



Young People in the Cultural and Creative Industries

A Comparative Research and Feasibility Study
Assessing Sector Conditions, Barriers, Skills Gaps
and Training Needs

IMPRESSUM

Title: Young People in the Cultural and Creative Industry: A Comparative Research and Feasibility Study Assessing Sector Conditions, Barriers, Skills Gaps and Training Needs

Published within the framework of:

Project: DigiCreate – *Intercultural Digital Dialogue and Networking in Cultural and Creative Industries for Young People*

Work Package: Work Package 2: Virtual Exchange Kick-Off: Validation of DigiCreate Methodological Framework

Programme: Erasmus+ Programme – Virtual Exchanges in Higher Education and Youth

Reference Number: 101193474 — DigiCreate — ERASMUS-EDU-2024-VIRT-EXCH

Project Consortium

The DigiCreate consortium consists of eight partner organisations from EU Member States and the Western Balkans:



- **Youth Power Germany EV (YP-DE) – Germany – *Project Coordinator***
- **Nevladina Organizacija GLAS (NVO GLAS) – Montenegro**
- **Udruzenje Okret (SPIN) – Bosnia and Herzegovina**
- **Univerzitet Union Nikola Tesla (UniTesla) – Serbia**
- **Javna Ustanova Univerzitet Crne Gore Podgorica (UoM) - Montenegro**
- **Cooperativa Para O Desenvolvimento E Coesão Social, CRL (Contextos) – Portugal**
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Date of Publication:

13 February 2026

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1 Summary

This research report was developed within the framework of the **DigiCreate – Intercultural Digital Dialogue and Networking in Cultural and Creative Industries for Young People** project, funded under the Erasmus+ Programme – Virtual Exchanges in Higher Education and Youth. Implemented by eight partner organisations from Germany, Spain, Portugal, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, DigiCreate aims to empower young people aged 18–30 in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) through innovative digital tools, mentoring models, and non-formal online learning formats.

The purpose of this research was to assess the current state of youth engagement in CCIs, identify structural barriers and skills gaps, and evaluate the feasibility of implementing a transnational, digitally based mentoring and training framework. The study combines desk research, a large-scale online survey (N=701), six national focus groups (N=90), and a comprehensive feasibility analysis covering technical, economic, organizational, legal, and stakeholder-related aspects.

Comparative desk research shows that while CCIs across the six countries demonstrate growth potential—particularly in digital, audiovisual, and hybrid creative fields—youth participation is frequently shaped by precarious employment, freelance and project-based work, income instability, and limited social protection. Regional inequalities, urban concentration of opportunities, and uneven access to digital infrastructure further restrict equitable participation, especially for youth from rural and marginalized backgrounds.

Findings from the survey and focus groups confirm persistent gaps in digital, entrepreneurial, and soft skills, including project management, financial literacy, communication, and intercultural collaboration. Young creatives consistently report difficulties transitioning from education to sustainable employment, limited mentorship opportunities, and insufficient institutional support structures. At the same time, they demonstrate strong motivation for cross-border collaboration, digital exchange, and non-formal learning formats that are flexible, practice-oriented, and community-driven.

The feasibility study indicates that implementing a virtual mentoring and training framework is technically and organizationally viable across partner countries, provided that digital accessibility, structured support mechanisms, and inclusive design principles are prioritized. Hybrid and fully online formats are particularly valuable in addressing geographic disparities and enabling participation without physical mobility.

Overall, the research underscores the need for structured, evidence-based interventions that integrate digital tools, mentoring, gamified learning elements, and intercultural dialogue. The findings directly inform the DigiCreate Methodological Framework, ensuring that the project responds to real, lived experiences of young creatives and contributes to more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable career pathways in the Cultural and Creative Industries across Europe and the Western Balkans.

2 Introduction – About the Project and the Role of the Research

The DigiCreate project brings together **eight partners from Germany (Youth Power Germany EV – YP-DE), Spain (Evolutionary Archetypes Consulting – EAC), Portugal (Contextos), Serbia (UniTesla), Montenegro (NVO GLAS, University of Montenegro – UoM, FPEP Bar), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (SPIN) to empower young people aged 18–30 in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) sector through digital tools and innovative online methodologies.** Over 36 months, the project will engage at least 2,500

participants, offering high-quality non-formal education and virtual exchanges without requiring physical mobility.

The **research component of DigiCreate** plays a central role in **understanding the specific needs, challenges, and skill gaps of young creatives across participating countries**. Initial research, including surveys, focus groups, and feasibility studies, **informs the development of the DigiCreate Methodological Framework, ensuring that the project's training, mentoring, and virtual exchange activities are evidence-based, inclusive, and responsive to local and regional contexts**. This research underpins the **design of interactive training modules, mentoring programs, gamification strategies, and digital tools**, all tailored to foster intercultural dialogue, professional skills, and digital competencies in the CCI sector.

The **project's activities are structured into six work packages (WPs)**. **WP1** manages overall project coordination, governance, and quality assurance. **WP2** develops and pilots the **DigiCreate Methodological Framework, mentoring program, and gamification strategy**. **WP3** creates and tests digital tools and the **DigiCreate Digital Hive Toolbox** to enhance skills in areas such as digital content creation, social media, and professional portfolio development. **WP4** focuses on **virtual exchange technologies and materials**, while **WP5** organizes three **Virtual Exchange Conferences** to strengthen collaboration between EU and Western Balkan countries. Finally, **WP6** ensures **wide dissemination, engagement, and assessment** of the project's community impact.

Through virtual exchanges, online courses, and the DigiCreate Digital Hive Toolbox, the project enables **young creatives to acquire digital, technical, soft, and entrepreneurial skills while promoting intercultural dialogue and collaboration**. By combining **research-driven methodology with accessible digital tools**, DigiCreate **fosters inclusive learning environments, strengthens cross-border networks, and supports career readiness for young people**, including those from marginalized or underrepresented groups, within the evolving CCI landscape.

3 Methodology

The DigiCreate research applies a comprehensive, mixed-method approach designed to generate deep, context-specific insights into the experiences, challenges, and needs of young people engaged in the cultural and creative industries (CCI) across six partner countries: Germany, Spain, Portugal, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The aim is to understand not only the skill gaps and professional barriers facing young creatives but also the opportunities, support systems, and preferred learning pathways that can inform the development of an evidence-based, innovative training methodology focused on soft skills, intercultural dialogue, and career development. By combining **quantitative, qualitative, and desk-based methods**, the research ensures a broad, reliable, and nuanced understanding of the target population.

The methodological process began with **extensive desk research**, which served as the foundational layer for understanding the broader policy, educational, socio-economic, and cultural context in which young creatives operate. This component included reviewing academic sources, official reports, national and regional statistical datasets, and relevant policy frameworks shaping the CCI sector. The desk analysis provided a comparative overview of existing opportunities, systemic limitations, technological readiness, and institutional conditions across the participating countries. It also helped identify gaps in knowledge and practice that the primary data collection would need to address, especially regarding non-formal education opportunities, soft-skill development, and barriers to professional mobility for young creatives.

Building on this foundation, the research employed an **exploratory sequential design**, starting with a large-scale online survey distributed to young creatives aged 18–30. A total of **701 participants from six countries** completed the survey. The instrument was highly structured, with multiple-choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended items capturing a wide range of information, including employment histories, income stability, skill levels, training experiences, career intentions, and attitudes toward intercultural exchange. Special attention was given to understanding the ways in which creativity influences participants' personal well-being, community engagement, and professional aspirations. Given the diversity of the target population, the survey ensured representation of individuals with formal education, non-formal learning backgrounds, self-taught creatives, freelancers, students, unemployed job seekers, and emerging artists. National partners played a crucial role in dissemination, ensuring inclusion across urban, semi-urban, rural, and remote areas.

The online questionnaire was administered using **Google Forms as the primary data collection platform**, ensuring standardized and accessible cross-country data collection. The survey was made available in **English and national languages**, depending on country-specific implementation. Following data collection, all responses were **translated where necessary, harmonised, and consolidated into a single dataset**, with final comparative analysis conducted in English to ensure consistency across countries.

Following the quantitative phase, the research incorporated a qualitative component consisting of **focus group discussions conducted in each of the six partner countries**. Each country organised at least one discussion involving approximately **15 participants**, resulting in a total of **90 young creatives**. The groups brought together individuals from diverse creative fields—including design, performing and visual arts, music, architecture, media production, audio creation, and hybrid interdisciplinary practices.

Focus groups were conducted in **online and hybrid formats (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and in selected cases in-person sessions)** depending on national conditions and feasibility. All participants were informed about **confidentiality, anonymity, and data protection principles**, and **informed consent was obtained prior to participation**. Sessions were recorded (with permission) and transcribed for analysis. Discussions were conducted in national/local languages to ensure inclusiveness and participant comfort, while the final reporting and analysis were standardised in English. Where translation was required, it was carried out in a culturally sensitive manner to preserve meaning and context.

A crucial complementary component of the methodology is the **feasibility study**, which assessed the technical, organizational, economic, and legal conditions necessary for delivering DigiCreate's mentoring and training programmes. The study was based on a combination of **desk research, internal project analysis, expert consultations, and structured interviews conducted both online and in-person across partner countries**. These included consultations with stakeholders from the CCI sector, education providers, and youth organisations. The feasibility analysis evaluated **digital infrastructure, internet connectivity, digital literacy levels, financial accessibility, institutional capacity, and organisational readiness**. It also examined **regulatory environments, risks, and stakeholder engagement** to assess the practicality and scalability of the proposed training and mentoring models.

The research population includes young creatives aged 18–30 with varying degrees of engagement in the cultural and creative industries, ranging from professionally active individuals (employed, self-employed, or freelance), to those seeking employment after formal or non-formal training, as well as early-stage creatives. The study intentionally incorporates participants from **marginalised and underrepresented groups**, including ethnic minorities, women in male-dominated creative fields, LGBTQ+ youth, people with disabilities, and individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

All methodological procedures, including sampling, data collection instruments, ethical standards, and implementation protocols, were predefined in the “**Research Methodology and Feasibility Study Guide**” developed under Work Package 2 (WP2), which serves as the official methodological framework for the project and is included as an annex to this report.

All collected data underwent **thematic, comparative, and content analysis**, enabling identification of shared patterns, national variations, and cross-country similarities in skill gaps, barriers, support systems, and learning preferences. This integrated approach ensures a holistic understanding of young creatives’ realities and directly informs DigiCreate’s training methodology, mentoring framework, and project outputs.

The study is structured into five chapters:

- Current state of youth engagement and the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) in six European and Western Balkan countries
- Perspectives of young people and youth workers in the Cultural and Creative Industries
- Conclusions, recommendations, and lessons learned
- Feasibility study results
- Recommendations for the mentoring model design

4 Current State of Youth Engagement and the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) in Six European and Western Balkan Countries

This section provides a **contextual and analytical overview of the current state of the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI)** in six European and Western Balkan countries—Germany, Spain, Portugal, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro—based exclusively on **desk research**. It offers a comprehensive picture of the sector as it is formally documented and analysed in national statistics, policy frameworks, institutional reports, and academic literature. The desk research serves as a **conceptual and empirical foundation** for the later presentation of primary findings from the quantitative survey and qualitative focus group discussions, providing a baseline understanding of structural conditions, trends, and challenges that shape youth engagement in CCIs.

The analysis examines the **general situation of the CCI sector and youth involvement**, describing the size, structure, and economic relevance of the sector in each country. It considers employment levels, dominant sub-sectors, ongoing digital transformation, and regional disparities, illustrating the context in which young people enter and operate within CCIs. **Education and skill development** are explored through both formal and non-formal pathways, including university programmes, vocational training, specialised creative schools, and digital learning platforms. The research identifies persistent gaps in entrepreneurial and work-based competencies, while also highlighting the role of informal learning spaces, online programs, and project-based initiatives in supporting young creatives.

Mobility and access are addressed in relation to geographic, infrastructural, and digital barriers that affect youth participation in education, training, and employment. Regional inequalities, particularly between urban and rural areas, as well as the enabling role of digital technologies, are considered, alongside national and EU-level initiatives designed to expand access and reduce territorial disparities. **Employment and skills** are examined through labour market trends, the prevalence of freelance and project-based work, and challenges related to job security and income stability. Skill gaps identified in secondary sources are discussed, together

with measures aimed at improving employability, supporting early-career creatives, and bridging mismatches between education outcomes and labour market demands.

The **role of policies and institutions** is also considered, reviewing national and entity-level frameworks, public institutions, funding mechanisms, and strategic plans relevant to youth engagement in CCIs. The analysis highlights the involvement of key stakeholders and inclusion-oriented initiatives while critically assessing structural limitations, policy coherence, and institutional coordination. Finally, **inclusion and accessibility** are addressed, focusing on documented initiatives supporting marginalised youth—including Roma and Egyptian communities, migrants, women, youth with disabilities, and young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds—and the main barriers to participation identified in secondary sources, as well as strategies employed to reduce exclusion and inequality.

Together, these desk research findings provide a **structured, comparative understanding of youth engagement in CCIs** across the six countries, offering a solid foundation for the subsequent survey and focus group results, which will capture the experiences, perceptions, and needs of young people directly engaged in the sector.

4.1 General Situation of the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) Sector and Youth Involvement

The Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) sector represents a strategically important and rapidly evolving field across Europe and the Western Balkans, encompassing economic growth, cultural production, innovation, and social impact. Based exclusively on desk research, this comparative analysis examines Spain, Germany, Portugal, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, highlighting both converging trends and country-specific structural conditions, with a particular focus on **youth involvement**, employment patterns, and institutional support mechanisms. The following overview synthesises national statistics, policy documents, sector reports, and academic literature to map the structural context in which young people participate in CCIs, providing a baseline for understanding the subsequent primary data collected through surveys and focus groups.

Spain presents one of the most developed and diversified CCI ecosystems among the analysed countries, spanning performing arts, music, museums and heritage, publishing, audiovisual industries (film, television, streaming, animation), video games, design and advertising, and cultural education. In 2024, **cultural employment increased by 6.6%, reaching approximately 771,000 people, or 3.6% of total national employment, surpassing pre-pandemic levels¹**. The sector's recovery is driven by strong live music performance and gradual, though uneven, rebounds in theatre and cinema. The audiovisual sector alone accounts for around 28% of the CCI economy, strengthened by initiatives such as the **Spain Audiovisual Hub of Europe²** and related tax incentives that attract international productions while fostering domestic expansion. Audiovisual content creation has grown by over **107% in the past five years³**, and parallel growth is observed in video games and interactive media, placing Spain among the leading European markets for game development. Youth participation is particularly prominent in audiovisual, music, design, and gaming, where young people engage as students in specialised education, emerging artists in residencies or incubators, and freelancers or entrepreneurs. Despite these opportunities, structural imbalances exist: **13.3% of the**

¹ <https://www.cultura.gob.es/ca/actualidad/2025/02/250220-empleo-cultural.html>

² https://spainaudiovisualhub.digital.gob.es/content/dam/seteleco-hub-audiovisual/resources/pdf/informe_2024/2024_2_Informe_Spain_Audiovisual.pdf

³ <https://cineuropa.org/en/newsdetail/483984/>

population works in creative and cultural occupations, yet only 3.1% of organisations are active in CCIs⁴, highlighting the prevalence of micro-enterprises, self-employment, and project-based work. Programs such as INJUVE's *Ayudas a la Creación Joven*⁵ provide targeted support for creators under 30 (up to 35 for entrepreneurial lines), funding production, mobility, research, and curatorial projects while offering visibility and networking opportunities. Challenges persist in the form of precarious employment, limited social protection, and constraints on social security portability, especially for mobile youth.

Germany hosts a mature CCI sector with a dense ecosystem comprising music, film, broadcasting, publishing, design, architecture, and performing and visual arts. It combines large cultural institutions with SMEs, freelancers, and startups, providing multiple entry points for young people through education, early-career employment, freelancing, and independent creative production. While national policy frameworks recognise CCIs as engines of innovation and youth employment, age-disaggregated statistics for the 18–30 group are limited, and data collection remains fragmented. Regional initiatives, such as Berlin's *Jugend im Museum* programme and creative youth hubs in North Rhine-Westphalia (Dortmund and Essen), exemplify targeted efforts to expand access for underprivileged and marginalised youth. Structural and intersectional barriers persist, particularly affecting young women, migrants, and LGBTIQ+ youth in male-dominated subfields like film direction, sound engineering, and music production. Inclusive curricula, mentorship, and institutional commitment to diversity are critical in mitigating these disparities.

Portugal is characterised by a culturally vibrant but structurally fragile CCI sector, spanning visual arts, design, film, music, architecture, performance, and digital media. However, youth engagement is poorly documented due to the lack of systematic statistical tracking of artistic and creative graduates. The absence of post-graduation employment data reflects a disconnect between education and labour markets, with limited access to internships, career guidance, and structured pathways into professional work. Consequently, young creatives often face informality, underemployment, and precarious project-based work. Informal platforms such as Coffeepaste, Clube da Criatividade de Portugal, and Mais Casting partially fill these gaps by centralising job opportunities, yet access remains concentrated in Lisbon and Porto, reinforcing regional disparities and contributing to talent drain from peripheral and rural areas.

Serbia has increasingly recognised the strategic importance of CCIs for economic development, innovation, and employment. The sector encompasses arts, media, design, publishing, IT and software development, advertising, music, film, fashion, and traditional crafts. **CCIs contributed approximately 7.1% of GDP in 2021, outperforming many traditional economic sectors⁶**, with SMEs forming the backbone of the industry. Research highlights the **sector's potential for employment generation, unemployment mitigation, and entrepreneurship, particularly due to its adaptability and innovation-driven nature⁷**. Cultural tourism and major events further stimulate local economies. From a sociocultural perspective, CCIs articulate national identity, foster social cohesion, and support inclusion, especially in post-crisis contexts. The Serbian government prioritises creative industries through strategic frameworks promoting intersectoral collaboration, internationalisation, and education. Nonetheless, challenges persist in **policy implementation, institutional**

⁴ <https://cultureactioneurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Creative-pulse-Survey-on-the-status-and-working-conditions-of-artists-and-CCS-professionals.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.injuve.es/programas-injuve/ayudas-injuve-creacion-joven>

⁶ Vasić, I. and Filipović, S. (2022). The importance of creative industry for the economic development of the republic of Serbia. Proceedings of the 9th International Scientific Conference - FINIZ 2022, 86-92. <https://doi.org/10.15308/finiz-2022-86-92>

⁷ Orlandić, M., Dodovska-Blagoevska, K., & Dodovski, A. (2023). Development of small and medium enterprises in Serbia for the period 2015-2020. years. Journal of Process Management and New Technologies, 11(1-2), 111-121. <https://doi.org/10.5937/jouproman2301111o>

coordination, management practices, and infrastructure development, limiting the sector's full potential⁸.

Montenegro views CCIs as key drivers of economic, cultural, and social development, particularly for youth inclusion. Young people engage through formal education, freelance work, startups, micro-businesses, and digital or multimedia creative initiatives. Digital sub-sectors, including video game development, software solutions, design, and multimedia production, are growing rapidly and providing new professional opportunities for youth. Programs like **Creative Europe 2021–2027⁹** and initiatives supported by international and local partners facilitate mentoring, networking, and financial support. Yet, structural challenges remain, including limited institutional support, fragmented data collection, restricted infrastructure access, and the need for strengthened digital, entrepreneurial, and creative competencies.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has an emerging, fragmented CCI sector composed mainly of **micro-enterprises, SMEs, NGOs, informal collectives, and freelancers¹⁰**. Youth involvement is characterised by non-linear, hybrid career paths, with young people combining roles as students, freelancers, cultural workers, and independent creators, particularly in digital and audiovisual domains. Despite recognition of CCIs as drivers of innovation, social cohesion, and local development—especially in urban centres like Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Mostar, and Tuzla—youth often face precarious employment, informality, and limited long-term career opportunities. Geographic disparities restrict access outside major cities, while intersectional barriers related to gender, socio-economic background, and migration status further constrain participation.

Across all six countries, CCIs show above-average growth potential, strong youth representation, and increasing reliance on digital production and freelance work. Yet, persistent challenges remain, including insufficient age-disaggregated data, precarious employment, regional inequalities, and uneven institutional support. While Spain and Germany benefit from sector scale and mature policy frameworks, and Serbia from strong strategic positioning, emerging or smaller ecosystems such as Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Portugal face structural fragility and weak integration between education, labour markets, and cultural policy. These findings underscore the need for **targeted, youth-focused interventions**, improved data collection, and inclusive policies that support sustainable career pathways within the CCI sector.

4.2 Education and Skill Development

Education and skill development represent a central dimension of youth engagement in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) across Europe and the Western Balkans. Based exclusively on desk research, this analysis examines the formal and non-formal pathways available to young people in Spain, Germany, Portugal, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, highlighting the role of digital education, emerging informal learning spaces, and structural challenges that influence the transition from training to employment in the CCI sector.

Spain offers a wide range of higher education opportunities in the arts and creative fields through public and private institutions, conservatories, and specialised film schools. Notable

⁸ Nikodijević, M., Novičević, B., & Rogan, M. (2021). Empirical study of the implementation of certain budgeting concepts in manufacturing companies in Serbia. *Economic Themes*, 59(1), 61-76. <https://doi.org/10.2478/ethemes-2021-0004>

⁹ Montenegro joins Creative Europe 2021-2027 programme - <https://www.gov.me/en/article/montenegro-joins-creative-europe-2021-2027-programme>

¹⁰ Regional Cooperation Council. (2022). Mapping of the Cultural and Creative Industries in the Western Balkans. RCC. <https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/MC%20RCC%20Final%20Report%2018%204%202022.pdf>

examples include the **ECAM (Escuela de Cinematografía y del Audiovisual de la Comunidad de Madrid)**¹¹ and the **Escuela de Cine del País Vasco (ECPV)**¹², as well as the network of public conservatories such as **Conservatorio del Liceu**¹³ across various regions. These institutions provide structured curricula in film directing, audiovisual production, animation, music performance, theatre, and performing arts, combining theoretical knowledge with intensive practical training. Spain's **vocational education system - Formación Profesional (VET system)**¹⁴ further complements higher education by offering diplomas and professional certificates in audiovisual production, sound engineering, live show management, set design, and animation, aligned with the **Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales** to ensure relevance to labour market standards. At the European level, programs such as **Creative Europe MEDIA and Culture**¹⁵ strands, supported by **Spain's Creative Europe Desk**¹⁶, facilitate training workshops, funding access, and international networking opportunities, strengthening cross-border collaboration and youth entrepreneurship. Online platforms like **Domestika**¹⁷ and **digital training by NGOs such as Fundación Cibervoluntarios**¹⁸ complement formal pathways, enabling young creatives to develop hybrid skills necessary for employment in the digital economy.

Serbia provides a growing but uneven landscape of creative education. Young people access CCI training through secondary art and music schools, university programs in arts, design, media, and cultural management, and specialized courses delivered by private academies or international projects. While formal education offers theoretical foundations, skill development often relies on informal learning through workshops, residencies, and project-based training facilitated by cultural centres, NGOs, and donor-funded initiatives. Vocational training and mentoring are emerging tools to bridge gaps between education outcomes and labour market needs, particularly in digital media, entrepreneurship, and creative project management. Nevertheless, challenges remain, including limited capacity to adapt curricula to rapidly changing labour market demands and insufficient mechanisms to support youth transition from training to paid creative work.

Montenegro integrates formal secondary and higher education with vocational programs through the **Center for Vocational Education (CVE)**¹⁹. At the secondary level, **five state schools specialise in the arts**: one visual arts school, two music schools, one combined ballet and music school, and one private-public talent music school, enrolling a **total of 317 students in 2024/2025**, with high female representation indicating sector-specific gender patterns. **Higher education** is delivered through the **Faculty of Dramatic and Fine Arts, the Music Academy, and programmes in language, literature, and journalism within the University of Montenegro, alongside private institutions such as University Mediteran and University Donja Gorica**, offering courses in visual arts, entrepreneurship, and creative industries. These programs combine theoretical learning with practical workshops, interdisciplinary projects, and international mobility through **Erasmus+** and **Creative Europe initiatives**. **CVE-accredited vocational courses** target practical competencies in digital design, multimedia production, musicology, cultural management, decoration, and art therapy, following national standards and curricula aligned with labour market needs. The **Employment**

¹¹ ECAM (Escuela de Cinematografía y del Audiovisual de la Comunidad de Madrid) - <https://ecam.es/>

¹² Escuela de Cine del País Vasco (ECPV) - <https://ecpv.es/>

¹³ Conservatorio del Liceu - <https://www.conservatoriliceu.es/superior/>

¹⁴ Formación Profesional (VET system) - <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/spain-u3>

¹⁵ Creative Europe MEDIA and Culture - <https://www.oficinamediaespana.eu/programa-media>

¹⁶ Spain's Creative Europe Desk - <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/resources/creative-europe-desks>

¹⁷ Domestika - <https://www.domestika.org/en>

¹⁸ Fundación Cibervoluntarios - <https://www.cibervoluntarios.org/es>

¹⁹ Center for Vocational Education - <https://www.gov.me/cso>

Agency of Montenegro (EAM) provides additional training, mentorship, and certification opportunities, often **in partnership with CVE and NGOs**, enabling youth to enhance employability in digital and creative fields. Despite these capacities, gaps remain between formal education and the skills needed for entrepreneurship, digital production, and innovation, emphasizing the need for integrated curricula that link theory, practice, and professional competences.

Germany offers extensive creative education opportunities through universities, art academies, vocational schools, and specialised institutions. These programs combine theoretical knowledge with practical skill-building and are supplemented by informal learning spaces and online platforms. Digital education is a central focus, with initiatives such as **DigitalPakt Schule investing €5 billion in school infrastructure, high-speed internet, digital devices, and interactive tools to bridge the digital divide**²⁰. **Edtech platforms like Sofatutor and Serlo** further enhance formal learning by providing interactive, self-paced courses that develop digital literacy and **media competence ("Medienkompetenz")**, equipping students with critical thinking skills to navigate the digital realm responsibly. Coding and computer science are increasingly incorporated from an early stage, reflecting a broader emphasis on preparing youth for the demands of a digital economy. Universities and higher education institutions have embraced digitalisation by offering online courses, virtual laboratories, and collaborative platforms for research and academic discourse. This flexibility benefits diverse learners, including working professionals and international students, improving access to higher education opportunities. Despite these advancements, challenges persist. A **study by the McKinsey Global Institute** highlights a significant digital skill gap across the **EU-28 public sector, with 8.6 million people lacking essential competencies: 1.7 million lack technological skills, 3.2 million lack digital citizenship skills, and 3.7 million lack classical skills**. The **Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs)** were particularly affected by the **COVID-19 pandemic**, which accelerated the **shift of activities from physical to online spaces, further emphasising the need for strong digital skills**²¹. Financial barriers also remain significant, as many young artists struggle to fund their studies or creative projects. The **high cost of formal education** can limit artistic practice and reduce employment opportunities, particularly for students from under-represented or socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Bosnia and Herzegovina presents a diverse but uneven landscape for education and skill development in the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI). Formal pathways exist through **vocational secondary schools, art and music academies, faculties of architecture and design, and university programs in visual and performing arts, media studies, and cultural management**, providing foundational theoretical and discipline-specific skills. However, **curricula often lag behind labour market needs**, particularly in digital and entrepreneurial competencies. **Non-formal and informal learning spaces—including cultural centres, NGOs, and donor-supported initiatives**—complement formal education through workshops, residencies, and project-based experiences. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital and hybrid learning, expanding participation, though disparities in infrastructure and internet access, especially in rural areas, continue to limit opportunities. **Universities increasingly offer online courses, digital platforms, and collaborative tools**, enabling flexibility for students and cross-border engagement, but the quality and availability of digital infrastructure vary widely. Digital skills essential for CCI careers—such as

²⁰ Collins Education Group. (2024, May 9). Education system and digital learning in Germany. LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/education-system-digital-learning-germany-ecollins-ptwqc>

²¹ Yesgermany. (2024, January 21). The Role of Technology in German Education. Medium. <https://medium.com/@yesgermany.manish/the-role-of-technology-in-german-education-f5a8a094f0eb>

audiovisual production, digital design, online content creation, and media literacy—are often acquired outside formal education via online tutorials, self-directed learning, and international projects. Despite growing recognition of their importance, integration into curricula remains limited. Additional challenges include a **mismatch between education outcomes and labour market needs**, as many graduates lack practical skills in entrepreneurship, project management, financial literacy, and sustainable career development. Financial barriers—tuition, equipment costs, and unpaid internships—further restrict access, disproportionately affecting young women, rural youth, and those without informal networks. Informal learning and online programs play a key role in addressing these gaps, offering practical skills, mentoring, and peer learning. Hybrid and online formats help overcome geographic and infrastructural barriers, ensuring broader access for youth across the country.

Portugal offers a wide spectrum of higher education in arts and creative fields through institutions such as **Universidade de Lisboa (Faculdade de Belas-Artes)**, **Universidade do Porto**, **Universidade do Minho**, **Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema**, and **private academies** like **ETIC and Restart**. Although these institutions provide strong artistic training, they often lack career transition support, entrepreneurship modules, and digital literacy integration. Graduates face a “**post-degree void**”, with limited guidance and pathways into professional markets, contributing to underemployment and early career dropout. **Non-formal spaces, including NGOs, cultural associations, and creative hubs**, as well as **online learning platforms** such as **YouTube, Domestika, and Skillshare**, provide complementary skill development opportunities. However, these initiatives remain heavily reliant on individual initiative and precarious funding. Policy recommendations, such as those in the **Adenda dos Jovens à Carta de Porto Santo (2025)**, emphasise the need for structured support mechanisms, mentorship, and sustained investment to ensure youth inclusion, employability, and fair participation in the creative economy.

Across Spain, Germany, Portugal, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, formal education provides essential theoretical and technical foundations for youth in the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI), while informal and online learning environments play a crucial role in developing practical skills, digital competencies, and entrepreneurial readiness. Persistent challenges include uneven access in rural areas, financial barriers, skills mismatches, precarious employment, and limited alignment between curricula and labour market demands. Countries with well-established infrastructures and digital education policies, such as Germany and Spain, offer broader opportunities, combining higher education, vocational training, and EU-level programmes with digital platforms and informal learning networks. Emerging or smaller CCI ecosystems, including Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Portugal, face gaps in institutional support, structured career pathways, and guidance for young creatives. Informal learning, mentoring, hybrid formats, and online programmes help bridge these gaps, providing flexible access to practical, digital, and entrepreneurial skills. Strengthening the transition from education to sustainable employment in the CCI sector requires coordinated policy measures, targeted training, mentorship, and international networking opportunities.

4.3 Mobility and Access

Mobility and access to education, training, and employment are central factors shaping youth engagement in the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI), particularly for those from rural, remote, or economically disadvantaged regions. Across Europe and the Western Balkans, mobility is widely recognised as a critical enabler for building careers, accessing new audiences, participating in international projects, and developing professional networks.

However, significant structural, financial, and digital barriers continue to limit equitable access to these opportunities, often concentrating training, residencies, and employment pathways in urban centres.

In **Spain**, national initiatives under the **Cultura y Ciudadanía**²² and **Foro Cultura y Ruralidades** lines specifically target rural areas, connecting local agents and supporting youth-led projects through residencies, showcases, and travel assistance. The Ministry of Culture channels European funds to creative infrastructure and projects in disadvantaged zones, promoting territorial cohesion and supporting rural creative ecosystems. Additionally, programs like the **Chambers of Commerce’s PICE**²³ grants provide mobility support for young people needing to relocate for education, training, or job placements across Spain and the EU. Despite these measures, urban–rural inequalities remain pronounced, particularly in transport, broadband access, and the distribution of cultural venues and training nodes. Depopulation, ageing populations, and limited services in rural areas exacerbate these challenges, reducing participation in cultural and creative activities. **High costs of living and housing shortages**²⁴ in Madrid and Barcelona further restrict mobility, effectively pricing young creatives out of key employment hubs.

In **Serbia** and **Montenegro**, access to education and employment in the CCI sector is heavily concentrated in major cities, leaving rural youth with fewer opportunities for professional development or networking. Vocational secondary schools, art academies, and university programs are primarily urban-based, and structured mobility support—such as relocation grants, apprenticeship schemes, or national residency programs—is limited. Informal learning initiatives, NGO-led workshops, project-based experiences, and donor-funded residencies partially address these gaps but cannot fully compensate for the lack of systemic, nationwide mobility support. In Montenegro, vocational training through the Center for Vocational Education (CVE) and higher education programs provide skill development, but young people from remote municipalities face practical challenges in accessing these opportunities, highlighting the need for combined financial, infrastructural, and digital support.

Bosnia and Herzegovina presents a similarly uneven landscape. Educational and professional opportunities in the CCI sector are concentrated in urban centres such as Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Mostar, and Tuzla, leaving rural youth with reduced access to specialized programs, residencies, workshops, creative hubs, and networking activities. Structural barriers include limited transport infrastructure, insufficient local cultural facilities, financial constraints, and a persistent digital divide. Broadband coverage and internet quality are uneven, particularly in remote areas, limiting access to online courses, hybrid learning, and international projects. While digital platforms, hybrid programs, and donor-supported initiatives have expanded access post-COVID-19, sustainable mobility and structured pathways from education to employment remain largely absent. Informal initiatives, mentoring programs, and peer-learning schemes play a critical role in bridging these gaps, but are often project-based and dependent on short-term funding.

In **Germany**, mobility is influenced by regional disparities and the digital divide, which limits access to training, creative employment, and networking opportunities for youth from lower-income households or remote areas. National strategies aim to address these challenges by expanding broadband infrastructure, supporting digital inclusion, and fostering online learning communities. **Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) technologies** are increasingly used to overcome geographical barriers in education, providing immersive and

²² Cultura y Ciudadanía - <https://culturayciudadania.cultura.gob.es/inicio.html>

²³ Chambers of Commerce’s PICE - <https://e-camara.com/web/en/participate-in-the-pice-mobility-plan/>

²⁴ The crises of Spain’s youth: 7 solutions for a better future - <https://dobetter.esade.edu/en/criises-spain-youth-solutions-better-future>

interactive experiences that make complex concepts tangible and accessible. Schools and vocational programs, including **apprenticeships in creative trades (Duale Ausbildung)** such as graphic design, audiovisual production, and stagecraft, combine practical work experience with formal training. These are often co-organized by chambers of commerce and supported by the **Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit)**. Initiatives by **Jobcenters** in cities like Hamburg and Leipzig target NEET youth (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) with job-orientation workshops for creative careers, although these programs face limited long-term funding and uptake in the creative sector remains lower compared to technical fields.

Portugal demonstrates high territorial centralization, with professional mobility, residencies, and cultural opportunities concentrated in Lisbon and Porto. Youth from interior or island regions encounter logistical, financial, and infrastructural barriers that restrict participation in both national and European initiatives such as **Erasmus+**, **Creative Europe**, and **DiscoverEU**. Independent artists or those outside formal educational structures often cannot access these programs due to limited guidance, complex applications, or lack of organizational support. Cultural decentralization has been identified as a critical strategy to promote equity, inspire youth, and diversify creative expression.

In this regard, the words of **former Portuguese Minister of Culture Pedro Adão e Silva**, during the **parliamentary discussion of the 2023 State Budget**, illustrate the significance of decentralization as both a social and cultural investment:

“I believe that decentralization is important not only for reasons of fairness and cohesion between the different regions of the country, but also because it has a reproductive, multiplying effect: it is by attending theatre plays, ballets, concerts, and films that the desire to become an actor, filmmaker, director, dancer, artist, or writer is born. If cultural offerings reach broader social groups throughout the country, this will, in the future, lead to a more plural and diverse cultural creation, capable of reflecting more richly the diversity of experiences in Portuguese society.” (Pedro Adão e Silva, 2023 – Parliamentary discussion of the State Budget)

This statement emphasizes that cultural decentralization is not merely an administrative reform but a generational strategy: expanding access to artistic experiences fosters inspiration, cultivates future talent, and encourages civic engagement. As Adão e Silva’s reflection suggests, equitable access to cultural opportunities across all regions strengthens creative diversity and democratic participation. Therefore, decentralization must be seen as a core dimension of youth and cultural policy — ensuring that young creatives throughout Portugal, regardless of their geographic origin, can access education, artistic production spaces, residencies, and professional networks. This perspective aligns directly with the principles of the **Adenda dos Jovens à Carta de Porto Santo**, highlighting the importance of long-term investment in regional cultural hubs and community-based creative centres to ensure that professional development and cultural participation are not confined to urban elites.

Across all six countries, persistent **regional inequalities and infrastructure-related barriers** shape mobility and access. Physical obstacles include limited transport, fewer training nodes, and reduced availability of cultural venues in rural or peripheral areas. Financial barriers—high living costs, housing shortages, relocation expenses, tuition, and equipment costs—further constrain participation, disproportionately affecting young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The **digital divide**, reflected in uneven access to high-speed broadband, devices, and digital literacy, limits opportunities for remote learning, online residencies, and participation in international projects. Digital platforms, hybrid training, VR/AR technologies, and community-based “digital inclusion hubs” have emerged as essential

mechanisms to reduce these gaps, allowing youth to access education, mentoring, and professional networks without the need for physical mobility.

Mobility and access are also closely linked to the transition from education to employment. Structured apprenticeship programs, residencies, and work-based learning models exist in some countries (e.g., Germany) but are less developed in the Western Balkans and Portugal. Many young creatives enter the CCI labour market through informal pathways, project-based initiatives, internships, or international collaborations, making systematic support, sustainable mobility schemes, and long-term mentorship crucial for bridging education-to-employment gaps.

In conclusion, addressing mobility and access challenges in the CCI sector requires integrated approaches combining financial aid, infrastructural investment, digital inclusion, decentralized cultural initiatives, and formal and informal learning pathways. These interventions are essential to ensure that young creatives, regardless of geographic origin, can fully participate in education, artistic production, professional networks, and sustainable careers in the cultural and creative industries.

4.4 Employment and Skills

The employment landscape for young people in the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) across Europe—including Spain, Serbia, Montenegro, Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Portugal—presents a diverse yet challenging environment. Opportunities range from traditional arts and heritage professions to emerging digital, audiovisual, and hybrid creative roles, reflecting both sectoral diversity and the transformative impact of digitalization. Despite these opportunities, young professionals face common challenges, including freelance and project-based work, irregular income, low pay, limited social protections, and scarce long-term career pathways. Skill gaps are evident across digital, soft, and entrepreneurial competencies, which are increasingly critical for navigating self-employment, collaborative projects, and innovative creative practices. National initiatives and international programmes, such as mentoring, non-formal training, digital tool development, and microgrant schemes, seek to bridge these gaps, yet structural limitations and regional disparities continue to shape youth employability in the sector.

Young people in **Spain** have access to a wide variety of entry points into the cultural and creative industries (CCIs), reflecting a diverse and evolving landscape. In the audiovisual field, **junior roles** are available in film and television production, editing, and sound design, alongside opportunities in animation and streaming services. Additionally, youth increasingly engage in digital content creation and social media management for cultural organizations, or take on technical positions in music and live events, including lighting, stage management, and sound engineering. Other avenues include design and illustration, museums and heritage mediation, and the rapidly growing video games sector, where roles range from quality assurance to art and design or programming. **Sectoral outlooks published by SEPE for audiovisual industries**²⁵ and DEV/AEVI for video games highlight these areas as particularly promising for young professionals. Despite these opportunities, young professionals across Spain face **persistent challenges in securing sustainable employment**. The sector is characterized by short-term or intermittent contracts, often necessitating self-employment that carries financial risks and limited social protection. Low and uneven pay is widespread, and project-based work frequently leaves young creatives vulnerable to prolonged periods without

²⁵ Sectoral outlooks published by SEPE for audiovisual industries - https://www.sepe.es/eu/SiteSepe/contenidos/que_es_el_sepe/publicaciones/pdf/pdf_mercado_trabajo/2024/2024_El_mercado_de_trabajo_del_sector_Audiovisual_en_Espana.pdf

stable income. The Spanish government has sought to address these challenges through the **Statute of the Artist reforms**²⁶, which introduce labour, fiscal, and social security measures tailored to the intermittent nature of creative work. Employer surveys and research in Spain consistently point to skill gaps in hybrid competencies that combine technical, creative, and entrepreneurial capacities. Young professionals are expected to master digital production tools while also understanding intellectual property, licensing, and business models. Skills in project management, entrepreneurial thinking, and collaboration/communication are increasingly valued, particularly in fast-moving sectors such as audiovisual media and video games. Bridging these skill gaps is essential for improving employability and ensuring youth can thrive in the evolving Spanish creative economy.

In **Serbia**, CCIs have grown in both economic and employment significance over the past decade. According to **World Bank data from 2017**, CCIs accounted for approximately 3.7% of national GDP and 3.3% of total employment. More recent analyses indicate that in 2021 the sector contributed 7.1% to GDP, reflecting strong growth dynamics. By 2023, the sector's contribution to GDP was 6% and its share in overall employment reached 6.9%.

The gross value added (GVA) of Serbia's creative industries in 2022 reached approximately EUR 874.8 million, representing 1.7% of total GVA. Notable contributions were observed across subsectors: printing and reproduction of recorded media EUR 62.9 million (0.8% of manufacturing GVA), publishing EUR 122.2 million (4.0% of the information and communication sector), programming and broadcasting EUR 102 million (3.3% of the same sector), advertising and market research EUR 179.1 million (8% of professional, scientific, and technical activities), other professional, scientific, and technical activities EUR 159 million (7.1%), creative, artistic, and entertainment activities EUR 114.5 million (17.9% of the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector), and libraries, archives, museums, and cultural activities EUR 64.1 million (10%). Creative, arts, and entertainment activities experienced the highest year-on-year growth in GVA at 7.6%, while printing and reproduction of recorded media declined by 10.8%.

The number of active enterprises in Serbia's CCI sector reached 6,012 in 2023, approximately 4.4% of all registered companies. A notable feature is the prevalence of SMEs within the sector, which play a crucial role in innovation, employment, and regional economic development. From 2020 to 2024, the number of entrepreneurs in CCIs increased by approximately 70%, highlighting the rise of micro-enterprises and self-employment as dominant forms of engagement. Within subsectors, advertising and market research accounted for 27.8% of business activity, while motion picture, video, and television production plus music publishing represented 15.9%. Libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural activities had the lowest enterprise participation at 0.8%, indicating opportunities for growth in underrepresented areas. Employment in Serbian CCIs steadily increased from 58,244 in Q4 2020 to 64,657 in Q4 2024, representing an 11% growth. The largest absolute employment and highest shares were in creative, artistic, and entertainment activities, which rose from 9,715 employees (16.7%) in 2020 to 11,359 (17.6%) in 2024. Cinematographic, television, and music production expanded nearly 60% from 3,404 employees in 2020 to 5,423 in 2024, largely driven by fiscal incentives and infrastructural development. Meanwhile, publishing and printing sectors saw employment declines, reflecting global digitalization trends. Other professional, scientific, and technical activities grew moderately from 6,858 to 9,382 employees, while advertising and market research expanded from 7,170 to 8,457 employees. Employment in libraries, archives,

²⁶ The status and working conditions of artists and cultural and creative professionals - <https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/docs/eenc/eenc-2020-status%20and%20working%20conditions%20of%20artists-final%20report.pdf>

museums, and galleries remained relatively stable, ranging from 6,802 to 7,150 employees, indicating systemic constraints and limited digital integration.

In **Montenegro, labor market analyses for 2024** reveal parallel trends in the creative and cultural sectors. On one hand, there is a significant supply of qualified professionals, including visual artists, designers, performing artists, musicians, journalists, graphic designers, and IT specialists, while on the other hand, formal demand through advertised positions remains limited. This imbalance results in a surplus of unemployed professionals, with project-based, seasonal, and freelance engagements serving as the primary avenues for young people to enter the workforce.

In the visual arts and design sector (group 85), 79 individuals were registered at the IV qualification level, of whom 45 were unemployed at the beginning of the year and 34 newly registered, including 11 with no prior work experience. During 2024, 24 individuals were employed (30.38% of total supply), leaving 42 unemployed at the end of the year, with a surplus of 13 and almost nonexistent formal demand. At the higher qualification level, 293 individuals were registered, of whom 56 were employed (19.11%), with only 10 registered vacancies, indicating a significant oversupply and limited formal employment opportunities. Young professionals typically find work through project-based, seasonal, or self-employed engagements, particularly in graphic and product design, visual identity, and digital illustration. Demand is primarily for candidates combining artistic education with digital skills and knowledge of contemporary design tools, enhancing competitiveness in private sector companies, creative agencies, and cultural projects. Overall employment relative to supply is around 30%, highlighting that most young visual creators work through freelance or micro-entrepreneurial models, which are now the dominant forms of employment in the creative industries.

Performing artists, musicians, and writers (group 86) show pronounced seasonal and project-based employment patterns typical of the cultural and creative sector. At the IV qualification level, 59 individuals were registered, with 39 unemployed at the start of the year and 20 newly registered, including 5 without prior work experience. During the year, 14 were employed (23.73% of total supply), leaving 26 unemployed at year-end, with a surplus of 9 and only 8 registered vacancies. At the higher qualification level, 95 individuals were available, with 22 employed (23.16%), while demand included 177 positions, indicating a clear mismatch between formal supply and specific market needs. Employment in this sector primarily occurs outside standard employment relationships, through temporary, seasonal, and project-based engagements, especially in music, theater, literary events, and cultural programs linked to the tourist season. Podgorica and coastal cities such as Budva, Kotor, and Herceg Novi concentrate most employment opportunities, while northern regions offer limited possibilities mainly through local cultural centers and educational institutions. The overall employment ratio of approximately 24% confirms high fluctuation and instability, with young artists predominantly engaged in freelance, project-based, or seasonal work, requiring institutional support and sustainable cultural employment models.

Occupations in public information (group 87), including journalists, editors, producers, and camera operators, show limited formal employment opportunities but growing prospects in digital media and new communication forms. At the IV qualification level, 37 individuals were registered, with 23 unemployed initially and 14 newly registered, including 2 without prior work experience. During 2024, 5 were employed (13.51%), leaving 21 unemployed at year-end, with a surplus of 3 and no recorded demand. At the higher qualification level, 162 were registered, with 47 employed (29.01%) and only 3 new vacancies. The digital media space opens new professional opportunities in content creation for social media, podcasts, online marketing, and multimedia storytelling. Young professionals increasingly find engagements in independent online portals, marketing agencies, and startup productions as content creators,

digital producers, community managers, and video editors. The overall employment rate of about 13% shows that traditional media cannot absorb all qualified professionals, whereas digital platforms offer flexible employment and self-employment opportunities, reshaping the labor market in public information.

Other cultural, artistic, and information occupations (group 88), including cultural managers, curators, librarians, event organizers, creative producers, film and stage technicians, and experts in cultural policy and media production, recorded 272 individuals at the IV qualification level. Of these, 209 were unemployed initially, 63 newly registered (including 7 without work experience), and 51 employed during the year (18.75%), leaving 186 unemployed and a surplus of 44, with no registered demand. At the higher level, 272 were registered, with 111 employed (40.81%) and 31 vacancies, reflecting moderate market dynamics. Employment in this sector is predominantly project-based, short-term, and freelance, through cultural centers, local municipalities, NGOs, and international programs such as Creative Europe. While formal public sector positions are limited, young professionals with managerial, digital, and production skills have significant opportunities in urban centers like Podgorica, Kotor, Bar, and Nikšić. Overall employment relative to supply is around 19%, indicating both a surplus of skilled personnel and growth potential through startups, production collectives, and artist residencies.

Graphic and visual professions (group 36) in 2024 showed a high supply of qualified professionals but limited formal employment. At the III qualification level, 13 individuals were registered, 3 employed (23.08%), with no recorded vacancies. At the IV level, 84 individuals were registered, 16 employed (19.05%), with 44 unemployed and a surplus of 13, without demand. At the higher level, 10 were registered, 3 employed (30%), with no demand. Employment increasingly shifts toward flexible and self-employed arrangements, with young graphic professionals active in printing, marketing agencies, and freelance markets, particularly in Photoshop, Illustrator, and Canva. Overall employment rates of 19–30% confirm the transition from traditional to digital work formats, highlighting the need for continuous skills development.

IT and computer technology professions (groups 28 and 69) exhibit strategic deficits and high market demand. In group 28, III-level qualification had 2 individuals registered with no employment or demand; IV-level included 489, with 140 employed (28.63%) and 9 vacancies; higher level had 292 registered, 68 employed (23.29%) with 71 vacancies. Group 69 showed similar trends: III-level had 1 registered, with 2 employed unusually; IV-level included 75, with 16 employed (21.33%), no demand; higher level had 155 registered, 18 employed (11.61%), with 129 vacancies. Demand is concentrated on programming, digital design, data analytics, and digital marketing. Employment is mostly freelance or project-based, favoring developers, digital designers, and data analysts. Advanced digital competencies and programming knowledge (Python, JavaScript, HTML/CSS) enhance employability and entrepreneurial opportunities. Employment ratios range from 11% to 29%, confirming IT as one of the most dynamic and promising labor market sectors.

Regional analysis identifies nine key areas: Podgorica (including Zeta, Tuzi, Cetinje, and Danilovgrad), Budva-Tivat-Kotor, Bar-Ulcinj, Bijelo Polje-Mojkovac-Kolašin, Berane-Petnjica-Andrijevića-Plav-Gusinje, Rožaje, Pljevlja, Nikšić-Plužine-Šavnik-Žabljak, and Herceg Novi. Podgorica serves as the main cultural and creative hub, while coastal cities provide mainly seasonal and project-based opportunities in tourism, festivals, and agencies. Northern centers offer limited formal employment, with some opportunities through local cultural centers, schools, and regional events. Herceg Novi is significant for newcomers without work experience, while Podgorica attracts most young professionals in social-humanistic and creative occupations seeking career development.

Young people in creative sectors find employment through project-based and freelance engagements, seasonal work, internships, vocational training, and self-employment in graphic and digital design, photography, video editing, and digital marketing. Higher education internship programs in 2023/24 offered 15,300 positions, bridging education and labor market gaps.

Foreign workers also play a notable role, often engaged in ad hoc or seasonal projects. In 2024, Montenegro issued 1,404 work permits in information and communication (out of a quota of 1,842) and 267 permits in arts, entertainment, and recreation (out of 335), with utilization indices of 76.22% and 80.06%, respectively. These foreign professionals fill workforce gaps, facilitate knowledge transfer, introduce innovative practices, and enrich inter-cultural dynamics, especially in digital design, multimedia production, and cultural management. Strategic substitution of foreign workers with domestic talent, alongside quota planning and enhanced digital and creative competencies, could increase local employment, support sustainable projects, and enhance cultural diversity.

Statistical data also highlights gender and economic dynamics: the information and communication sector employed 6,500 individuals (3,800 men, 2,700 women), or 2.3% of total employment, while arts, entertainment, and recreation employed 8,900 (4,200 men, 4,700 women), or 3.2% of the labor market. Average gross salaries in September 2025 were €1,673 (net €1,366) in the information and communication sector, and €1,044 (net €888) in arts, entertainment, and recreation, a 37% difference, reflecting lower economic status in artistic professions. Sectoral turnover was €462.5 million in information and communication and €222.8 million in arts and recreation, with gross value added of €328.3 million and €124.4 million, respectively. Foreign-owned enterprises accounted for 20.8% of production value in information and communication, highlighting internationalization and knowledge transfer, while emphasizing the need to balance domestic and foreign workforce inclusion.

Overall, Montenegro's labor market demonstrates a surplus of creative and cultural professionals, while IT and digital sectors exhibit the highest demand and deficits. Podgorica and coastal cities function as absorption centers, with northern regions requiring local program development and remote freelancing opportunities. Digital and entrepreneurial competencies are key to enhancing youth employability and adapting to the modern labor market, while careful management of domestic and foreign professionals can stimulate sustainable creative and cultural employment.

Germany provides diverse creative opportunities for youth, from traditional arts to new digital professions. Challenges include freelance instability, low pay, and project-based work, producing irregular incomes and limited job security, which can be particularly difficult for young professionals who are still establishing their careers and may lack a financial safety net. Skills gaps are pronounced in digital, soft, and entrepreneurial competencies. The rapid digitalization of industries, accelerated by events like the COVID-19 pandemic, has increased demand for professionals proficient in digital tools and platforms. Beyond technical skills, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and entrepreneurial abilities are essential to navigate the largely self-employed nature of creative work. By 2023, **DigitalPakt Schule** supported over 43,000 schools with digital infrastructure upgrades and teacher training, particularly in federal states such as Bavaria and Lower Saxony, strengthening foundational digital skills for future creative professionals. The Creative Europe Desk DE also coordinates EU-supported calls for digital and cross-border cultural projects, providing microgrants for emerging creatives aged 18–30, which serve as crucial entry points for youth-led initiatives and enable international collaboration, innovative projects, and increased visibility in the CCI sector.

Bosnia and Herzegovina offers a range of creative opportunities for youth, spanning traditional artistic professions as well as digital and hybrid roles in visual and performing arts,

music, film and audiovisual production, design, architecture, digital media, cultural management, and online creative services. Employment in the CCI sector is largely project-based, freelance, or self-employed, resulting in irregular income, limited job security, and constrained career progression. Young creatives often combine multiple short-term engagements, including donor-funded or cultural programme projects, to sustain their professional activity. Access to social protection, health insurance, and pension schemes is limited for freelancers, increasing vulnerability, particularly for early-career professionals. Skill gaps are pronounced in digital competencies such as online content creation, digital marketing, platform-based work, and intellectual property management, as well as in soft skills like communication, teamwork, adaptability, and intercultural collaboration. Entrepreneurial and business skills—financial literacy, project management, pricing of services, fundraising, and long-term career planning—are also insufficiently developed, limiting the transformation of creative talent into sustainable livelihoods.

In **Portugal**, the creative labour market is informal, project-driven, and low-paying, with most workers self-employed and lacking access to social protections, paid holidays, or maternity leave. National cultural employment surveys indicate that a large proportion of workers are self-employed - “**trabalhadores independentes**” yet no official data disaggregates employment by age, leaving the actual participation and economic stability of young creatives largely invisible and complicating targeted policy-making. Digitalization and cross-sector innovation have increased demand for technical and digital skills, but artistic training often lags behind market needs. Young creatives report requiring support in digital tools, self-management, marketing, networking, taxation, grant writing, and intellectual property management. Independent initiatives such as **Coffeepaste** and **Clube da Criatividade Portugal** provide valuable support through networking, competitions, job listings, and community connections, but operate with limited funding. Consequently, systemic public investment, structured employment strategies, and policy frameworks are still needed to strengthen youth participation and sustainability in Portugal’s CCI sector.

In conclusion, youth employment in the cultural and creative industries across Spain, Serbia, Montenegro, Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Portugal reflects both significant opportunities and persistent challenges. While each country exhibits unique dynamics—ranging from Spain’s growing audiovisual and video games sectors, Serbia’s expanding SMEs and fiscal incentives, Montenegro’s project-based and seasonal work, Germany’s well-supported digital infrastructure and EU microgrants, Bosnia and Herzegovina’s hybrid creative roles, to Portugal’s largely informal and self-employed workforce—the common threads are clear. Young creatives across these contexts face irregular income, limited social protections, and gaps in digital, soft, and entrepreneurial skills. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated strategies that combine formal and non-formal education, mentoring, digital and entrepreneurial training, and targeted public policies to support sustainable careers. Strengthening such frameworks will enable young professionals to transform creative talent into resilient livelihoods, foster innovation, and ensure the long-term vitality of Europe’s cultural and creative sectors.

4.5 Policies, Institutions, and Funding

Europe’s cultural and creative industries (CCI) are supported by a complex landscape of policies, institutions, and funding mechanisms, aimed at fostering youth participation, digital innovation, and professional development. Despite progress, disparities in funding, coordination, and youth inclusion remain across countries.

Portugal's cultural policy framework includes **INCoDe.2030**, the **Plano de Ação para a Transição Digital (PATD)**, the **Plano de Recuperação e Resiliência (PRR)**, and public funding mechanisms managed by **DGARTES** and **GEPAC**, which provide a structural basis for cultural development, digital innovation, and youth inclusion. Despite these frameworks, youth employability and professional integration in the creative sector remain limited, largely due to fragmented cultural, educational, and labour policies, which result in isolated initiatives rather than a coherent, interministerial strategy. Public investment in culture continues to represent **less than 1% of the national budget**, consistently below the European average, undermining institutional sustainability, limiting long-term planning, and contributing to precarious working conditions. The **Young People's Addendum to the Porto Santo Charter (2025)** emphasizes that youth participation in culture must go beyond mere beneficiary status, giving them "a seat at the table" as active co-creators and leaders. It calls for the integration of youth voices into strategic planning and ensuring that funding supporting young people is embedded in long-term institutional goals. The Addendum highlights the importance of sustainable and transparent funding, participatory budgeting, and decentralization of cultural access, recommending the "creation and expansion of cultural networks connecting urban, peri-urban, and rural territories" and "increased participatory budgeting for culture managed by local communities". From a labour perspective, the Addendum stresses that young people often enter the cultural sector through internships or volunteer work, which are frequently unregulated and poorly compensated. To address this, it advocates for fair remuneration, regulation of internships, and recognition of the legal status of emerging cultural workers, noting that "regulation is needed to prevent the exploitation of emerging cultural workers." These principles underline the critical link between youth inclusion, investment in culture, and the long-term sustainability of Portugal's creative industries, as well as the need for equitable opportunities across the country, beyond major urban centres.

Germany's policies supporting youth in the creative and cultural industries (CCI) emphasize digital literacy, media education, and infrastructure development. Key initiatives include the **Digital Education Initiative**, **DigitalPakt Schule**, and **Digital Strategy 2025**, which enhance access to digital tools, high-quality learning platforms, and teacher training, while fostering understanding of data literacy, algorithms, and programming. These policies aim to ensure equitable access to digital resources and strengthen the professional integration of young people in the creative sector. **Key stakeholders** in these initiatives include the **Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)** and the **Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi)**, which are central to policy design, funding, and strategic guidance. Universities, art academies, vocational schools, and higher education institutions integrate VR/AR technologies and digital learning into their curricula, supporting both formal and specialized training. **NGOs**, such as the **VR/AR Association Germany**, facilitate informal learning, mentorship, and support for marginalized youth, while **EdTech** startups like **Sofatutor**, **Serlo**, and **VRScience Lerntechnologie** provide innovative digital platforms and learning tools. Cultural organizations, creative hubs, and associations offer networking opportunities, showcases, and collaboration spaces for young artists and professionals. Several grassroots initiatives specifically target marginalized youth, refugees, and young people with disabilities. Examples include "**Multaka: Museum as Meeting Point**" in Berlin, which trains young refugees as cultural guides; the **MESH Collective**, which engages youth in digital arts and storytelling; and **Förderband e.V.**, providing inclusive workshops and adapted maker spaces for youth with disabilities. These projects highlight the importance of social inclusion and hands-on digital learning, yet most programs rely on short-term funding, limiting their scalability and long-term impact. Overall, Germany's approach combines national and local policies, institutional engagement, and grassroots innovation to support youth in the creative

sector, but sustainable investment and long-term program continuity remain crucial for maximizing employability and professional growth in the CCI sector.

Montenegro has increasingly prioritized the creative and cultural sectors as drivers of economic growth, social inclusion, intercultural exchange, and youth professional development. The **Youth Strategy 2023–2027**, adopted by the Government on October 19, 2023, sets four central objectives: the development of youth services and programs, active youth participation in policy-making, enhancement of intersectoral collaboration, and strengthening monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for youth policies. Special attention is given to creativity, cultural expression, and digital competencies, considered essential for empowering young people both professionally and socially. At the **national level**, the implementation of the Youth Strategy is coordinated by the **Ministry of Sport and Youth**, with **institutional and financial support** from the **Ministry of Culture and Media** and the **Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Media**, enabling effective coordination across education, culture, and economic sectors. This intersectoral coordination is particularly important in the creative industries, where education, artistic expression, and technology intersect. Montenegro actively participates in the **European framework supporting the creative sector**, notably through the **Creative Europe Programme 2021–2027**, which provides local organizations with **EU funding for cultural, media, and creative industry projects**. This program fosters professionalization, knowledge transfer, international mobility, and sectoral capacity building, enabling Montenegro’s creative industries to develop in a global context.

Complementary national strategies further strengthen this framework. The **National Programme for Cultural Development 2023–2027** defines priorities in cultural heritage, contemporary arts, and creative industries, with a focus on decentralization of cultural life, strengthening cultural infrastructure, and supporting young creators. It also promotes international cooperation and participation in European cultural networks, encouraging mobility, knowledge exchange, and professional development. The **Media Strategy 2023–2027** addresses freedom of expression, media professionalism, and sector sustainability, highlighting digital transformation, media literacy, and support for independent media, all of which contribute to creative production, digital innovation, and youth skill development. The **Education Reform Strategy 2025–2035**, supported by **UNICEF Montenegro**, emphasizes digital, creative, and entrepreneurial skills, advocating for interdisciplinary approaches and stronger links between educational institutions, cultural organizations, and the economic sector, preparing youth to actively participate in creative industries and contribute to societal innovation.

At the **local level**, municipalities implement concrete cultural initiatives. The **Budva Action Plan for Cultural Development 2025–2026** outlines measures for youth engagement in cultural activities and projects, while **Nikšić’s designation as European Capital of Culture 2030** provides a unique opportunity for international cultural projects, professional skill development, and sustainable employment in creative industries. These local and international programs enhance visibility, cross-border collaboration, and sectoral innovation.

NGOs and international actors play a crucial role in mentoring, capacity building, and access to funding. **UNDP Montenegro** implements projects for youth employment and creative industry capacity development, **Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)** promotes mobility and cultural exchange, and the **Western Balkans Fund (WBF)** provides grants for creative and cross-border projects. **Creative Europe Desk Montenegro** supports organizations in accessing EU funds, providing training, and mentoring, collectively strengthening professionalization and career development opportunities for youth. The **NGO sector** forms a vital network of support, innovation, and mentorship. Organizations such as **Bokeljaska udruga muzičara A Capella Tivat, Metafora – Centar za ljubitelje jezika i**

umjetnosti, Eduka Art Danilovgrad, CEZAM, KARIKA, ŠkArt, and Mozaik, among others, provide educational programs, workshops, creative spaces, and international collaboration opportunities, allowing young people to develop professionally and access employment in arts, culture, and media sectors.

Serbia's creative and cultural industries (CCI) governance has evolved significantly over the past decade. From **July 2012 to December 2020**, the CCI sector operated under the **Sector for Contemporary Creativity and Cultural Industries** within the **Ministry of Culture and Information**, which coordinated and supported the development of contemporary art, cultural production, audiovisual media, performing arts, literature, design, and digital infrastructures. Following an internal reorganization at the end of 2020, this sector was dissolved, and administrative responsibilities were restructured within the broader **Ministry of Culture**, which now functions as the key public administration body responsible for strategic development, regulation, and promotion of cultural and artistic activities, including preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, library systems, publishing, cinematography, and digital cultural platforms.

To strengthen intersectoral governance, the **Council for Creative Industries** was established in 2018 as an interministerial coordination body to initiate policy measures, foster public-private partnerships, and enhance collaboration between cultural, economic, and civil society stakeholders. In 2019, the **Serbia Creates** platform was launched as a **national umbrella initiative** promoting Serbian creativity, cultural production, and international visibility, positioning creative professionals as ambassadors of national identity, innovation, and knowledge-based economic development. Complementing this, the **Sector for Development, International Cooperation and Promotion of Digital, Innovative and Creative Activities**, within the **Office for IT and e-Government**, plays a key role in policy formulation, strategic planning, international engagement, and improving regulatory and business conditions for the sustainable growth of the CCI.

Despite these institutional developments, Serbia **lacks a single, unified strategic framework** for the CCI sector, resulting in fragmented governance and uneven implementation of policies. Nevertheless, the sector is increasingly recognized as a **driver of innovation, economic growth, and international cultural presence**. Financial mechanisms, such as the **Incentive Program for the Film Industry**, implemented in collaboration with the **Ministry of Economy and Film Center Serbia**, provide **non-refundable funding for audiovisual production, stimulate foreign investment, and generate employment**, contributing to creative entrepreneurship.

Youth-focused policies are integrated into several frameworks that foster digital literacy, interdisciplinary skills, entrepreneurship, and international exposure:

- The **2030 National Youth Strategy** emphasizes the socio-economic empowerment of young people, with a focus on creativity, digital competencies, and entrepreneurship. It promotes cross-sectoral collaboration, active youth participation in policy-making, and support mechanisms for young creatives, including mentoring, funding access, and stronger links between education, culture, and labour markets. Platforms like **Serbia Creates** operationalize these objectives by providing practical engagement opportunities for youth.
- The **National Cultural Strategy 2020–2029** provides a comprehensive, long-term framework for preserving, promoting, and developing Serbia's cultural heritage and creative sectors. It highlights youth inclusion, capacity building, digital transformation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and modernization of cultural governance, creating enabling conditions for youth-led innovation and co-creation.
- The **Public Policy Testing Manual for Youth Employment**, developed by **SIPRU**, introduces evidence-based, experimental approaches for youth employment policies. Although not sector-specific, it is highly relevant for the CCI sector, emphasizing

participatory governance, policy experimentation, and intersectoral collaboration, thereby supporting responsive mechanisms for youth employment in creative fields.

- The **Smart Specialisation Strategy 2020–2027 (Serbia Creates Innovation)** embeds CCI as a strategic driver of innovation-led economic transformation, aligning **R&D, education, and industry needs**, promoting high-skilled employment, entrepreneurial competencies, and innovation capacity in the creative sector, with dedicated institutional and financial support.
- **Digital Serbia 2030** and the **Strategy for the Development of the Information Society 2022–2030** prioritize digital infrastructure, broadband access, digital literacy, and e-governance, creating an enabling ecosystem for digitally-oriented creative sectors, including audiovisual production, digital media, and interactive content. These frameworks position young creatives as essential drivers of digital innovation within Serbia’s cultural and creative landscape.

The CCI sector in Serbia is experiencing rapid growth in digital and audiovisual subsectors, fueled by technological advancement, a digitally native workforce, and international collaboration. In contrast, traditional creative domains—including publishing, photography, and print media—face stagnation, highlighting the need for targeted policies to ensure balanced sectoral development. Key policy priorities include:

- **Enhancing digital literacy and reskilling initiatives** for professionals in declining subsectors.
- **Stimulating innovation in publishing and print media** through digital transition frameworks and collaborative multimedia projects.
- **Strengthening fiscal and institutional incentives** for high-growth areas like audiovisual production and design, including grants, tax incentives, and support for innovation hubs.
- **Investing in cultural infrastructure** such as studios, exhibition venues, and maker spaces, alongside digitization of public cultural institutions.
- **Promoting the formalization of creative employment**, ensuring access to social protections, healthcare, and stable income for freelancers and gig workers.

Overall, Serbia’s creative and cultural sector governance is characterized by a fragmented yet increasingly structured framework, integrating national strategies, youth-oriented programs, digital initiatives, and public-private platforms. While challenges remain in strategic coherence, equitable support for traditional subsectors, and sustainable employment conditions, the combination of institutional mechanisms, policy instruments, and targeted financial support provides a solid foundation for youth engagement, international visibility, and innovation-led growth in the creative economy.

Spain has developed a comprehensive and multi-level policy framework to support young people in the cultural and creative industries (CCIs), addressing long-standing challenges related to precarious employment, intermittent work patterns, and limited social protection. A cornerstone of this approach is the **Estatuto del Artista**²⁷, an ongoing package of reforms designed to adapt labour, social security, and fiscal regulations to the specific realities of artistic and creative work. Within this framework, **Royal Decree-Law 1/2023** introduced significant improvements, including the formal recognition of artistic work, the inclusion of occupational illnesses specific to creative professions, and enhanced social protection for freelance and self-employed artists, directly benefiting young creatives entering the sector. In parallel, the **Plan de Recuperación**²⁸, **Transformación y Resiliencia (PRTR)**, funded through the

²⁷ The Status And Working Conditions Of Artists And Cultural And Creative Professionals - <https://www.kreativnievropa.cz/co5fokmmap3aa309/uploads/2023/07/the-status-and-working-conditions-of-artists-and-cultural-NC0423087ENN.pdf>

²⁸ Plan de Recuperación - <https://planderecuperacion.gob.es/>

NextGenerationEU mechanism, channels substantial public investment into digitalisation, innovation, and creative transformation. The PRTR supports projects across cultural industries, the audiovisual sector, and tourism–culture synergies, fostering new employment opportunities, digital skills development, and cross-sector collaboration. These investments are particularly relevant for young people, who are disproportionately represented in emerging digital, audiovisual, and hybrid creative fields. Additionally, accessibility regulations, notably **Law 11/2023** and its related decrees, strengthen inclusive access to cultural venues and services, ensuring broader participation of young people with disabilities and reinforcing cultural rights as a core policy objective. The implementation of these policies is supported by a diverse institutional ecosystem. The **Ministerio de Cultura**²⁹ plays a central coordinating role by overseeing cultural statistics, national funding schemes, and strategic policy development, while also hosting the **Creative Europe Desks – Culture & MEDIA**, which provide guidance, training, and access to European funding opportunities for young professionals and organizations. The **Instituto de la Juventud (INJUVE)**³⁰ complements this framework through youth-specific programmes, most notably *Ayudas a la Creación Joven*, which offers grants, mentoring, visibility, and exhibition opportunities for emerging creators. From an employment perspective, the **Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal (SEPE)** contributes through vocational education and training schemes and the coordination of the **Youth Guarantee programme**³¹, linking young jobseekers with employment, traineeships, and upskilling opportunities, including within CCIs. Beyond national institutions, regional cultural departments and local governments play a crucial role in Spain’s decentralized cultural governance system. They frequently fund and manage creative hubs, artist residencies, cultural centres, and local funding calls, tailoring support to regional creative ecosystems and facilitating grassroots and youth-led initiatives. Spain is also actively engaged at the European level through participation in networks such as the **European Creative Hubs Network (ECHN)**³², which connects creative spaces across countries and provides young creatives with access to shared resources, international mobility, advocacy platforms, and peer learning opportunities. Key stakeholders further enrich this ecosystem. Non-governmental organisations and professional associations, including **SGAE**³³ (authors’ rights management), **DEV/AEVI**³⁴ (video game industry), and **FAETEDA** (performing arts producers), play an essential role in representing creative professionals, advocating for improved working conditions, and shaping sector-specific policies. Educational institutions, universities, and specialised schools—such as **ECAM** and **ECPV**—alongside conservatories and arts faculties, provide formal training, skills development, and talent incubation. At the same time, creation centres and cultural organisations like **Medialab Matadero (Madrid)**³⁵, **Hangar (Barcelona)**³⁶, and **Tabakalera (San Sebastián)**³⁷ function as innovation labs and incubators, offering workspace, mentoring, residencies, and platforms for experimentation and youth-led creative projects.

²⁹ Ministerio de Cultura - <https://www.cultura.gob.es/cultura/mc/espacio-igualdad/estadisticas/empleo-cultural.html>

³⁰ INJUVE - <https://www.injuve.es/programas-injuve/ayudas-injuve-creacion-joven>

³¹ Youth Guarantee programme - https://www.sepe.es/SiteSepe/contenidos/garantia_juvenil/ficheros/garantiajuvenil/documentos/plannacionalgarantiajuvenil_en.pdf

³² The European Creative Hubs Network - <https://creativehubs.net/about-us.php>

³³ SGAE - <https://www.sgae.es/sobre-sgae/nuestra-historia/>

³⁴ DEV/AEVI - <https://www.dev.org.es/>

³⁵ Medialab Matadero - <https://www.mataderomadrid.org/en/programs/medialab-matadero>

³⁶ Hangar - <https://hangar.org/en/>

³⁷ Tabakalera - <https://www.tabakalera.eus/>

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, support for young people in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) is shaped by a complex and fragmented governance structure, with responsibilities divided across state, entity, cantonal, and local levels. Although CCIs are increasingly recognised in strategic documents related to culture, youth, digitalisation, and economic development, policies remain indirect, unevenly implemented, and lacking long-term coherence. As a result, **support for young creatives is largely driven by international organisations, donor-funded programmes, and civil society**, rather than by comprehensive national strategies. At entity level, **youth strategies in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska prioritise employability, entrepreneurship, and skills development**, while cultural policies acknowledge CCIs as contributors to cultural diversity and innovation. Digitalisation strategies emphasise digital literacy and ICT skills, but the country lacks a national programme for digital education or systemic digital transformation of creative education, leaving implementation to project-based, donor-supported initiatives. **Public funding for culture**, provided mainly through **entity and cantonal calls, offers limited entry points for young creatives** but is characterised by short-term funding cycles, small budgets, and high competition, restricting sustainable career development. Key stakeholders include ministries responsible for culture, youth, education, and economic development, universities and art academies, NGOs delivering non-formal education, mentoring, and digital skills training, international organisations supporting mobility and cross-border cooperation through programmes such as **Erasmus+** and **Creative Europe**, and creative hubs and cultural organisations that provide spaces for networking and showcasing, mainly in urban areas. While numerous grassroots and inclusion-oriented initiatives engage young women, rural youth, migrants, and socio-economically disadvantaged groups through creative and digital practices, their impact is constrained by short-term funding, weak institutionalisation, and limited policy integration, resulting in a fragmented support landscape and unequal access to opportunities for young people in the CCI sector.

Across the analysed countries, youth inclusion in cultural and creative industries depends on the coherence of policy frameworks, institutional coordination, and access to stable funding. Germany and Spain show more advanced and structured approaches through integrated digital, educational, and labour policies, while Portugal, Montenegro, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to face fragmented governance, uneven implementation, and a strong reliance on short-term or project-based funding. Support systems across all contexts involve ministries, public agencies, educational institutions, NGOs, cultural organisations, creative hubs, and international programmes, yet young people remain underrepresented in decision-making, often positioned as beneficiaries rather than policy shapers. Digital, entrepreneurial, and interdisciplinary skills are widely prioritised to improve employability, particularly in fast-growing digital and audiovisual subsectors. At the same time, precarious employment, freelance instability, unregulated internships, and limited social protection persist as shared challenges.

Overall, youth are increasingly recognised as key drivers of cultural innovation, economic diversification, and creative sector growth, but long-term impact requires coherent intersectoral strategies, sustained public investment, fair labour conditions, and meaningful youth participation embedded in policy and funding frameworks.

4.6 Inclusion and Accessibility

Marginalized youth—including Roma, Egyptians, migrants, women, youth with disabilities, and young people from rural or low-income backgrounds—face persistent structural barriers

to participation in cultural and creative industries (CCI) across Europe. While all analysed countries demonstrate growing policy awareness of inclusion and accessibility, implementation remains uneven and long-term structural impact is still limited.

In **Spain**, inclusion in the cultural and creative industries is supported through a combination of accessibility legislation, territorial cohesion measures, gender equality policies, and targeted youth employment instruments. The **Spanish Disability Strategy 2022–2030**³⁸ and concrete actions by the Ministry of Culture aim to ensure universal access to cultural spaces and programming, including upgrades in state museums and improved physical and digital accessibility. These efforts are reinforced by **Law 11/2023**³⁹, which transposes EU accessibility directives and obliges cultural venues and digital services to adapt their infrastructure and platforms, as well as by the **II National Accessibility Plan**⁴⁰, which sets a broader roadmap for universal access in public services. Despite this framework, implementation gaps remain significant: only **26% of Spanish websites currently meet EU digital accessibility standards**⁴¹, highlighting persistent digital exclusion for young people with disabilities.

Territorial inequality represents another major structural barrier. Young people in rural or depopulated areas face limited access to cultural venues, training centres, creative networks, and public transport, while those seeking opportunities in major urban hubs encounter high relocation and living costs. The prevalence of unpaid or underpaid entry-level creative work further advantages those with financial support, disproportionately excluding youth from low-income, migrant, or Roma backgrounds. Uneven regional funding distribution also means that cultural participation and professional pathways often depend on geography, education level, and socio-economic status.

To address these challenges, Spain has introduced targeted measures. Programmes such as **Cultura y Ciudadanía/Cultura y Ruralidades**⁴² explicitly invite young rural agents and promote territorial diversity, encouraging creative activity beyond major metropolitan centres. The **Youth Guarantee**⁴³ scheme provides training and employment pathways for young people distant from the labour market, including in creative fields. Through the **Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia (PRTR)**⁴⁴, EU recovery funds have been channelled into digitalisation, cultural accelerators, and territorial cohesion, with calls aimed at strengthening local cultural industries. In 2025, the Ministry of Culture launched a dedicated line of rural cultural cooperation grants of up to **€120,000 per project**⁴⁵, specifically designed to reduce regional inequalities. At the same time, the Ministry promotes gender equality in audiovisual industries, with the objective of achieving a **50/50 gender balance**⁴⁶ between men and women. Despite this evolving policy mix, structural disparities persist, and sector analyses continue to show that rural youth and socio-economically disadvantaged groups remain underrepresented in cultural employment and leadership positions.

³⁸ Spanish Disability Strategy 2022–2030 - <https://www.dsca.gob.es/sites/default/files/derechos-sociales/discapacidad/docs/estrategia-espanola-discapacidad-2022-2030-def.pdf>

³⁹ Law 11/2023 - https://noticias.juridicas.com/base_datos/Fiscal/752262-ley-11-2023-de-8-may-trasposicion-directivas-de-la-ue-accesibilidad-determinados.html

⁴⁰ II National Accessibility Plan - <https://www.rpdiscapacidad.gob.es/estudios-publicaciones/PlanNacionalAccesibilidad.pdf>

⁴¹ Redaccion la Educacion Digital - <https://www.laeducaciondigital.com/actualidad/solo-el-26-de-las-webs-en-espana-cumplen-con-la-normativa-europea-de-accesibilidad-digital/>

⁴² Cultura y Ciudadanía/Cultura y Ruralidades - <https://culturayciudadania.cultura.gob.es/cultura-medio-rural/8-foro/call-for-projects.html>

⁴³ Youth Guarantee - <https://www.sepe.es/HomeSepe/en/encontrar-trabajo/Garantia-Juvenil/plan-garantia-juvenil-plus.html>

⁴⁴ Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia (PRTR) - <https://planderecuperacion.gob.es/como-acceder-a-los-fondos/convocatorias/BDNS/674425/convocatoria-ayudas-a-proyectos-de-apoyo-a-aceleradoras-culturales-prtr>

⁴⁵ Ministry of Culture launched a dedicated line of rural cultural cooperation grants - <https://www.cultura.gob.es/actualidad/2025/06/250603-ayudas-cooperacion-rural.html>

⁴⁶ Ministry promotes gender equality in audiovisual industries - <https://portal.mineco.gob.es/RecursosArticulo/mineco/ministerio/ficheros/Espana-hub-audiovisual-en.pdf>

In **Serbia**, inclusion in the CCI sector is embedded within broader youth, digital, and innovation strategies, including the **2030 National Youth Strategy**, **Smart Specialisation Strategy**, and **Digital Serbia 2030 framework**. These policies promote digital literacy, entrepreneurship, interdisciplinary skills, and innovation-driven growth, positioning young creatives as drivers of economic transformation. However, marginalized youth—particularly Roma, women, rural youth, and young people from low-income backgrounds—continue to face barriers related to precarious employment, limited access to professional networks, and uneven regional development. While platforms such as **Serbia Creates** and sectoral funding mechanisms (e.g., audiovisual incentives) strengthen visibility and employment opportunities, there are limited CCI-specific, long-term inclusion programmes targeting marginalized groups. As in other countries, short-term project funding and freelance instability constrain sustainable participation.

In **Montenegro**, inclusion policies are anchored in a relatively comprehensive strategic and institutional framework developed over the past decade to promote equal opportunities for young people from marginalized groups, including Roma and Egyptians, migrants, women, and youth with disabilities. The **Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians 2021–2025**⁴⁷ defines measures to improve access to education, employment, social protection, and cultural participation, explicitly recognising culture and creative activities as tools for integration, empowerment, and stereotype reduction. In cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and Media, it promotes the inclusion of Roma artists and young creators in local and national cultural programmes. This framework is reinforced by the **Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2022–2027**⁴⁸ and the **Gender Equality Action Plan 2023–2027**, which strengthen accessibility standards, inclusive education, and the active participation of young women and youth with disabilities in cultural and public life. The **National Programme for Cultural Development 2023–2027**⁴⁹ defines inclusivity, intercultural dialogue, and openness of cultural institutions as core principles, encouraging programmes that engage marginalized communities. Complementary strategies—such as the **Media Strategy 2023–2027**⁵⁰ and the **Education Reform Strategy 2025–2035**⁵¹, supported by UNICEF—contribute by promoting media literacy, digital competencies, and creative expression, particularly in underserved areas. At the local level, municipalities including Nikšić, Podgorica, and Berane integrate inclusive cultural measures into their development plans through workshops, exhibitions, and community-based artistic initiatives. Despite this structured framework, barriers to participation remain multidimensional. Economic hardship continues to disproportionately affect Roma and Egyptian youth, women in rural areas, migrants, and persons with disabilities, limiting their ability to engage in cultural programmes or pursue creative careers. Limited access to quality education and insufficient development of digital, artistic, and entrepreneurial skills further reduce employability. **Research by Centre for Civic Education (CCE)**⁵² highlights weak links between the education system and the labour market as a key driver of youth marginalisation. Regional disparities are also significant: young people in northern municipalities face reduced access to cultural infrastructure and digital tools. The report

⁴⁷ Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians 2021–2025 - <https://www.gov.me/clanak/strategija-socijalne-inkluzije-roma-i-egipcana-u-crnoj-gori-2021-2025>

⁴⁸ Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2022–2027 - <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/e9659c4e-e7f6-41f2-ab98-0fd115b80601>

⁴⁹ National Programme for Cultural Development 2023–2027 - <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/a98b089a-f362-447e-b33a-b9fbde050b70>

⁵⁰ Media Strategy 2023–2027 - <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/b7e6dde8-74a2-4ce7-b58c-376a85ed0416>

⁵¹ Education Reform Strategy 2025–2035 - <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/73f999b6-b879-4868-a72d-e670ce78f77f>

⁵² Research by Centre for Civic Education (CCE) - <https://cgo-ccc.org/en/2023/08/29/youth-between-marginalization-radicalization-and-potential/>

Mapping Youth Participation in Digital Democracy in Montenegro⁵³ confirms persistent digital divides in internet connectivity and access to equipment, constraining creative and civic engagement. Social stigma toward persons with disabilities additionally limits access to mentorship, resources, and professional networks. To address these challenges, national institutions cooperate closely with international partners such as **UNDP, UNICEF, RYCO, and the Western Balkans Fund**. Initiatives including *Inclusive Arts for All*, *Creative Communities without Barriers*, and the UNDP-supported **ReLOaD: Empowering Youth and Women through Creative Industries**⁵⁴ use artistic production, innovation, and local creative entrepreneurship as mechanisms for social inclusion and employment, particularly in municipalities such as Nikšić, Tivat, Kotor, Pljevlja, and Podgorica. Programmes such as **Digital, Inclusive, and Transformative: Quality Education for Montenegro**⁵⁵ further support digital skill development in remote areas, while research on social enterprises highlights their potential to create employment pathways for marginalized youth in the creative sector. According to the **2024 Social Inclusion Report**⁵⁶, progress has been observed in the employment of Roma and Egyptians and in increased participation of youth with disabilities in cultural events. However, sustainable financing, stronger local capacities, and deeper institutional integration of inclusive measures across cultural, educational, and social policies remain critical challenges for ensuring long-term impact.

In **Germany**, inclusion and accessibility initiatives focus on reducing digital and socio-economic barriers for marginalized youth in CCI. Programs emphasize bridging the digital divide and providing equal access to online learning, particularly for those in remote areas or with mobility constraints. Measures include **DigitalPakt Schule**⁵⁷, which invests in school digital infrastructure, and community hubs for digital inclusion. Projects offer mentoring, virtual exchanges, and career guidance to bridge gaps between education and industry, enhance intercultural competencies, and provide networking opportunities.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, inclusion in the CCI sector is largely project-based and donor-driven. Marginalized youth—including young women, rural youth, migrants, returnees, and those with limited resources—face barriers such as financial constraints, limited digital access, weak professional networks, and uneven availability of creative programmes. Civil society and international projects use participatory arts, creative workshops, and digital storytelling to empower these groups, develop digital and intercultural skills, and provide flexible entry points into the sector. Key barriers include the digital divide, high costs of education and creative work, limited career guidance, and mobility constraints. Non-formal learning, online platforms, and hybrid programmes help mitigate these challenges, yet the lack of stable institutional support and coherent national frameworks limits the scalability and long-term impact of inclusion efforts.

In **Portugal**, inclusive participation in the creative industries remains uneven. Youth from low-income, migrant, Roma, or rural backgrounds are underrepresented in higher arts education and cultural employment. Initiatives such as **Cultura para Todos** and **Rede Cultura 2027** encourage local engagement, but few sustained measures exist to ensure long-term participation or career continuity for marginalized youth. The **Porto Santo Charter** and its **Youth Addendum** frame cultural participation as both a right and a social necessity,

⁵³ Mapping Youth Participation in Digital Democracy in Montenegro - <https://uzor.me/report-on-mapping-youth-participation-in-digital-democracy-in-montenegro/>

⁵⁴ ReLOaD: Empowering Youth and Women through Creative Industries - <https://www.undp.org/montenegro/press-releases/reload-empowering-youth-and-women-through-creative-industries>

⁵⁵ Digital, Inclusive, and Transformative: Quality Education for Montenegro - <https://montenegro.un.org/en/280750-digital-inclusive-and-transformative-quality-education-montenegro>

⁵⁶ 2024 Social Inclusion Report - <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/a40d18e4-216c-4f44-9611-cb25c6ccbe79>

⁵⁷ DigitalPakt Schule - <https://www.digitalpaktshule.de/index.html>

advocating for accessibility, fair pay, mentorship, decentralization, and equitable funding, aligned with broader European goals for cultural democracy and the green–digital transition. Systemic barriers persist, including limited employment data, weak institutional links between education and the labour market, and chronic underfunding of culture. While youth demonstrate resilience, the absence of structural support perpetuates inequality and precarity. Addressing these challenges requires Portugal to invest in youth integration, strengthen mentorship and career pathways, decentralize cultural opportunities, and implement equitable, sustained funding models that transform the principles of the Porto Santo Youth Addendum into actionable policies.

Across all countries analyzed, initiatives demonstrate a clear commitment to inclusion and accessibility in the creative and cultural industries, yet systemic barriers remain significant. Marginalized youth—including Roma, Egyptians, migrants, women, youth with disabilities, and those from rural or low-income backgrounds—face geographic isolation, economic hardship, insufficient digital infrastructure, uneven regional development, limited professional networks, and social stigma that restrict access to education, training, and cultural employment. Effective strategies observed include legislative and policy frameworks promoting accessibility and gender equality, targeted funding programs, mentorship and career guidance, digital and artistic skills development, intercultural dialogue, and community-based creative projects. Long-term inclusion and equity require coordinated actions across culture, education, and social policy, ensuring that marginalized youth not only participate in programs but can also build sustainable careers, influence cultural decision-making, and exercise agency within the creative industries.

5 Perspectives of Young People and Youth Workers in the Cultural and Creative Industries

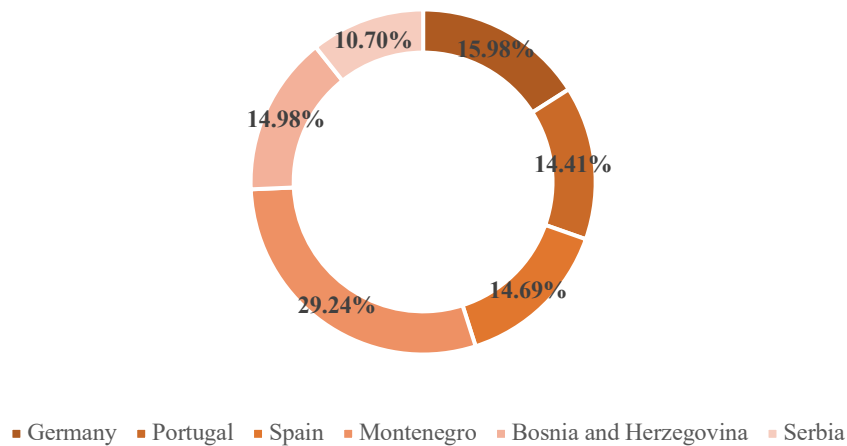
The preceding sections of this publication presented an extensive desk research analysis addressing key domains relevant to young people engaged in the cultural and creative industries (CCI). These included the overarching public policy frameworks, existing legislative and strategic documents shaping the CCI environment, labour market trends, employment opportunities, skills needs and gaps, formal and non-formal educational pathways, mobility and internationalisation patterns, regional disparities, social participation, processes of digital transformation, and the availability of institutional and community-based support mechanisms. Building on this foundation, the present chapter synthesises the perspectives of young people and youth workers collected through a mixed-methods research design implemented across six European countries—Germany, Portugal, Spain, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. These countries together represent a diverse governance landscape encompassing federal, unitary, regionalised, and highly decentralised systems, which significantly shape opportunities, access to resources, and institutional support structures for youth active or aspiring to work in the CCI sector.

The research included national focus groups composed of **15 young creatives per partner country** (aged 18–30), combined with an online survey capturing the views of a total of **701 respondents**. The methodological design followed Creswell’s mixed-methods principles, enabling qualitative insights from discussion-based interactions to complement and deepen the interpretation of the quantitative data collected through the structured survey instrument. The qualitative component prioritised topics that participants themselves identified as most urgent and relevant. Owing to the limited duration of the focus groups, it was not possible to cover all issues with equal depth; nevertheless, the focus group discussions offered rich

contextualisation, allowing participants to emphasise the challenges and priorities they perceived as most central to their lived experiences in the CCI ecosystem. This does not diminish the relevance of topics that emerged less prominently during discussions but were strongly represented in the survey data. The survey results thus serve as the analytical backbone of this chapter, while the focus group findings provide granularity, nuance, and real-world interpretation of the quantitative trends.

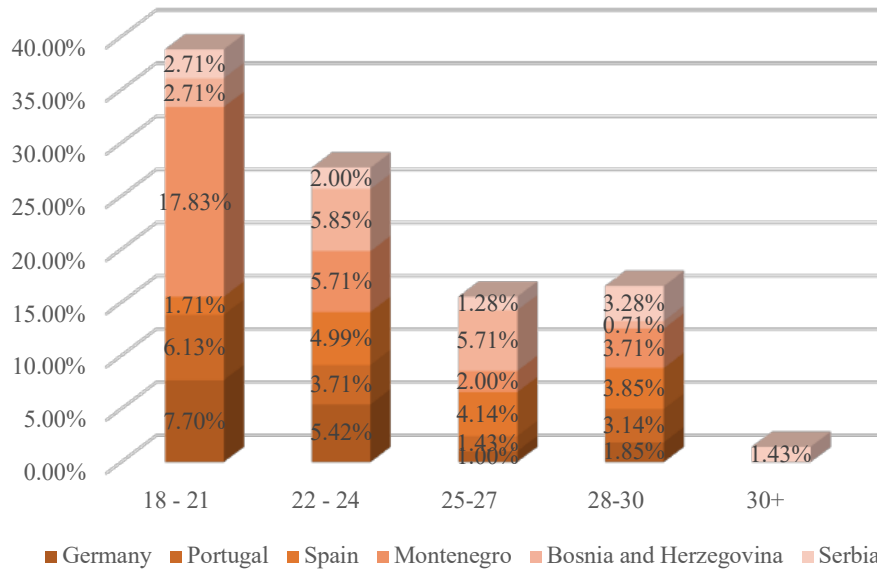
The primary thematic areas that emerged across countries reflect the core concerns of young people: access to employment and internship opportunities in the CCI sector; skill gaps and training needs; barriers to labour market entry; regional inequalities in cultural participation and access to opportunities; experiences with formal education and the adequacy of curricula; the role of non-formal learning; digital, entrepreneurial, and soft skills development; availability of funding, studio spaces, equipment, and mentorship; wellbeing, workload, and burnout; mobility opportunities; and the effectiveness and accessibility of support offered by public institutions, youth workers, organisations, and cultural platforms.

Distribution of Survey Respondents by Country



The survey captured a broad cross-section of young people with diverse backgrounds and regional affiliations. In terms of country distribution, **Montenegro accounted for the largest share of respondents (205; 29.24%)**, followed by **Bosnia and Herzegovina (105; 14.98%)**, **Spain (103; 14.69%)**, **Portugal (101; 14.41%)**, **Germany (112; 15.98%)**, and **Serbia (75; 10.70%)**, forming a representative dataset for comparative analysis across different socio-political and economic contexts.

Age Structure of Respondents Across Six Countries



The age structure of the sample provides a nuanced understanding of the life stages at which young people interact with the cultural and creative industries (CCIs). Overall, the dataset is strongly dominated by respondents in earlier transition phases from secondary education toward higher education and the labour market. The largest age cohort is the **18–21 group**, representing **272 respondents (38.80%)**, followed by the **22–24 group** with **194 respondents (27.67%)**. Respondents aged **25–27** accounted for **109 individuals (15.55%)**, while those in the **28–30** category represented **116 respondents (16.55%)**. Only **10 participants (1.43%)** were older than 30, confirming that the survey predominantly captured youth perspectives aligned with formal definitions of young adulthood in Europe.

A country-level breakdown reveals important demographic variations and different forms of engagement with CCIs across national contexts. **Montenegro** recorded by far the highest concentration of the youngest respondents: **125 individuals aged 18–21 (17.83%)**, indicating strong participation of late high-school and early university students. In contrast, **Spain** demonstrated a significantly more even distribution across early adulthood, with notable clusters in the **22–24 (35; 4.99%)** and **25–27 (29; 4.14%)** categories, suggesting a higher degree of engagement among youth who are transitioning from advanced studies into early employment.

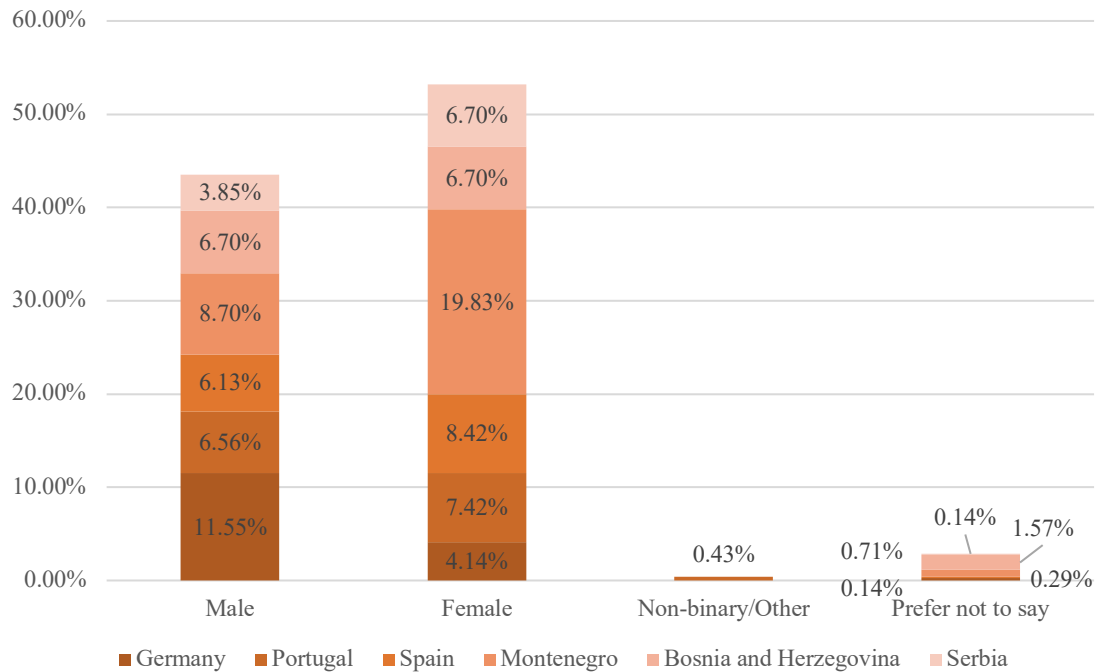
Germany displayed a pattern marked by a strong youth presence in the earliest age group (**54; 7.70%**) and a sharp decline across older categories (**38 in 22–24; 5.42%**, and only **7 in 25–27; 1.00%**), which may reflect both the structure of the German educational system and the composition of youth communities engaged in CCIs. **Portugal** similarly showed a predominantly younger participant profile, with **43 respondents aged 18–21 (6.13%)** and a stable but modest representation in later age bands, notably **22–24 (26; 3.71%)** and **28–30 (22; 3.14%)**.

Meanwhile, **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Serbia** exhibited more balanced distributions across the three central age groups (18–27), reflecting gradual transitions from formal education to early professional experiences. Bosnia and Herzegovina had **19 respondents aged 18–21 (2.71%)**, **41 aged 22–24 (5.85%)**, and **40 aged 25–27 (5.71%)**, while Serbia recorded **19 (2.71%)**, **14 (2.00%)**, and **9 (1.28%)** in those same categories. Serbia is also one of the few

countries with a noticeable number of respondents aged 30+ (10; 1.43%), indicating a broader range of participant engagement across the life course.

Taken together, these patterns show that while younger age groups (18–24) dominate across all six countries, each national context displays unique demographic characteristics shaped by differing educational pathways, labour market entry points, and levels of involvement in CCIs. This diversity provides valuable comparative insight into how young people at various developmental stages perceive and participate in cultural and creative sectors.

Gender Distribution of Respondents Across All Countries



The gender distribution of the survey sample reveals a consistent trend across six countries: **young women constitute the majority of respondents** in research on the cultural and creative industries (CCI). Out of 701 participants, **53.21% identified as female (373 respondents)**, **43.51% as male (305)**, **0.43% as non-binary/other (3)**, and **2.85% preferred not to disclose their gender (20)**. This pattern may reflect higher interest in CCI among young women, their educational and career trajectories, or differential engagement with online surveys.

A country-level breakdown shows considerable variation in gender representation. In **Montenegro**, women represent the largest share, accounting for 139 respondents (19.83%) compared to 61 males (8.70%), while 5 participants (0.71%) preferred not to disclose their gender. **Spain** also shows a female majority, with 59 respondents (8.42%) female versus 43 males (6.13%) and 1 participant (0.14%) preferring not to disclose. **Portugal** displays a similar trend: 52 females (7.42%), 46 males (6.56%), and 3 non-binary/other respondents (0.43%). **Germany** shows a moderate female majority, with 29 females (4.14%), 81 males (11.55%), and 2 participants (0.29%) identifying as non-binary/other. **Serbia** records 47 females (6.70%) versus 27 males (3.85%), with 1 participant (0.14%) preferring not to disclose, while **Bosnia and Herzegovina** presents a perfectly balanced gender distribution: 47 females and 47 males (both 6.70%), with the highest proportion of respondents preferring not to disclose gender at 11 (1.57%).

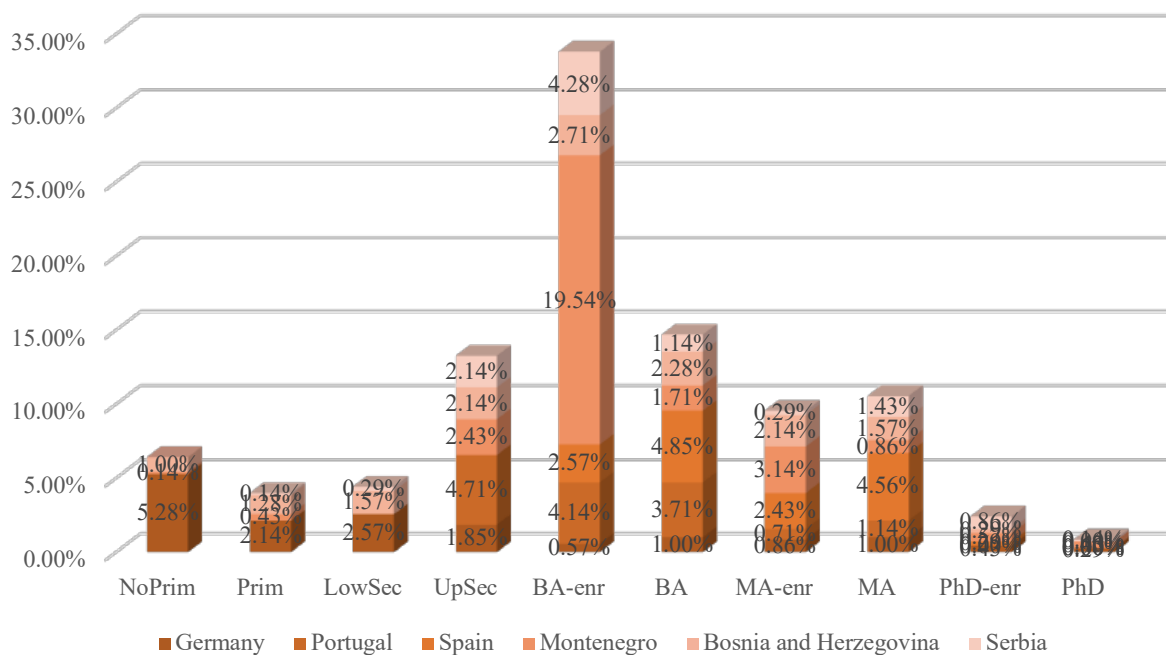
The gender distribution in the focus groups largely mirrors the survey trends, with minor variations. In Spain, the group included 7 women and 8 men, while Serbia had 8 women and

7 men. Germany’s focus group comprised 9 women and 6 men, Montenegro included 9 women and 5 men, and the focus groups in Portugal and Bosnia and Herzegovina maintained a balanced gender composition, reflecting deliberate efforts to ensure gender diversity in qualitative discussions.

These figures confirm that young women are generally more likely to engage with CCI-focused research, both in surveys and interactive qualitative settings, while male participation remains substantial but slightly lower. Non-binary representation was minimal in focus groups, consistent with survey trends.

Overall, this data indicates that young women are generally more likely to participate in CCI-focused research across diverse socio-political and cultural contexts. Non-binary representation is minimal (0.43%), concentrated in Portugal, and a small portion of respondents chose not to disclose their gender (2.85%), with the highest numbers in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. The consistent female majority across countries highlights both interest and engagement patterns in CCI-related activities and research participation, while focus groups show that gender-balanced qualitative inquiry was actively pursued to capture diverse perspectives.

Highest Level of Education Completed Among Respondents Across Countries



Graph abbreviations:

- NoPrim** – Not completed primary education
- Prim** – Primary education
- LowSec** – Lower secondary education
- UpSec** – Upper secondary education
- BA-enr** – Currently enrolled in undergraduate (Bachelor) studies
- BA** – Completed Bachelor’s degree
- MA-enr** – Currently enrolled in postgraduate (Master) studies
- MA** – Completed Master’s degree
- PhD-enr** – Currently enrolled in PhD studies
- PhD** – Completed PhD degree

The **educational background of respondents** reveals substantial variation across countries and provides insight into how young people enter and navigate the cultural and creative industries (CCI). The dataset shows a **generally high level of formal education**, with especially strong representation at the **upper secondary and bachelor levels**. Across the full sample (N = 701), **13.27% completed upper secondary education (UpSec; 93 respondents)**, **33.81% were enrolled in bachelor studies (BA-enr; 237)**, **14.69% held a completed bachelor's degree (BA; 103)**, **9.56% were enrolled in master's programmes (MA-enr; 67)**, and **10.56% had completed a master's degree (MA; 74)**. Doctoral-level participation was minimal, with **2.43% enrolled in PhD programmes (17)** and **0.86% holding a PhD (6)**. Lower levels of schooling were less common: **4.42% reported lower secondary education (LowSec; 31)**, **3.99% primary education (Prim; 28)**, and **6.42% had not completed primary education (NoPrim; 45)**.

Country-level patterns illustrate both structural differences in education systems and varying accessibility of CCI career pathways. **Montenegro** stands out with the **highest share of respondents currently enrolled in undergraduate studies (137; 19.54%)**, suggesting a strong linkage between **CCI aspirations and formal university pathways**, and notable engagement at the **master's level (22 MA-enr; 3.14%)**. **Portugal** presents a **balanced profile**, with **upper secondary graduates (33; 4.71%)** and **bachelor-level students or graduates (BA-enr: 29; 4.14%; BA: 26; 3.71%)**, indicating **dual entry routes into CCIs** through both vocational and academic pathways. **Spain** similarly demonstrates a **strong academic orientation**, with **34 bachelor graduates (4.85%)** and **32 master's degree holders (4.56%)**, but **no respondents in lower educational categories**, reflecting a **highly educated sample**.

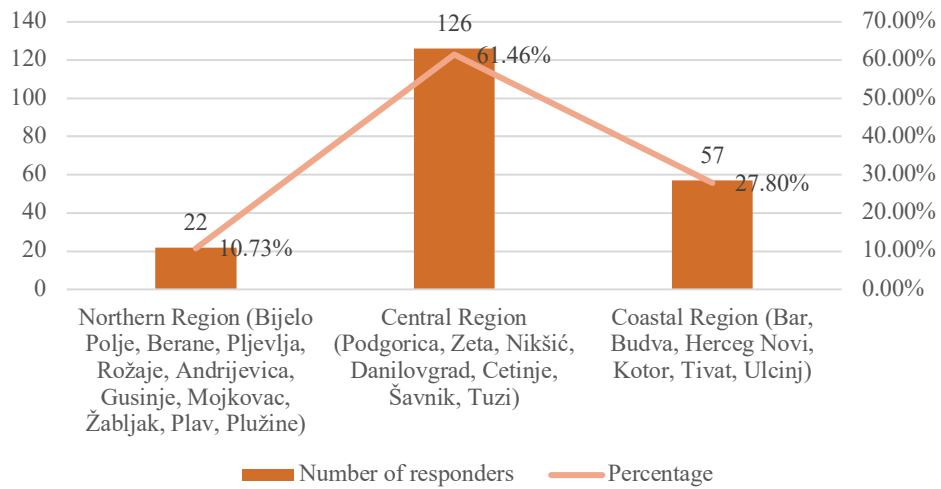
Germany displays the **widest dispersion across categories**, ranging from **no completed primary education (37; 5.28%)** to **doctoral-level respondents (PhD-enr: 3; 0.43%; PhD: 2; 0.29%)**, reflecting **diverse educational tracks—including academic, vocational, and dual systems—and the socioeconomic heterogeneity of its youth population**. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** shows substantial representation in **lower and mid-level categories (NoPrim: 7; 1.00%, Prim: 9; 1.28%, LowSec: 11; 1.57%)** combined with moderate numbers in **upper secondary (15 UpSec; 2.14%)** and **bachelor-level qualifications (BA-enr: 19; 2.71%; BA: 16; 2.28%)**. **Serbia** presents a mixed pattern, with a strong presence of **upper secondary graduates (15 UpSec; 2.14%)**, a smaller but notable share of **bachelor-level students and graduates (BA-enr: 30; 4.28%; BA: 8; 1.14%)**, alongside scattered representation across lower education levels.

The **qualitative data from focus groups** largely mirror these trends and provide deeper insight into the educational and professional trajectories of participants. In **Spain**, participants included a majority of **bachelor's students and graduates**, with a few **master's students**, and one **high school student**, reflecting **strong academic orientation and early engagement with CCI pathways**. In **Montenegro**, participants ranged from **master's students to doctoral candidates**, including some studying abroad (e.g., **Doctoral, Bratislava**), indicating **highly advanced education levels and academic mobility**. In **Portugal**, focus group participants included a mix of **students, recent graduates, freelancers, and established practitioners**, reflecting **diverse entry routes and professional experiences in the CCI sector**.

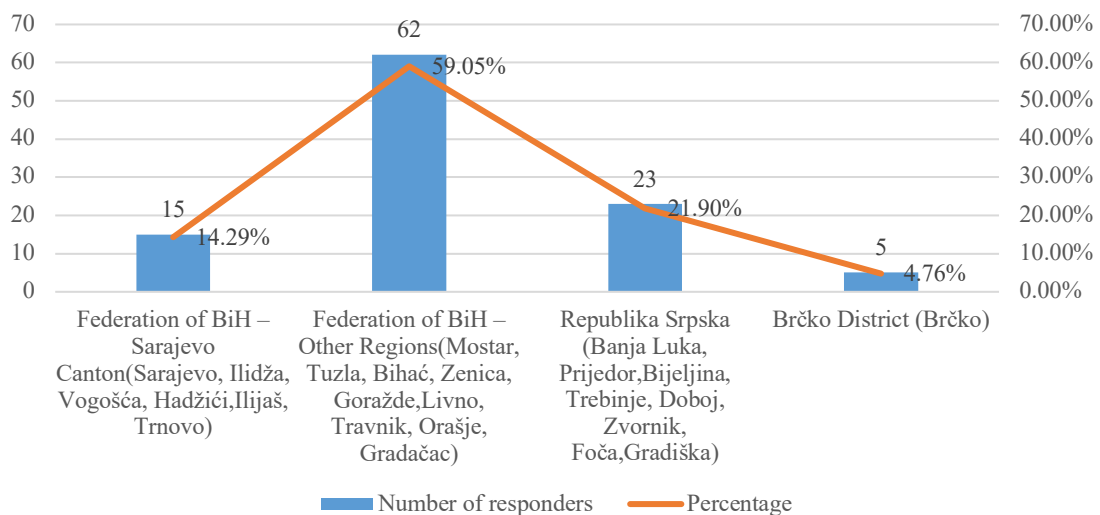
Overall, the data highlight that the **majority of young people engaging with CCIs across surveyed countries have attained or are pursuing higher education**, though the **extent and structure of educational attainment differ significantly**. **Spain and Portugal show strongly academically oriented profiles**, **Montenegro exhibits exceptionally high undergraduate and master's enrolment**, **Germany reflects broad educational diversity**, while **Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia illustrate more varied pathways shaped by socioeconomic and regional disparities**. The patterns underline the **importance of national education systems and accessibility in shaping young people's entry routes into cultural and creative sectors**,

while focus group insights emphasize **the role of both formal education and professional experience in navigating the CCI landscape.**

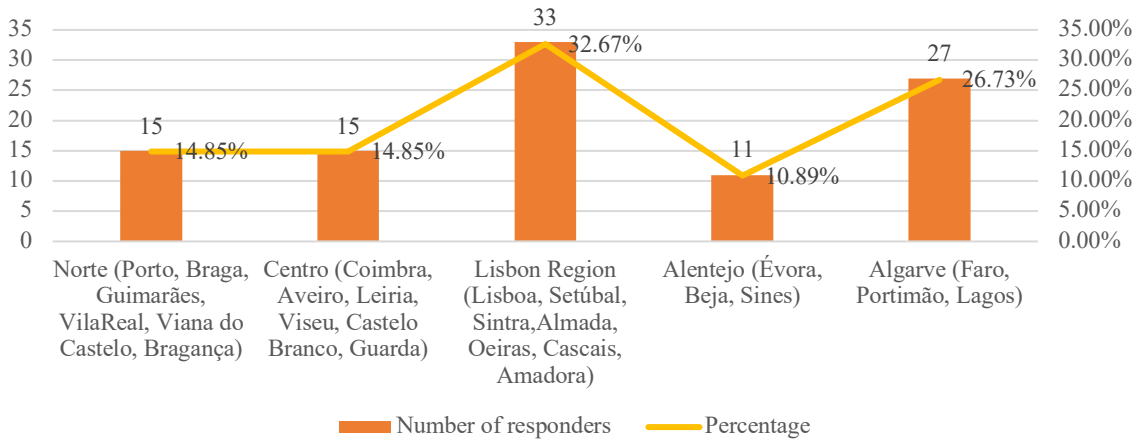
Regional Distribution of Respondents – Montenegro



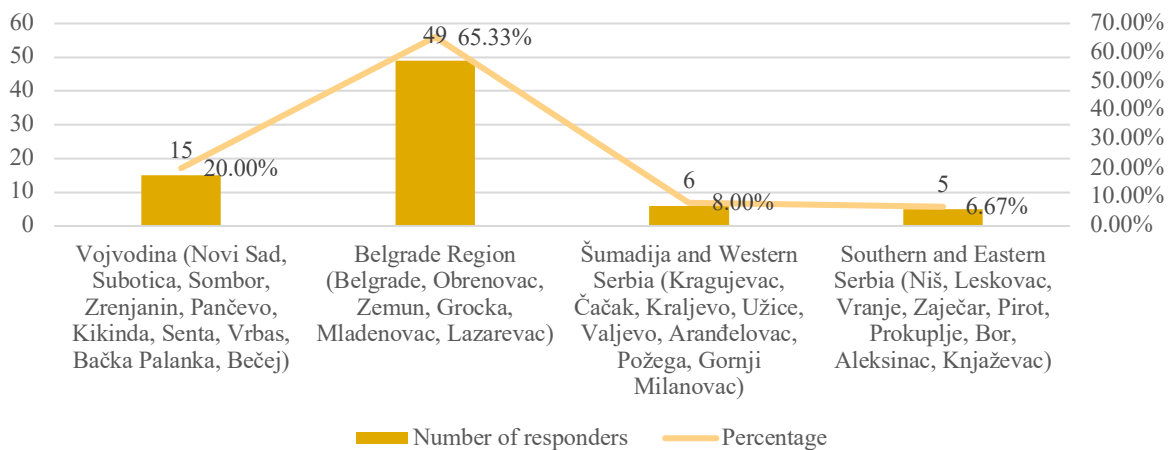
Regional Distribution of Respondents – Bosnia and Herzegovina



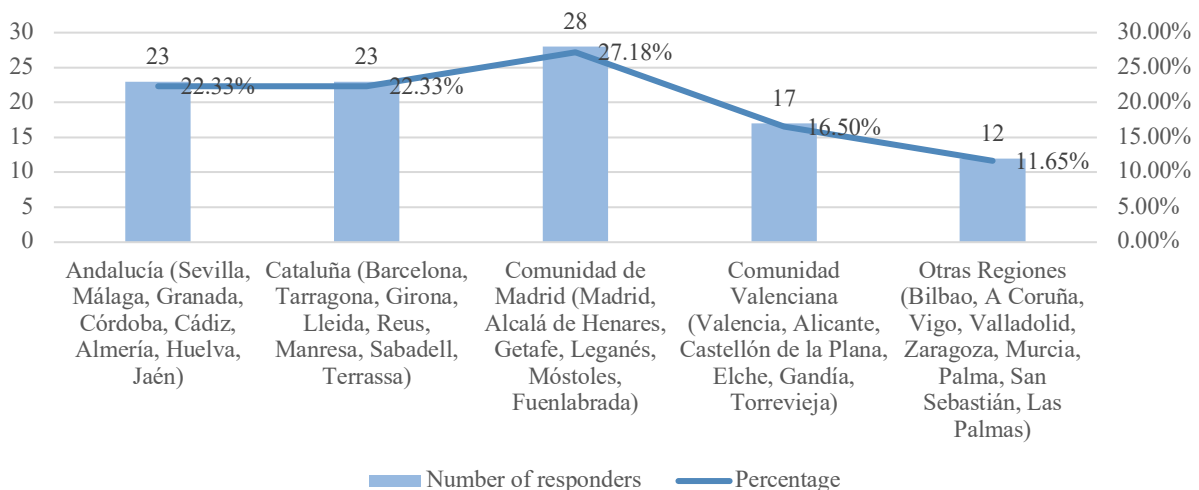
Regional Distribution of Respondents – Portugal



Regional Distribution of Respondents – Serbia



Regional Distribution of Respondents – Spain



The **regional distribution of respondents** demonstrates significant variation in territorial participation across the six countries, reflecting broader differences in administrative

structures, population concentration, and the uneven availability of cultural and educational opportunities.

In **Montenegro**, the sample is **strongly centralised**, with **61.46% of respondents (126 individuals) coming from the Central Region**, which includes **Podgorica and Nikšić**—cities that dominate the country’s cultural, educational, and economic landscape. The **Coastal Region accounts for 27.80% (57 respondents)**, while only **10.73% (22)** come from the **Northern Region**, highlighting **persistent regional disparities in access to opportunities and infrastructural development**. Focus group participants in Montenegro were drawn from a mix of cities, including **Podgorica, Cetinje, Nikšić, Bijelo Polje, and Pljevlja**, reflecting both **central and peripheral engagement within the country**.

The **territorial distribution in Bosnia and Herzegovina** reflects its **highly decentralised political and administrative structure**. A majority of respondents (**59.05%, 62 individuals**) are from **regions of the Federation of BiH outside Sarajevo Canton**, while **21.90% (23)** are from **Republika Srpska**, and **14.29% (15)** from the **Sarajevo Canton**, the political and cultural centre of the Federation. Additionally, **4.76% (5)** are from the **Brčko District**, underscoring the country’s **internal diversity and multi-level governance**. This territorial diversity is further confirmed by the **focus group composition**, as participants came from both **major urban centres and smaller towns, including Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Mostar, Tuzla, and Zenica**, enabling the inclusion of perspectives shaped by different local socio-economic and administrative contexts.

In **Portugal**, respondents are **more evenly dispersed geographically**, although the **Lisbon Region remains the most represented area with 32.67% (33 individuals)**. The **Norte and Centro regions each account for 14.85% (15 respondents)**, followed by **Algarve with 26.73% (27)** and **Alentejo with 10.89% (11)**. This distribution captures both **Portugal’s urban concentration—particularly in Lisbon—and the engagement of peripheral regions, especially the Algarve**.

Serbia shows a **more pronounced centralisation pattern**, similar to Montenegro. The **Belgrade Region dominates with 65.33% (49 respondents)**, reflecting its role as the **cultural, educational, and economic hub**. **Vojvodina accounts for 20.00% (15)**, while **Šumadija and Western Serbia represent 8.00% (6)**, and **Southern and Eastern Serbia make up the remaining 6.67% (5)**. This division mirrors **Serbia’s internal demographic and developmental imbalances**, with Belgrade attracting the largest share of young people engaged in cultural and creative sectors.

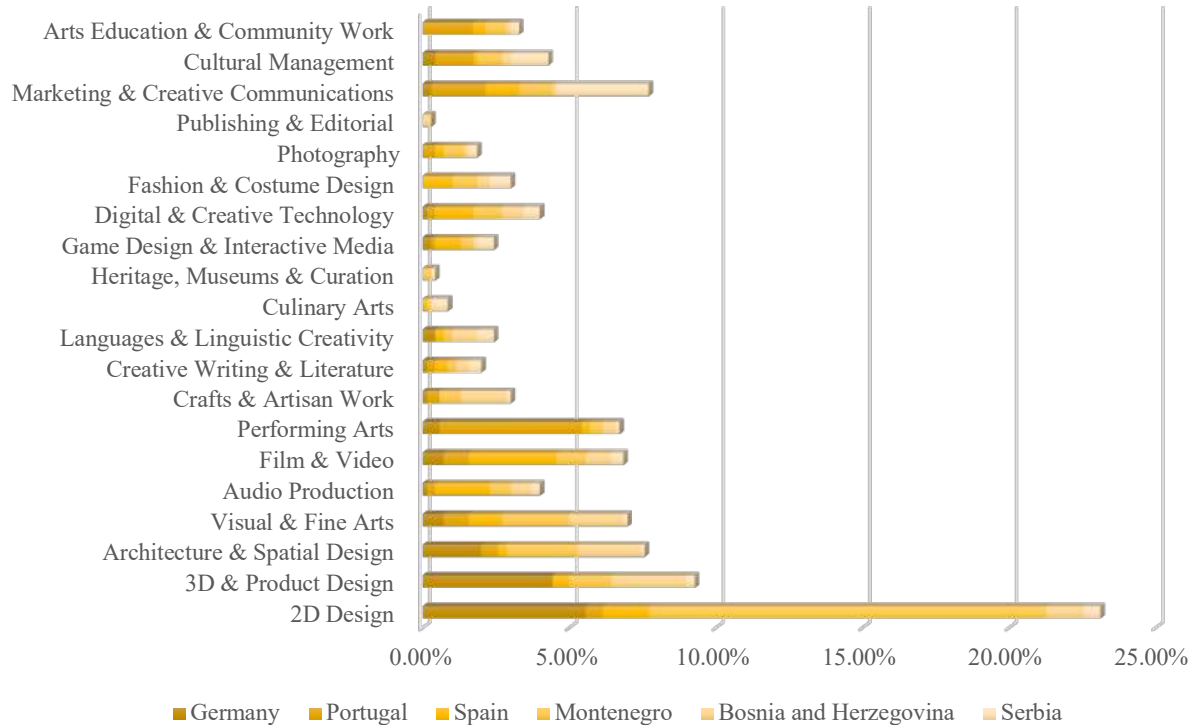
In **Spain**, the distribution is **more balanced across autonomous communities**, consistent with the country’s **strong regional governance model**. Respondents are distributed across **Andalucía and Cataluña (each 22.33%, 23 respondents)**, **Comunidad de Madrid (27.18%, 28)**, **Comunidad Valenciana (16.50%, 17)**, and **other regions (11.65%, 12)**. Focus group participants were **all based in Barcelona**, reflecting the city’s **central role as a hub for CCI engagement**, even within a more regionally balanced national sample.

In **Germany**, respondents were drawn from **both larger cities and surrounding areas**, including **Berlin, Hamburg, Köln, Leipzig, München, Stuttgart, and Dortmund**, highlighting **wide geographical diversity and decentralized engagement in CCI**.

Taken together, these **regional patterns illustrate how administrative structures, centralisation levels, and regional development disparities shape young people’s engagement with cultural and creative industries**. Countries with **strong central hubs (Montenegro, Serbia)** show clear dominance of their capitals and central regions, while **decentralised systems (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain)** and **geographically distributed countries (Portugal, Germany)** exhibit more balanced participation across multiple regions. The focus group locations confirm that both central and peripheral areas

contribute to qualitative insights, ensuring that regional diversity is considered in understanding young people’s pathways into CCI.

Career Path Subcategories in the Creative Industries Among Respondents from Six Countries



The career pathways of the **701 respondents** across Germany, Portugal, Spain, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia reveal a **highly diverse creative landscape** shaped by both global CCI trends and country-specific structural conditions. Participants were asked to select a single subcategory representing their current or intended professional trajectory within the cultural and creative industries (CCI). The results indicate that **digital design, audiovisual production, and marketing attract the strongest engagement** overall, while more niche fields—such as **culinary arts, linguistic creativity, and heritage-based careers—remain comparatively underrepresented**. Insights from focus groups across all countries further contextualise these patterns, highlighting how individual career choices are influenced by **local labour markets, educational opportunities, and the necessity of flexible, multi-skilled professional strategies**.

Across the full sample, the most represented field is **2D Design**, encompassing **graphic design, illustration, branding, UI/UX, and visual communication**, with **162 respondents (23.11%)**. This category is strongly dominated by **Montenegro, with 95 respondents (13.55% of the total dataset)**, positioning the country as a **regional hub for digital visual creativity**. Germany contributes **39 respondents (5.56%)**, while lower engagement is recorded in **Spain (11; 1.57%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (9; 1.28%), Portugal (4; 0.57%), and Serbia (4; 0.57%)**, likely reflecting differences in cohort size and creative-economic structures. These quantitative findings are reinforced by focus group data from Montenegro, where participants reported working in **graphic design, photography, illustration, painting, sculpture, conservation, and graphic arts**, demonstrating strong engagement in **both contemporary digital practices and traditional visual arts**.

The second most represented field is **3D and Product Design**, selected by **65 respondents (9.27%)**, with the largest concentrations in **Germany (31; 4.42%) and Bosnia and**

Herzegovina (18; 2.57%), followed by **Montenegro (10; 1.43%)**, and more modest participation in **Spain (4; 0.57%)** and **Serbia (2; 0.29%)**. Focus group discussions help explain this distribution, particularly in Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where participants described involvement in **3D design, junior development, and digital production roles**, often linked to **gaming, virtual environments, and applied design**. These qualitative insights underline the expansion of **technologically oriented design fields** in contexts with emerging or established digital industries.

Audiovisual and media-oriented fields collectively form a substantial cluster within the dataset. **Audio Production** accounts for **28 respondents (3.99%)**, with the strongest representation in **Spain (13; 1.85%)** and notable participation in **Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina (both 5; 0.71%)**. **Film and Video** is selected by **48 respondents (6.85%)**, with Spain again showing the highest concentration (**21; 3.00%**), reflecting a strong **audiovisual culture**. Focus group participants in Spain and Serbia reported working as **film directors, cinematographers, video editors, music producers, DJs, and multimedia artists**, illustrating how survey trends correspond with active engagement in contemporary audiovisual production and **cross-media creative work**.

Performing Arts account for **47 respondents (6.70%)**, with Portugal contributing a particularly high share (**34; 4.85%**), indicating sustained interest in **live and performance-based practices** despite the overall dominance of digital careers. This pattern aligns with focus group contributions from Portugal, where participants highlighted involvement in **performance, arts education, and community-based artistic work**. **Photography (13; 1.85%)** is more strongly represented in **Montenegro (5; 0.71%)** and **Portugal (3; 0.43%)**, likely influenced by **tourism, visual storytelling, and media-related opportunities** identified by focus group participants in both countries.

Heritage-based and other niche creative sectors remain marginal across the dataset, including **Heritage, Museums and Curation (3; 0.43%)**, **Creative Writing and Literature (14; 2.00%)**, **Culinary Arts (6; 0.86%)**, **Crafts and Artisan Work (21; 3.00%)**, and **Languages and Linguistic Creativity (17; 2.43%)**. Focus group discussions suggest that **limited institutional pathways, lower economic sustainability, and reduced visibility among young people** contribute to this underrepresentation, particularly in smaller or less formalised creative markets.

Digital transformation-oriented fields are increasingly visible, with **Digital and Creative Technology** accounting for **28 respondents (3.99%)**, primarily from **Spain (9; 1.28%)** and **Montenegro (7; 1.00%)**. **Game Design and Interactive Media (17; 2.43%)** shows strong participation in **Spain (6; 0.86%)** and **Serbia (4; 0.57%)**. These quantitative trends are reflected in focus group narratives from Germany and Serbia, where participants described engagement in **junior game development, animation, UX/UI design, and interactive media**, often alongside **freelance or entrepreneurial activities**.

Sectors related to **coordination, outreach, and education** also show meaningful engagement. **Marketing and Creative Communications** includes **54 respondents (7.70%)**, with the highest shares in **Serbia (22; 3.14%)** and **Portugal (13; 1.85%)**, while **Cultural Management (30; 4.28%)** is led by **Serbia (9; 1.28%)** and **Portugal (9; 1.28%)**. Focus group participants in these countries frequently reported roles such as **marketing managers, brand strategists, cultural managers, and project coordinators**, suggesting a growing interest in **organisational and policy-related careers** within CCI. **Arts Education and Community Work (23; 3.28%)** is most prominent in **Portugal (12; 1.71%)** and **Montenegro (5; 0.71%)**, reflecting strong engagement in **socially oriented and community-based creative practices** discussed in qualitative sessions.

Focus group data further illuminate how these quantitative distributions translate into **lived career trajectories**. In Serbia, participants reported roles spanning **art direction, music**

production, brand strategy, film direction, writing, game and fashion design, cinematography, playwriting, multimedia art, marketing management, DJing, animation, 3D art, and illustration. German participants described freelance and early-career work in illustration, graphic and motion design, digital art, social media content creation, video editing, music production, junior game development, UX/UI design, cultural management, and creative entrepreneurship. Montenegrin participants emphasised both classical and digital visual arts practices. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, focus group participants included designers, musicians, content creators, and junior developers who often combined multiple roles, reflecting flexible and hybrid career strategies shaped by fragmented labour markets and limited formal employment opportunities in the cultural and creative sectors.

Overall, the integrated analysis shows that while global CCI trends—particularly the dominance of digital visual design and technology-integrated creative roles—strongly influence youth engagement, national specificities related to heritage, education systems, digital infrastructure, and local creative economies play a decisive role in shaping career pathways. Montenegro emerges as a particularly active creative context with high engagement across multiple categories, Germany and Spain display diversified and technologically advanced profiles, Portugal shows notable strength in audiovisual production and arts education, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia reflect evolving creative ecosystems characterised by flexibility, hybridity, and cross-sectoral career strategies.

Across these diverse national contexts, encompassing countries, age, educational background, career pathways, gender, and regional distribution, the findings integrate quantitative trends from the survey with qualitative insights from focus groups, providing a nuanced view of young people's engagement with the cultural and creative industries (CCI). The analysis is structured around four overarching thematic areas, each highlighting critical dimensions of professional development and sectoral dynamics.

(1) **Professional Experience and Development Needs in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI)** examines young respondents' work histories, including early career exposure, practical skill acquisition, transitions from education to employment, income stability, current working conditions, and career intentions. This analysis identifies national-level patterns, sector maturity, and emerging skill gaps, which serve as a foundation for designing targeted training measures, capacity-building initiatives, and policy interventions that address the specific needs of each country's creative ecosystem.

(2) **Barriers and Drivers of Professional Growth** addresses both systemic and individual challenges, such as skills mismatches, limited market opportunities, discrimination, and structural constraints, while also highlighting key enablers including mentorship, collaboration, multicultural and interdisciplinary exposure, and responsiveness to market trends. This thematic area illuminates the factors that either hinder or facilitate young people's career trajectories within CCI, reflecting the diversity of professional realities across Europe.

(3) **Support Systems and Resources** analyses the availability, accessibility, and effectiveness of financial, educational, technical, social, and mentorship mechanisms that underpin professional development. It considers how these resources contribute to soft skills acquisition, intercultural competence, and sustained engagement in the sector, identifying

gaps where additional investment or infrastructure could enhance participation and long-term career sustainability.

(4) Preferences and Challenges in Non-Formal Learning explores young people's expectations regarding **flexible, accessible, and practice-oriented learning formats**, their **willingness to invest time and financial resources**, and the **barriers to participation in non-formal education** across different regional contexts. This area captures the importance of **adaptable learning pathways** that complement formal education, support emerging skill needs, and respond to the evolving demands of the creative industries.

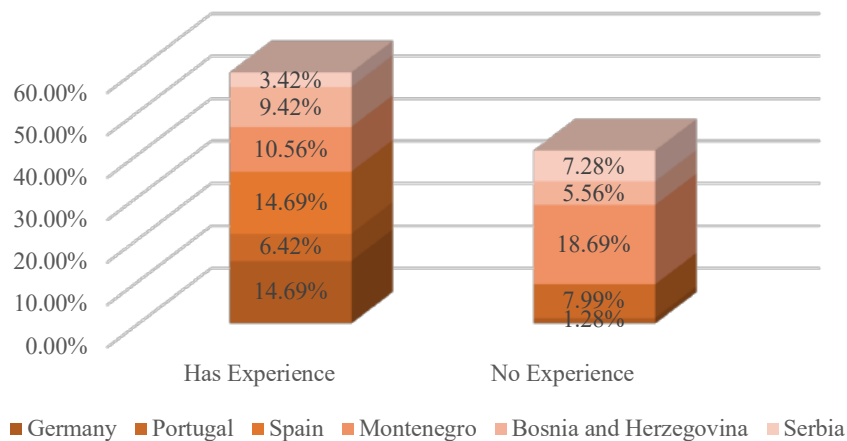
The combination of **cross-national survey data and focus group insights** provides a **comprehensive, multi-layered understanding** of how young people and youth workers perceive their realities within CCI. The findings illuminate not only **shared challenges across Europe**, such as entry barriers and skill gaps, but also **distinct national and regional dynamics**, shaped by **governance structures, socio-economic conditions, educational pathways, gender composition, regional distribution, and the varying maturity of CCI sectors** in each country. This integrated perspective underscores the importance of **tailored capacity building, specialized training, infrastructure development, and career guidance** that responds to the **unique contexts and needs of young creatives in each national and regional setting**.

5.1 Professional Experience and Development Needs in CCI

The survey, complemented by focus group discussions, examines the professional experiences and development needs of young people in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI), including both those with prior sector experience and those without. This approach provides a nuanced understanding of early career engagement, labor market entry, income patterns, and career intentions, while capturing the diversity of pathways into creative work, the precarity of employment, and the broader social, cultural, and professional roles of creative activities. The study also sheds light on practical skill acquisition and the readiness of young professionals to transition from education to employment within the sector.

Based on a dataset of 701 respondents across six countries, the analysis highlights variations in CCI work experience, duration of professional engagement, income levels, and sources of livelihood, while exploring career trajectories and aspirations of those new to the sector. Country-level patterns reveal structural differences, sector maturity, and opportunities for skill development, offering a comprehensive understanding of early engagement and identifying gaps to inform targeted training programs and policy interventions. The findings further show how young creatives use their work for social, cultural, educational, and professional purposes, illustrating intersections between identity, civic engagement, and career development. Overall, the study underscores the diversity and precarity of early creative careers and highlights the importance of structured pathways and targeted initiatives to support young professionals in the CCI.

Work Experience in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) Across Six Countries



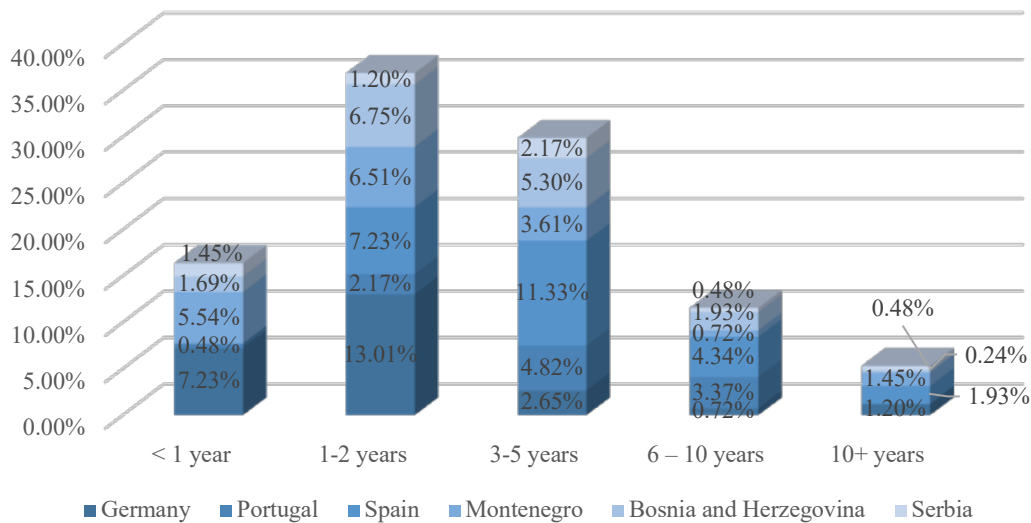
The dataset encompasses **701 respondents**, revealing that a majority—**415 participants (59.20%)**—reported **having CCI work experience**, while **286 participants (40.80%)** had **no prior experience**. This balance indicates that while many young people are actively engaging in the sector, a substantial portion remains on the periphery, highlighting potential gaps in access to early professional opportunities and work-based learning.

Country-level patterns show substantial variation. Germany leads with **103 experienced (14.69%)** versus **9 inexperienced (1.28%)**, reflecting a large and structured CCI sector. Portugal has **45 experienced (6.42%)** and **56 inexperienced (7.99%)**, suggesting uneven access. Spain reports **103 experienced (14.69%)**, with **focus group data** showing that out of **15 participants, 11 had CCI work experience** while **4 had none**, indicating a strong link between education and early career engagement. Montenegro shows **74 experienced (10.56%)** against **131 inexperienced (18.69%)**, and the **focus group** illustrates a mixed profile: some participants had CCI experience through teaching assistant roles, practical work, freelance projects, and occasional honoraria, while others had **no prior CCI experience** and were unemployed, highlighting a sizeable cohort still seeking initial exposure. Bosnia and Herzegovina has **66 experienced (9.42%)** and **39 inexperienced (5.56%)**, reflecting growing but uneven professional engagement, whereas Serbia presents limited participation with **24 experienced (3.42%)** versus **51 inexperienced (7.28%)**, indicating structural barriers or smaller local market opportunities.

The **focus group findings** add nuance to these figures. In Spain, the majority of participants had **CCI work experience**, confirming high sector engagement even among young adults still completing studies. In Montenegro, employment and sector experience were more varied: participants included those with **CCI experience** in teaching support, occasional freelance assignments, and honoraria-based projects, as well as participants with **no prior CCI experience**, reflecting both the flexible nature of early CCI work and persistent entry barriers for youth.

These findings reveal that early professional experience is both a significant indicator of sector readiness and a marker of disparities across national contexts. Countries with larger and more diversified CCI sectors, such as Germany and Spain, offer more opportunities for early engagement, whereas smaller or emerging markets, such as Montenegro and Serbia, display higher proportions of youth **without work experience in CCI**, highlighting the need for targeted programs to facilitate access to initial employment and work-based learning opportunities.

Distribution of CCI Work Experience Duration Among Respondents Across Six Countries



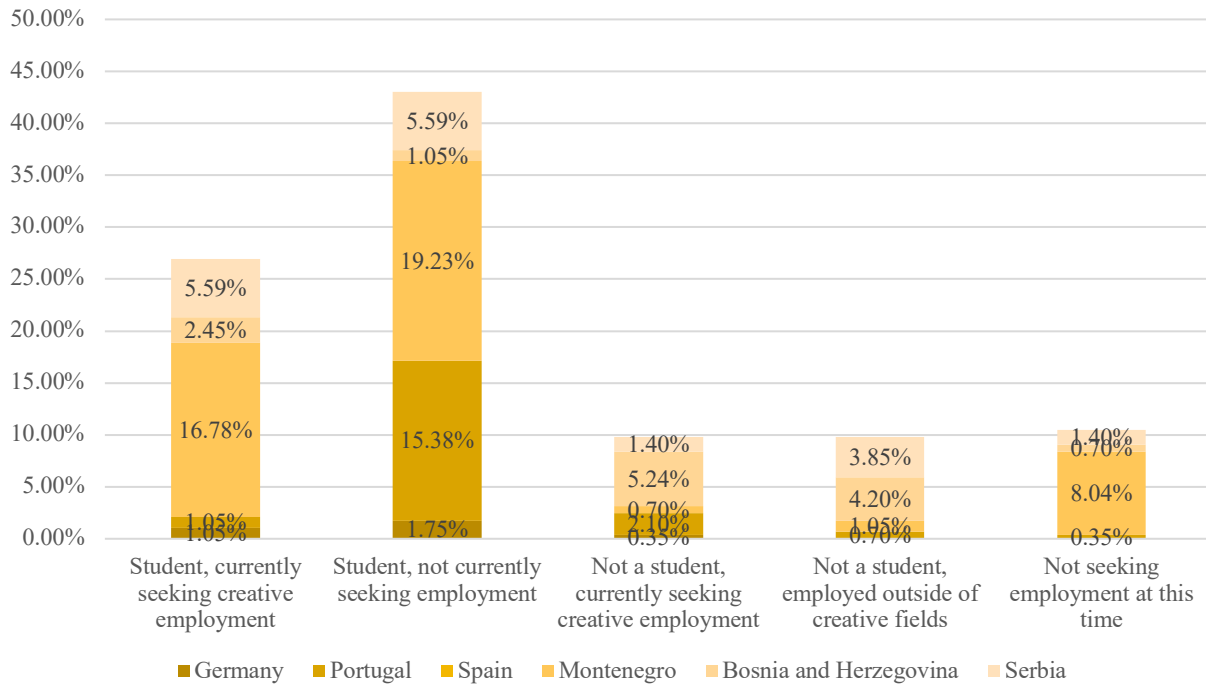
Among the **415 respondents reporting prior work experience in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI)**, the survey explored the duration of their professional engagement. Understanding the length of experience provides insight into early career trajectories, skill accumulation, and sector maturity across different national contexts.

Across all countries, the majority of experienced respondents are in the early stages of their careers: **68 participants (16.39%)** have less than 1 year of experience, while **153 (36.87%)** report 1–2 years. A substantial portion, **124 respondents (29.88%)**, have accumulated 3–5 years of experience, indicating progressive engagement and skill consolidation. Longer-term experience is less common: **48 participants (11.57%)** report 6–10 years, and only **22 respondents (5.30%)** have more than 10 years in the sector.

Country-level patterns reveal distinct engagement dynamics. In Germany, early career stages dominate, with **30 respondents (7.23%)** under 1 year and **54 (13.01%)** with 1–2 years, while only a small number have over 6 years of experience. Portugal shows a relatively balanced spread, with **20 participants (4.82%)** having 3–5 years and **14 (3.37%)** reporting 6–10 years, reflecting opportunities for skill development within a competitive market. Spain exhibits a strong mid-level experience profile, with **30 respondents (7.23%)** at 1–2 years and **47 (11.33%)** at 3–5 years, while longer-term experience is limited. Montenegro displays a similar trend to Germany, with most respondents having less than 2 years of experience (**23; 5.54%** and **27; 6.51%**), highlighting the prevalence of early career engagement. Bosnia and Herzegovina shows moderate experience across early to mid-career stages, with **28 respondents (6.75%)** reporting 1–2 years and **22 (5.30%)** 3–5 years, while Serbia has a smaller cohort with concentrated short-term experience, mostly under 3 years.

These results indicate that while many young creatives gain initial exposure to CCI roles, the majority remain in the early phases of their professional development. Countries with more established sectors, such as Germany and Spain, support progressive skill accumulation, whereas emerging markets like Montenegro and Serbia see a higher concentration of youth at the very start of their careers. Overall, this highlights both the potential for growth in CCI employment and the need for structured pathways to support sustained career development.

Current Employment and Education Status of Respondents Without Work Experience in CCI Sector Across Six Countries



Among respondents **without prior work experience**, **students constitute the largest segment**, reflecting the early career stage of this group. Specifically, **77 participants (26.92%)** are **students actively seeking creative employment**, while a larger portion of **123 respondents (43.01%)** are **students not currently seeking employment**. Non-students seeking creative work or employed outside the creative sector each account for **28 respondents (9.79%)**, and **30 participants (10.49%)** are **not seeking employment at all**. These totals indicate that early-career engagement in the CCI is strongly associated with **student status**, suggesting that higher education institutions remain a primary entry point for exposure to creative careers. At the same time, the sizable share of respondents **not actively seeking work** (approximately one in ten) highlights potential gaps in motivation, access, or opportunities for young people **without prior sector experience**.

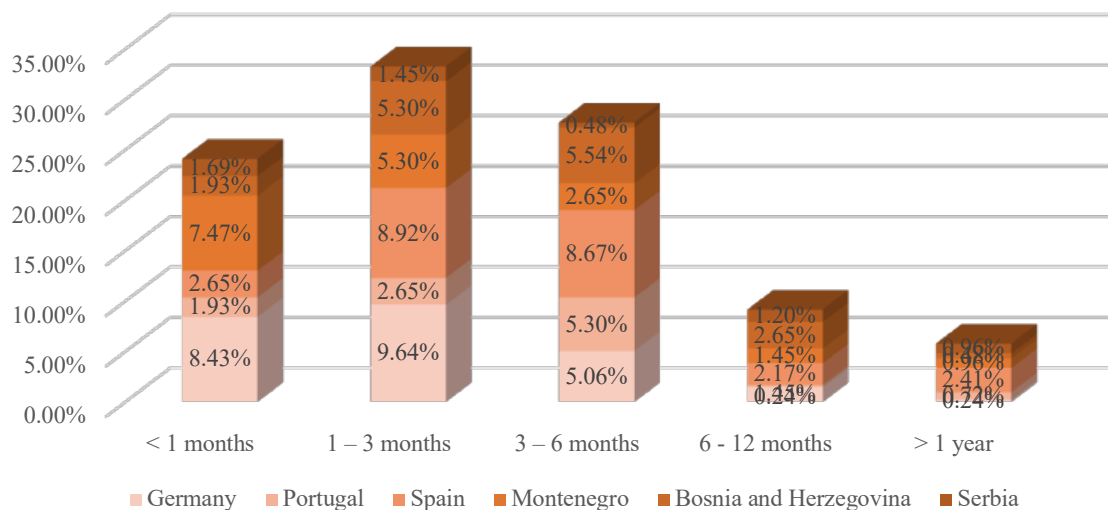
In Germany, a small group of respondents is represented: **3 participants (1.05%)** are **students actively seeking creative employment**, **5 (1.75%)** are **students not currently seeking employment**, and **1 (0.35%)** is a **non-student seeking creative roles**, resulting in a total of **9 participants** in other or unspecified categories. Portugal demonstrates a concentration of students, with **3 respondents (1.05%)** seeking creative employment and a significant majority of **44 (15.38%)** not currently seeking work. Among non-students, **6 (2.10%)** are seeking creative employment, **2 (0.70%)** are employed outside the creative sector, and **1 (0.35%)** is in other categories, totaling **56 participants**. Spain reports **no respondents without work experience** in this dataset, likely indicating that all participants in Spain had prior CCI experience.

Montenegro has the largest cohort of non-experienced respondents. Here, **48 participants (16.78%)** are **students seeking creative employment**, **55 (19.23%)** are **students not seeking work**, **2 (0.70%)** are **non-students seeking creative roles**, **3 (1.05%)** are **non-students employed outside creative fields**, and **23 (8.04%)** are **not seeking employment**, reflecting both strong **student representation** and a notable portion of young people **not actively engaged in the labor market**. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, **7 participants (2.45%)** are

students seeking creative employment, 3 (1.05%) are students not seeking work, 15 (5.24%) are non-students seeking creative roles, 12 (4.20%) are non-students employed outside the creative sector, and 2 (0.70%) are not seeking employment, showing a more balanced distribution between students and non-students. Serbia exhibits a mix of students and non-students: 16 participants (5.59%) are students seeking creative employment, another 16 (5.59%) are students not seeking work, 4 (1.40%) are non-students seeking creative roles, 11 (3.85%) are non-students employed outside creative fields, and 4 (1.40%) are not seeking employment at this time.

Across the total sample and individual countries, the data indicate that **students dominate the population without prior work experience in CCI**, emphasizing the role of education as a preparatory stage for future employment. However, there is a consistent minority of **non-students not currently engaged in creative work**, either seeking employment elsewhere or not seeking work at all, pointing to potential barriers to entry such as limited internships, lack of guidance, or insufficient early career support. The variation across countries suggests that structural differences—such as labor market size, availability of internships, and educational integration—significantly shape **early-career engagement in the creative sector**.

Time to First Employment in CCI Among Experienced Respondents Across Six Countries



For respondents with **prior work experience in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI)**, the survey examined the **approximate time it took to secure their first job or project after actively seeking it**. This metric provides insight into **labor market entry**, the efficiency of professional networks, and the **accessibility of early career opportunities** across different national contexts.

Across all countries, a majority of participants **secured initial employment relatively quickly**. Of the **415 experienced respondents**, **100 individuals (24.10%)** attained work **within less than 1 month**, and **138 (33.25%)** within **1–3 months**. An additional **115 respondents (27.71%)** reported a **waiting period of 3–6 months**, while fewer participants experienced longer entry times: **38 (9.16%)** required **6–12 months**, and **24 (5.78%)** took **more than a year** to begin their first CCI role.

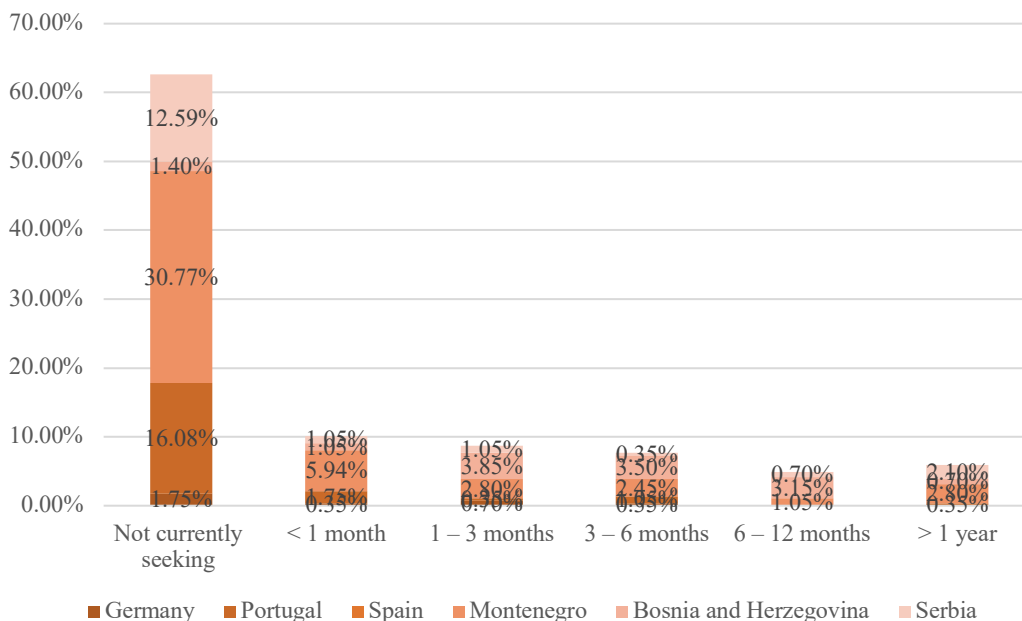
Country-level patterns reveal varied entry dynamics. In Germany, early entry dominates: **35 respondents (8.43%)** found work **in under a month**, **40 (9.64%)** within **1–3 months**, and only **7 participants** waited **over 6 months**, reflecting **efficient placement mechanisms** and

robust sector infrastructure. Portugal shows a balanced distribution, with the majority entering **within 3–6 months (22; 5.30%)**, while a small portion waited **over a year (3; 0.72%)**, suggesting **moderate competition and limited scale of opportunities**. Spain demonstrates relatively rapid entry as well, with **11 (2.65%)** under **1 month** and **37 (8.92%)** within **1–3 months**, though a notable segment (**10; 2.41%**) took **more than a year**, indicating variability in the **freelance and project-based labor market**.

Montenegro’s respondents primarily gained first experience **within a month (31; 7.47%)** or **1–3 months (22; 5.30%)**, though a few experienced delays **over a year (4; 0.96%)**, reflecting **early career engagement amidst emerging CCI structures**. Bosnia and Herzegovina shows a spread across early months and mid-term entry: **8 respondents (1.93%)** under **1 month**, **22 (5.30%)** within **1–3 months**, and **23 (5.54%)** within **3–6 months**, with only **2 participants exceeding one year**. Serbia presents the **slowest entry overall relative to cohort size**, with only **7 (1.69%)** finding work **in less than a month** and **4 (0.96%)** waiting **over a year**, highlighting **structural or market limitations** for young creatives.

These results highlight that while many young creatives **gain early employment within months of starting their search**, **national contexts significantly influence the speed of labor market entry**. More developed or structured CCI markets, such as **Germany and Spain**, enable **faster access**, whereas smaller or emerging sectors, including **Montenegro and Serbia**, show **longer transition periods for initial professional engagement**.

Duration of Job Search Among Respondents Without CCI Work Experience Across Six Countries



Among respondents **without previous work experience in the creative sector**, the data reveal clear differences across countries regarding the **duration of job-seeking efforts**. Overall, a **large majority—179 individuals (62.59%)—reported that they are not currently seeking employment or projects in the creative field**. This group is most strongly represented in **Montenegro (88 respondents; 30.77%)**, followed by **Portugal (46; 16.08%)** and **Serbia (36; 12.59%)**, while **Germany shows a smaller share (5; 1.75%)**, **Bosnia and Herzegovina even less (4; 1.40%)**, and **Spain had no respondents in this category**.

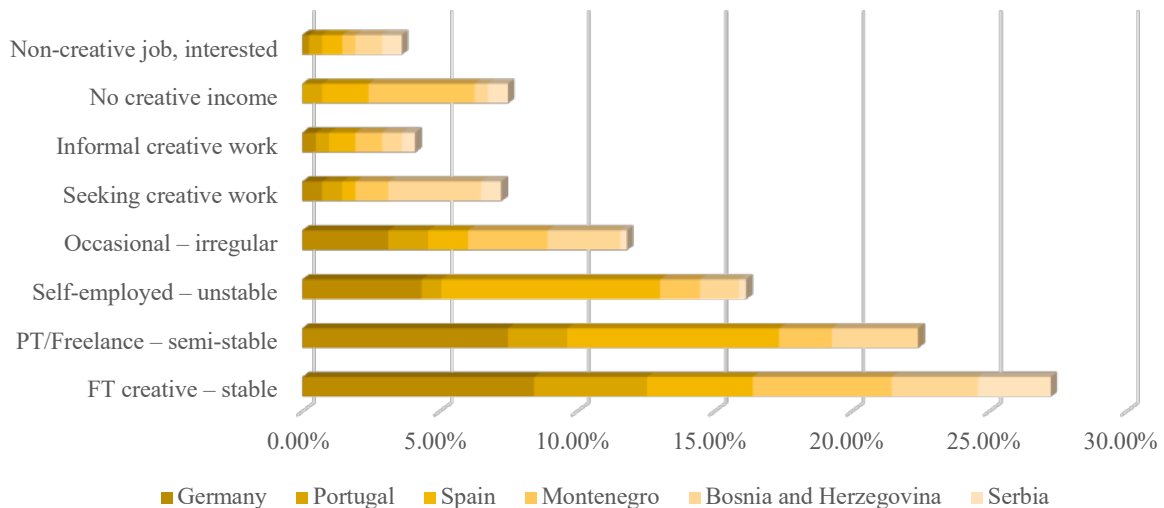
Among those who are seeking opportunities, **29 respondents (10.14%) have been searching for less than one month**, with **Montenegro again accounting for the highest**

number (17; 5.94%), followed by Portugal (5; 1.75%), Germany (1; 0.35%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (3; 1.05%), and Serbia (3; 1.05%). Another 25 respondents (8.74%) reported searching for 1–3 months, led by Bosnia and Herzegovina (11; 3.85%) and Montenegro (8; 2.80%), with smaller contributions from Germany (2; 0.70%), Portugal (1; 0.35%), and Serbia (3; 1.05%).

Longer search intervals show continued engagement. A total of 22 respondents (7.69%) have been seeking opportunities for 3–6 months, primarily in Bosnia and Herzegovina (10; 3.50%) and Montenegro (7; 2.45%), with smaller shares in Germany (1; 0.35%), Portugal (3; 1.05%), and Serbia (1; 0.35%). Another 14 respondents (4.90%) have been searching for 6–12 months, coming mostly from Bosnia and Herzegovina (9; 3.15%), Montenegro (3; 1.05%), and Serbia (2; 0.70%). The longest period—more than one year—includes 17 respondents (5.94%), largely concentrated in Montenegro (8; 2.80%), Serbia (6; 2.10%), and smaller numbers in Portugal (1; 0.35%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (2; 0.70%).

Overall, the data show that the majority of inexperienced respondents are currently not pursuing creative job opportunities, while those who are searching exhibit a wide spectrum of search durations. Montenegro consistently stands out with the highest engagement across almost all search-duration categories, while Bosnia and Herzegovina shows particularly strong representation among those with mid- to long-term search efforts.

Current Work and Income Status in the Creative Sector Across Six Countries



Abbreviations used in the Graph:

- FT creative – stable** = Full-time employed in a creative role with stable income;
- PT/Freelance – semi-stable** = Part-time or freelance creative work with somewhat stable income;
- Self-employed – unstable** = Freelance/self-employed creative work with unstable income;
- Occasional – irregular** = Occasional/project-based creative work with low or irregular income;
- Seeking creative work** = Actively looking for employment in the creative sector;
- Informal creative** = Working informally in creative jobs (no contract/registration);
- No creative income** = Currently not earning from creative work;
- Non-creative job – interested** = Employed in a non-creative job but interested in creative opportunities.

Following the analysis of how long it took respondents to secure their first employment or freelance project in the creative sector, the data on their current work and income situation provides a detailed picture of the diversity—and often precarity—of career trajectories across the six countries. Among respondents with prior experience in the sector (N=415), the most stable form of engagement—full-time employment in a creative role with stable

income—is most prevalent in Germany, where 35 respondents (8.43%) report this status. Portugal and Spain follow with 17 (4.10%) and 16 (3.86%), while Montenegro (21; 5.06%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (13; 3.13%) show moderate levels. Serbia records 11 respondents (2.65%), indicating comparatively fewer stable opportunities. A significant share of participants work **part-time or freelance with somewhat stable income**, including 31 in Germany (7.47%) and 32 in Spain (7.71%), while Serbia reports none. Income stability becomes more uncertain in the next segment: **freelancers or self-employed individuals with unstable income** reach 33 in Spain (7.95%) and 18 in Germany (4.34%). Occasional or project-based creative work, typically associated with **low or irregular income**, is also widespread, highlighting that many remain active but cannot secure consistent engagement. Informal work without contracts appears in every country, and a notable portion of experienced respondents **currently earn no income from creative work**, indicating a risk of exiting the sector despite prior experience. A smaller but important segment works in **non-creative jobs while remaining interested in creative opportunities**. Overall, Germany and Spain show the **strongest concentration of stable or semi-stable creative engagement**, while Western Balkan countries exhibit higher shares of irregular, informal, or non-creative employment, reinforcing that securing **long-term, sustainable creative careers remains a major challenge**.

Focus group analysis confirms that **economic precarity is a constant challenge** for young creatives across all countries. In **Montenegro**, for example, of 15 participants, 4 are currently unemployed, while the remainder engage in freelance, project-based, or academic work, meaning over **66% lack stable employment**. Despite their activity, participants emphasize that **“there is no system connecting young creatives to the market or providing continuous support after graduation”**, and that professional advancement frequently relies on **personal contacts, volunteer work, and non-profit projects**. Economic instability and limited opportunities to commercially capitalize on creative work remain persistent obstacles. Many report facing **low pay, unregulated contracts, and uncertainty regarding project engagement**, creating a sense of **professional insecurity**. One participant noted: **“Graphic designers are less designers and more managers, communicators, and marketers.”**. Another highlighted: **“We are our own managers, which requires additional skills.”**. These reflections underscore how **organizational and communication competencies** become central to self-managed career development, linking closely to the concept of **self-directed learning and entrepreneurial action** (European Commission, 2020).

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, focus group participants described similarly precarious conditions, with young creatives combining roles as designers, musicians, content creators, and junior developers, often juggling multiple forms of work. Creativity was central to their sense of self, but rarely sufficient as a sole source of income. Discussions highlighted unstable income, delayed payments, unpaid projects framed as “opportunities”, and expectations that participation itself should be seen as a privilege. Participants emphasized that early-career creatives are often encouraged to accept informal arrangements, which later complicates negotiating fair conditions. Additional challenges were reported by those from smaller towns, with migration backgrounds, or returnee experiences, including subtle biases related to names, accents, networks, or perceived origin. A recurring theme was the **absence of clear career pathways**, with no institutional guidance or mentorship; career progression was described as “guesswork”, driven by trial and error, personal sacrifice, and emotional resilience.

In **Germany**, a focus group of 15 young creatives highlighted similar challenges, particularly the tension between passion and precarity, which several participants described as the **“passion trap”**. Creativity is central to their identity and well-being, yet attempting to earn a living from it exposes them to **unstable income, irregular work, and constant uncertainty**. Freelance arrangements often alternate between months of relative financial stability and months of

almost no paid work. Unpaid **“opportunities”** and requests to work **“for the portfolio”** are common, generating frustration as participants see their passion leveraged against them. For some, particularly those with migration backgrounds, subtle biases related to name, accent, or perceived origin further affect how they are perceived as professionals, producing **anxiety about the future, feelings of not being “good enough,” and constant pressure to prove themselves.**

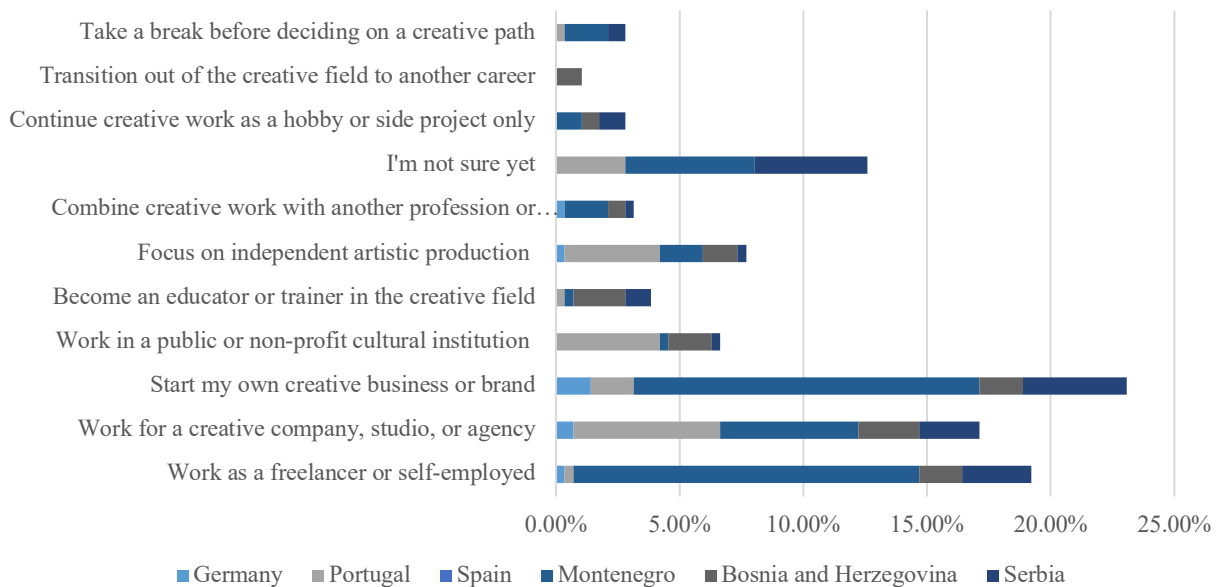
In **Serbia**, young creatives encounter numerous structural barriers, including the **oversupply of professionals, low pay, lack of state support, and expensive materials**, which make it difficult to sustain a living solely from creative work. The absence of **stable work opportunities and internships**, combined with limited funding for projects, forces many to rely on side jobs or short-term engagements. Participants consistently describe the environment as **highly unstable**, where professional viability often depends on accessing scarce opportunities, outsourcing, or moving abroad.

In **Spain**, economic precarity is intensified outside major creative hubs. Young creatives reported that **“Visibility depends on constant output, but stability is never guaranteed,”** and **“If you are not in Madrid or Barcelona, it’s much harder. Outside the big cities you have to either move or go digital.”** Freelancers face additional pressures: **“As freelancers we’re our own managers – no one tells you what to do, so you need structure to finish things.”**

In **Portugal**, arts graduates face limited pathways into the labor market, as degrees in arts-related fields **do not report employability rates or include internships facilitating transition into professional work.** Participants reported: **“Art schools don’t connect us with real work; there are no partnerships or internships. When you finish, you’re just on your own.”** Another added: **“There’s not even data about how many of us work — it’s like our jobs don’t count.”** Young creatives highlighted limited job offers, unpaid opportunities, and a culture of informality, often compounded by perceptions of pre-decided outcomes: **“There are open calls, but everyone knows who will be selected.”** Economic precarity and low or irregular income were recurring concerns: **“You can survive alone, but not if you want a family. Stability isn’t realistic for most of us.”**

Taken together, survey and focus group data provide a **comprehensive picture of the creative sector:** while initial access may be relatively quick, **sustained, stable, and remunerative creative careers remain elusive**, particularly in Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. Across all countries, young creatives frequently **combine multiple roles, self-manage projects, and rely on personal networks** to maintain professional engagement, highlighting the need for **systemic support, market connections, and pathways that facilitate long-term career sustainability.**

Career Aspirations of Responders without Work Experience Across Six Countries



Among the **286 respondents** who reported **no prior work experience** in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI), the survey explored career aspirations within the creative field, revealing diverse intentions and preferences across the six countries.

Across all respondents, the most common aspirations are to **start their own creative business or brand (66; 23.08%)**, **work as a freelancer or self-employed (55; 19.23%)**, and **work for a creative company, studio, or agency (49; 17.13%)**. Other notable pathways include **pursuing a public or non-profit cultural institution (19; 6.64%)**, **focusing on independent artistic production such as exhibiting, performing, or publishing (22; 7.69%)**, and **combining creative work with another profession or income source (9; 3.15%)**. Smaller shares include those **undecided (36; 12.59%)**, aiming to **become an educator or trainer in the creative field (11; 3.85%)**, planning to **continue creative work as a hobby (8; 2.80%)**, intending to **transition out of the creative field (3; 1.05%)**, or **taking a break before deciding (8; 2.80%)**.

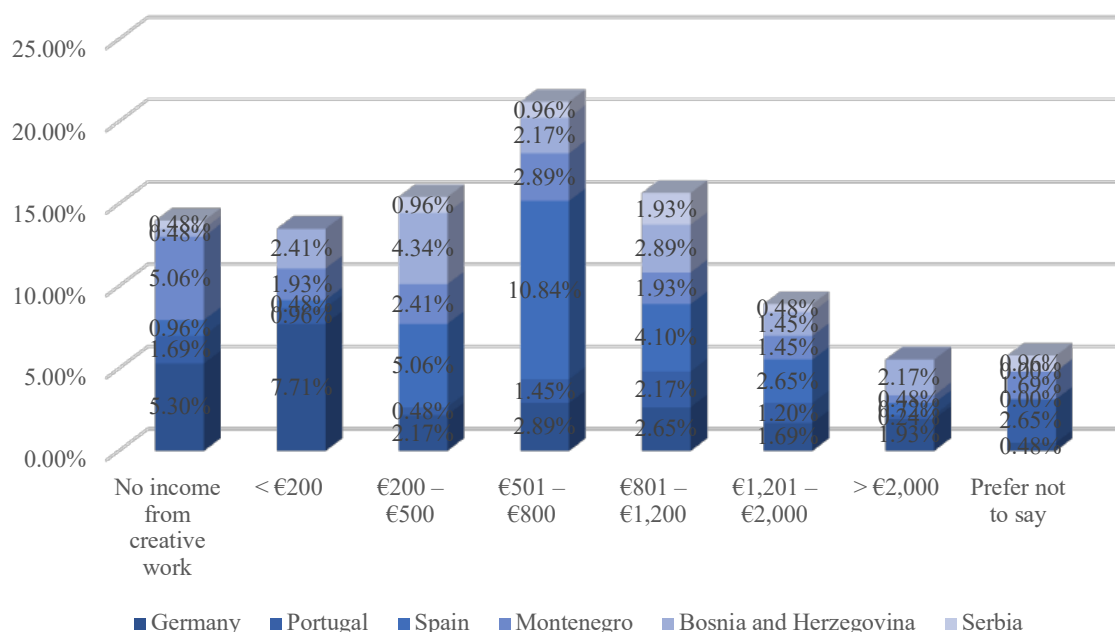
Country-level patterns reveal notable variation in career aspirations among respondents without prior work experience. In **Germany**, aspirations are relatively low, with **1 respondent (0.35%)** aiming for freelance work, **2 (0.70%)** targeting creative company employment, **4 (1.40%)** planning their own business, and small numbers pursuing education or independent artistic production. **Portugal** shows stronger interest in **creative company roles (17; 5.94%)** and **independent artistic production (11; 3.85%)**, alongside some aiming for **freelance work (1; 0.35%)**, **starting a business (5; 1.75%)**, or contributing to **public/non-profit institutions (12; 4.20%)**, with a few **undecided (8; 2.80%)** or **taking a break before deciding (1; 0.35%)**. **Spain** has no respondents without work experience reporting aspirations in this dataset.

Montenegro, the largest cohort, displays strong **freelance ambitions (40; 13.99%)**, **interest in creative company roles (16; 5.59%)**, an emphasis on **starting a business (40; 13.99%)**, and **independent artistic work (5; 1.75%)**, with smaller shares combining work with other income sources (**5; 1.75%**) or pursuing **education/training roles (1; 0.35%)**. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, aspirations are more evenly distributed, including **freelance work (5; 1.75%)**, **creative company employment (7; 2.45%)**, **business ownership (5; 1.75%)**, **public/non-profit roles (5; 1.75%)**, **independent artistic production (4; 1.40%)**, and

scholarships/education (6; 2.10%). Serbia shows moderate **freelance ambitions** (8; 2.80%) and **creative company employment** (7; 2.45%), with smaller numbers aiming to **start a business** (12; 4.20%), **combine creative work with another profession** (1; 0.35%), or **focus on independent artistic production** (1; 0.35%), while a few plan to **continue as a hobby** or **take a break before deciding**.

These findings illustrate that while many young people without prior CCI work experience aspire to **professional creative careers**, the pathways they envisage are highly varied, with strong interest in both **freelance and formal employment**, alongside **independent artistic production** and **entrepreneurial ventures**. The data also highlights **substantial cross-national differences** in ambitions and the **perceived viability of different career paths** in the creative sector.

Average Monthly Income from Creative Work Among Respondents with Work Experience Across Six Countries



Building on the analysis of employment pathways and current work conditions, the survey also assessed the **estimated average monthly income** of respondents with **previous work experience** in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI), providing direct insight into the **economic sustainability of creative careers** across the six countries. The findings reveal substantial **precarity and fragmented income structures**, with pronounced **cross-country variation**.

Among all **415 respondents** with experience, income levels remain overwhelmingly low. **58 individuals (13.98%)** report **no income** from creative work, while another **56 (13.49%)** earn **less than €200**, **64 (15.42%)** earn **between €200 and €500**, and **88 (21.20%)** earn **€501–€800**, indicating that **more than a quarter of the experienced cohort** receives **no financial return** from the sector at all. Among those who do earn, incomes cluster primarily in the **lower bands**, especially below €500, with only a modest share reaching higher ranges such as **€801–€1,200 (65; 15.66%)**, **€1,201–€2,000 (37; 8.92%)**, or **above €2,000 (23; 5.54%)**.

Country-level patterns highlight structural differences within national creative economies. In **Germany**, the income distribution is somewhat more balanced but still includes **22 respondents (5.30%)** who earn nothing. Moderate clusters appear in the **€501–€800 (12;**

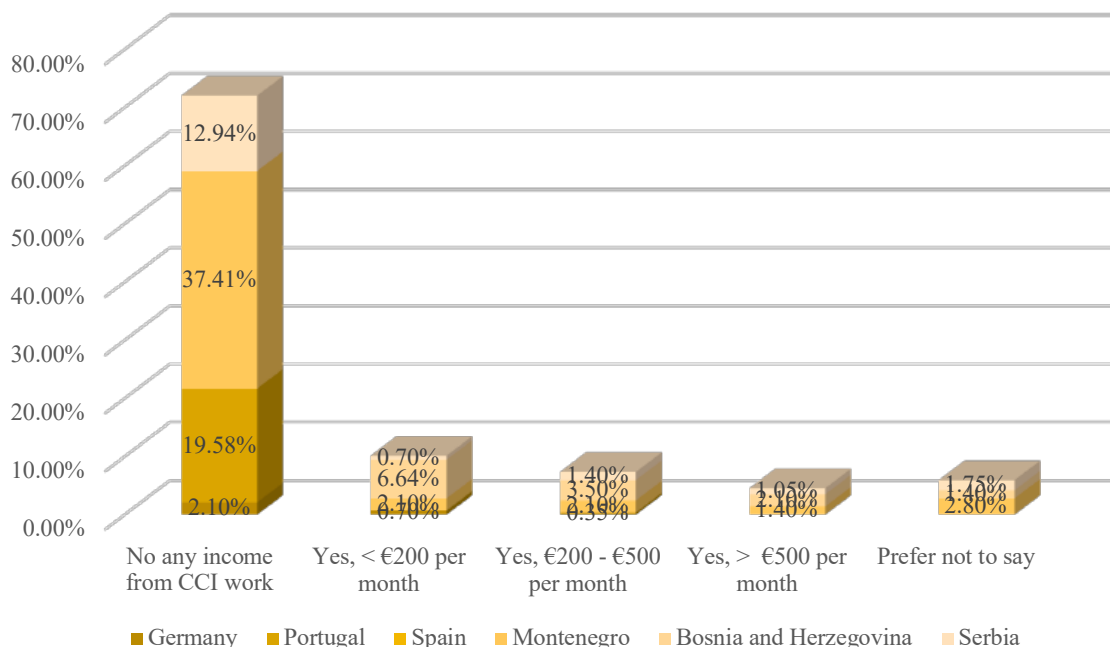
2.89%) and €801–€1,200 (11; 2.65%) ranges, while 8 respondents earn more than €2,000, suggesting more favorable market conditions for higher-earning freelancers or specialised creative professionals.

Portugal shows greater polarization: only a few participants report incomes above €800, 7 respondents (1.69%) earn nothing, and 11 (2.65%) prefer not to disclose their earnings, with a modest grouping in the €501–€800 range (6; 1.45%). Spain reveals one of the strongest concentrations of medium income, with 21 respondents (5.06%) earning €200–€500 and 45 (10.84%) in the €501–€800 range, while very few achieve higher income levels, and none chose the “prefer not to say” option.

In Montenegro, precarity is most visible: 21 respondents (5.06%) earn nothing, the majority remain below €500, and only 2 participants (0.48%) earn above €2,000, reflecting limited monetisation channels and broader labour market constraints. Bosnia and Herzegovina similarly shows substantial low-income clustering, especially in the €201–€500 category (18; 4.34%), while only small numbers reach €1,201–€2,000 (6; 1.45%) or more than €2,000 (9; 2.17%). Serbia demonstrates limited earning potential, with 2 participants (0.48%) earning nothing, most income falling in the €801–€1,200 band (8; 1.93%), only 2 respondents (0.48%) in €1,201–€2,000, and 4 declining to answer.

Overall, the combined data confirm that creative-sector income remains unstable and largely insufficient, even for those with prior experience. Low earnings below €500 make up a substantial share of the sample, while relatively few respondents earn more than €1,200 per month. These results point to a systemic income gap across all six countries and underline the need for stronger institutional support, improved wage standards, expanded funding opportunities, and more robust professionalisation pathways to ensure that young creatives can sustain viable careers within the CCI.

Income Status Among Respondents Without Creative Work Experience Across Six Countries



Among respondents without prior working experience in the creative field, earnings from creative or related activities remain limited. Out of 286 respondents, the vast majority—206 individuals (72.03%)—reported that they do not receive any income from creative work.

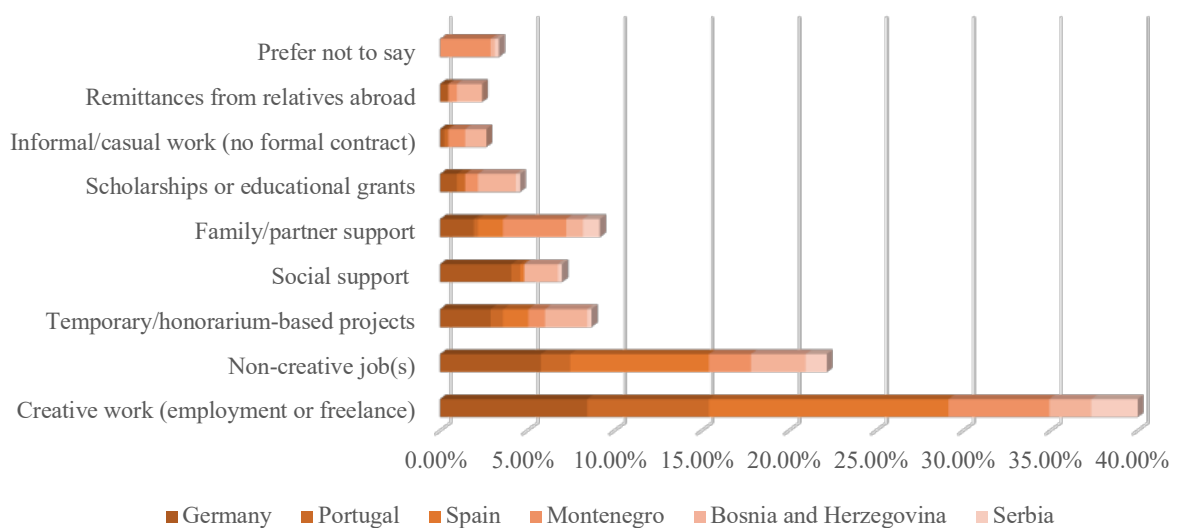
This trend is strongest in **Montenegro (107; 37.41%)**, followed by **Portugal (56; 19.58%)**, **Serbia (37; 12.94%)**, and **Germany (6; 2.10%)**, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and Spain recorded no respondents in this category.

A smaller segment earns minimal income from creative activities. **29 respondents (10.14%)** earn **less than €200 per month**, with Bosnia and Herzegovina showing the highest number (19; 6.64%), followed by Montenegro (6; 2.10%), Germany (2; 0.70%), and Serbia (2; 0.70%). Moderate earnings between **€200 and €500 per month** were reported by **21 respondents (7.34%)**, concentrated in Bosnia and Herzegovina (10; 3.50%), Montenegro (6; 2.10%), and Serbia (4; 1.40%), with Germany contributing one respondent (0.35%).

Higher earnings are less common. **13 respondents (4.55%)** earn **more than €500 per month**, primarily from Montenegro (4; 1.40%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (6; 2.10%), and Serbia (3; 1.05%). Additionally, **17 respondents (5.94%)** chose the **“prefer not to say”** option, with Montenegro again showing the highest share (8; 2.80%), followed by Serbia (5; 1.75%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (4; 1.40%).

Overall, the data clearly show that most individuals without working experience remain outside income-generating creative activities, with only a small proportion earning modest amounts. Montenegro consistently records the highest numbers across categories, Portugal and Serbia follow with moderate participation, Bosnia and Herzegovina shows significant activity in the lower earning brackets, Germany remains minimally represented, and Spain reports no respondents in this segment.

Main Source of Income Among Respondents with Work Experience Across Six Countries



Among respondents with **work experience** in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI), the survey explored their **main source of overall income**, revealing a mix of **creative and non-creative revenue streams** that illustrate the **economic diversification** and **precarity** facing young creatives. Out of **415 participants**, **166 individuals (40.00%)** rely primarily on **creative work**—either employment or freelance—as their main source of income, while an additional **92 respondents (22.17%)** derive income from **non-creative jobs**, highlighting the common necessity to combine creative engagement with other forms of employment. **Temporary or honorarium-based projects** account for **36 participants (8.67%)**, indicating that short-term engagements remain an important, though unstable, income channel. **Social support**

mechanisms, including unemployment benefits, welfare, or disability allowances, sustain **29 respondents (6.99%)**, and **38 participants (9.16%)** rely on **family or partner support**, further demonstrating the fragility of financial independence in early creative careers. Smaller numbers report income from **scholarships or educational grants (19; 4.58%)**, **informal or casual work without formal contracts (11; 2.65%)**, or **remittances from relatives abroad (10; 2.41%)**, while **14 respondents (3.37%)** preferred **not to disclose** their main source of income.

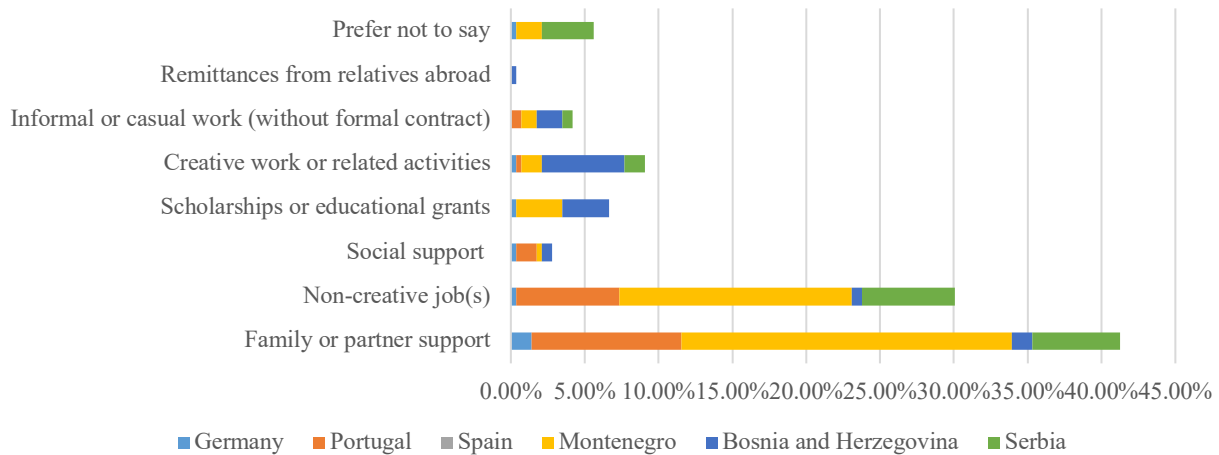
Country-level patterns show notable variation in income sources among respondents with work experience. In **Germany**, **35 participants (8.43%)** rely on creative work, **24 (5.78%)** on non-creative jobs, **12 (2.89%)** on temporary projects, and **17 (4.10%)** on social support, with smaller shares supported by family/partners (**8; 1.93%**), scholarships (**4; 0.96%**), informal work (**1; 0.24%**), or remittances (**2; 0.48%**). In **Portugal**, creative work sustains **29 respondents (6.99%)**, non-creative jobs **7 (1.69%)**, temporary projects **3 (0.72%)**, social support **2 (0.48%)**, family/partners **1 (0.24%)**, scholarships **2 (0.48%)**, and informal work **1 (0.24%)**, with **none** reporting remittances or preferring not to say.

Spain shows a stronger concentration in creative work (**57; 13.73%**), with **33 (7.95%)** in non-creative employment, **6 (1.45%)** on temporary projects, **1 (0.24%)** on social support, and **6 (1.45%)** relying on family/partners. In **Montenegro**, **24 respondents (5.78%)** depend on creative work, **10 (2.41%)** on non-creative jobs, **4 (0.96%)** on temporary projects, none on social support, while family/partner support (**15; 3.61%**) and remittances (**2; 0.48%**) play a larger role, supplemented by scholarships (**3; 0.72%**), informal work (**4; 0.96%**), and **12 (2.89%)** preferring not to say.

Bosnia and Herzegovina presents a spread across **creative work (10; 2.41%)**, **non-creative jobs (13; 3.13%)**, **temporary projects (10; 2.41%)**, **social support (8; 1.93%)**, **family/partner support (4; 0.96%)**, **scholarships (9; 2.17%)**, **informal work (5; 1.20%)**, **remittances (6; 1.45%)**, and **1 (0.24%)** preferring not to disclose. **Serbia** demonstrates limited reliance on creative work (**11; 2.65%**), with smaller shares in non-creative jobs (**5; 1.20%**), temporary projects (**1; 0.24%**), social support (**1; 0.24%**), family/partners (**4; 0.96%**), scholarships (**1; 0.24%**), remittances (**1; 0.24%**), no participants reporting informal work, and **1** choosing not to disclose.

These results highlight the **economic precariousness of young creatives**: although **creative work is the primary income source for 40% of respondents**, many continue to rely on **secondary or alternative streams**, including non-creative employment, temporary projects, social support, family assistance, or informal work. Patterns vary across national contexts, with **Spain and Germany showing the highest reliance on creative work**, **Montenegro showing strong dependence on family/partner support and remittances**, and **Serbia reflecting limited engagement with creative income sources**. The findings underscore **persistent income fragility**, the need for **enhanced professionalisation pathways**, and **systemic support** to improve **financial stability in the CCI sector**.

Current Main Income Sources Among Respondents Without CCI-Sector Work Experience Across Six Countries



Among **respondents without prior working experience in the creative field**, the data on current income sources show a clear dominance of informal and non-labour-market-dependent financial support mechanisms. Overall, the most common source of income is **family or partner support**, reported by **118 individuals (41.26%)**. This trend is especially prominent in **Montenegro (64 respondents; 22.38%)**, followed by Portugal (29; 10.14%), Serbia (17; 5.94%), Germany (4; 1.40%), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (4; 1.40%). Spain recorded no respondents in any category due to the sample composition.

The second most common income source is **non-creative employment**, cited by **86 respondents (30.07%)**. Montenegro again leads (45; 15.73%), followed by Portugal (20; 6.99%), Serbia (18; 6.29%), Germany (1; 0.35%), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (2; 0.70%), suggesting that a significant portion of individuals with no creative-sector experience rely on alternative fields for financial stability.

Social support mechanisms, including unemployment benefits, welfare assistance, or disability benefits, represent another notable income stream, reported by **8 respondents (2.80%)**. Portugal accounts for half of these cases (4; 1.40%), followed by Germany (1; 0.35%), Montenegro (1; 0.35%), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (2; 0.70%). This highlights a relatively small—but present—reliance on public safety nets.

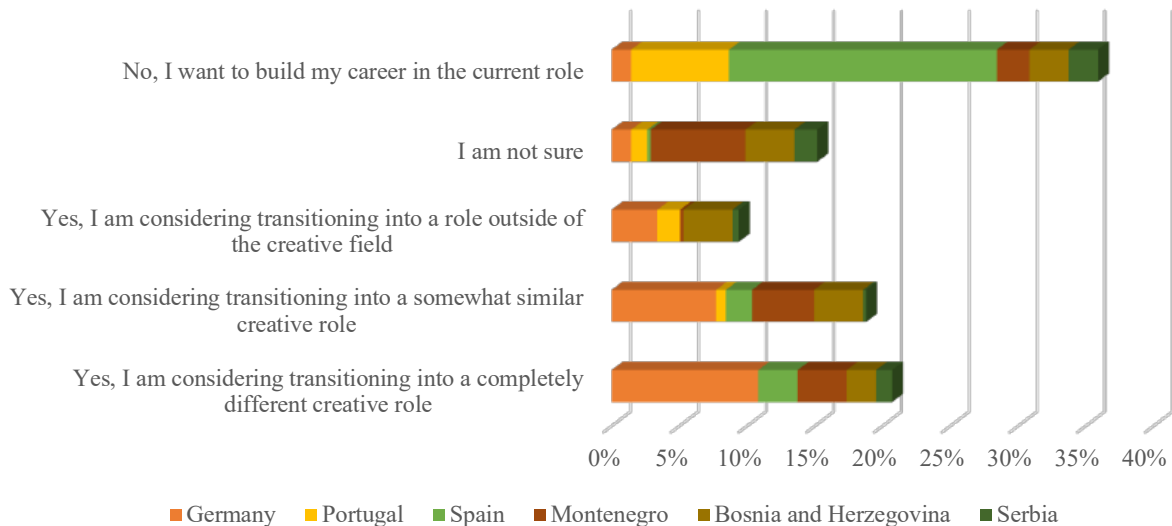
Additionally, **scholarships or educational grants** constitute a meaningful source for **19 respondents (6.64%)**, with Germany (1; 0.35%), Montenegro (9; 3.15%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (9; 3.15%) together forming this group. A smaller share—**26 respondents (9.09%)**—earn income from **creative work or related activities**, despite lacking formal experience. This category is most represented in Bosnia and Herzegovina (16; 5.59%), followed by Montenegro (4; 1.40%), Serbia (4; 1.40%), Germany (1; 0.35%), and Portugal (1; 0.35%).

Informal or casual work (unregistered or without formal contracts) provides income for **12 respondents (4.20%)**, with Montenegro (3; 1.05%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (5; 1.75%), Serbia (2; 0.70%), and Portugal (2; 0.70%) contributing to this group. **Remittances from relatives abroad**, though minimal, support **1 respondent (0.35%)**, located in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finally, **16 individuals (5.59%)** preferred not to disclose their income source, most frequently in Serbia (10; 3.50%) and Montenegro (5; 1.75%).

Overall, the data show that individuals without creative-sector experience rely primarily on family support and non-creative employment, with limited access to formal income sources or sustained creative earnings. Montenegro consistently stands out across most categories,

reflecting both higher sample size and more diverse income pathways, while Bosnia and Herzegovina shows significant representation in creative earnings and scholarship-based support.

Career Transition Intentions Among Creative Professionals With Work Experience Across Six Countries



Among respondents **with prior working experience in the creative field**, the data reveal a diverse landscape of career intentions, with substantial variation across countries in terms of readiness to transition into new roles or remain within current positions. Overall, **149 respondents (35.90%)**, the largest group, stated that they **do not wish to transition and intend to build their careers in their current creative roles**. This preference is most strongly expressed in **Spain (82 respondents; 19.76%)**, followed by Portugal (30; 7.23%), Montenegro (10; 2.41%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (12; 2.89%), Serbia (9; 2.17%) and Germany (6; 1.45%). A significant share—**86 respondents (20.72%)**—reported that they are **considering transitioning into a completely different creative role**, with the highest numbers in Germany (45; 10.84%), Spain (12; 2.89%), Montenegro (15; 3.61%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (9; 2.17%), and Serbia (5; 1.20%). Portugal has no respondents expressing this intention, indicating a comparatively stable or satisfied creative workforce.

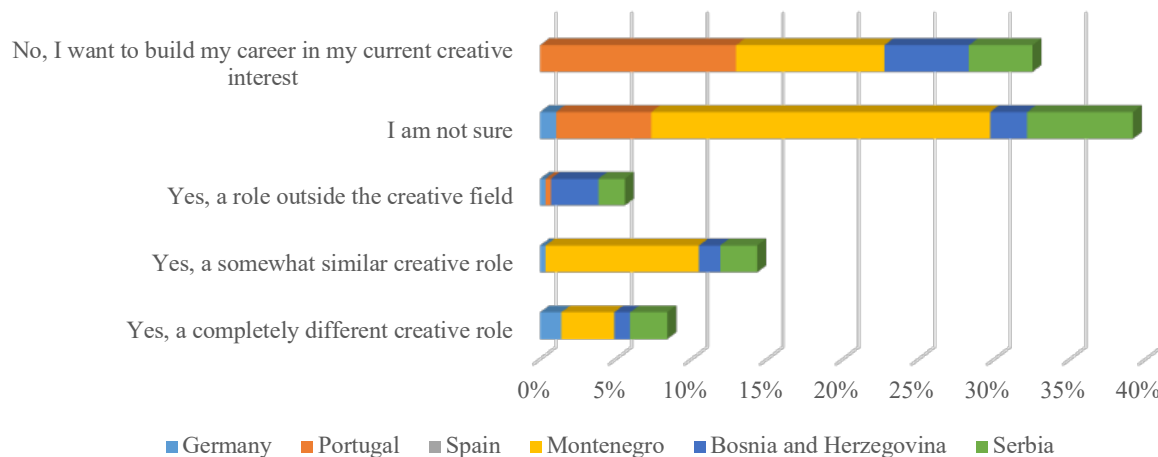
Another **78 respondents (18.80%)** indicated interest in transitioning into a **somewhat similar creative role**, again led by Germany (32; 7.71%), Montenegro (19; 4.58%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (15; 3.61%), Spain (8; 1.93%), Portugal (3; 0.72%), and Serbia (1; 0.24%). This segment represents individuals seeking development rather than full career redirection.

Transitions outside the creative industry also appear significant, with **39 respondents (9.40%)** expressing interest in moving into a **non-creative role**. Bosnia and Herzegovina leads this category (15; 3.61%), followed by Germany (14; 3.37%), Portugal (7; 1.69%), Serbia (2; 0.48%) and Montenegro (1; 0.24%). This indicates that in certain countries—particularly Bosnia and Herzegovina and Germany—creative professionals may perceive limited growth prospects and are considering exiting the sector.

Uncertainty remains a factor: **63 respondents (15.18%)** are **not sure** about future career directions. These individuals are most represented in Montenegro (29; 6.99%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (15; 3.61%), Serbia (7; 1.69%), Portugal (5; 1.20%), and Spain (1; 0.24%). Spain notably records no uncertainty, reinforcing its trend of strong commitment to current roles.

Overall, the data reveal that while many creative professionals—particularly in Spain—demonstrate strong stability and commitment to their current trajectories, substantial portions of the workforce in Germany, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina are actively considering significant career shifts either within or outside the creative sector.

Career Transition Intentions Among Individuals Without CCI Work Experience Across Six Countries



Among respondents **without prior work experience in the creative sector**, transition intentions display a **markedly different pattern** compared to those already employed in the field. A total of **286 individuals** participated in this segment, revealing a strong orientation toward **exploration rather than commitment** to a clearly defined creative pathway. **Twenty-four respondents (8.39%)** are considering a transition into a **completely different creative role**, while **41 respondents (14.34%)** are exploring a **somewhat similar creative trajectory**. Interest in opportunities **outside the creative field** is also present at this early stage, with **16 individuals (5.59%)** expressing willingness to move beyond the sector altogether.

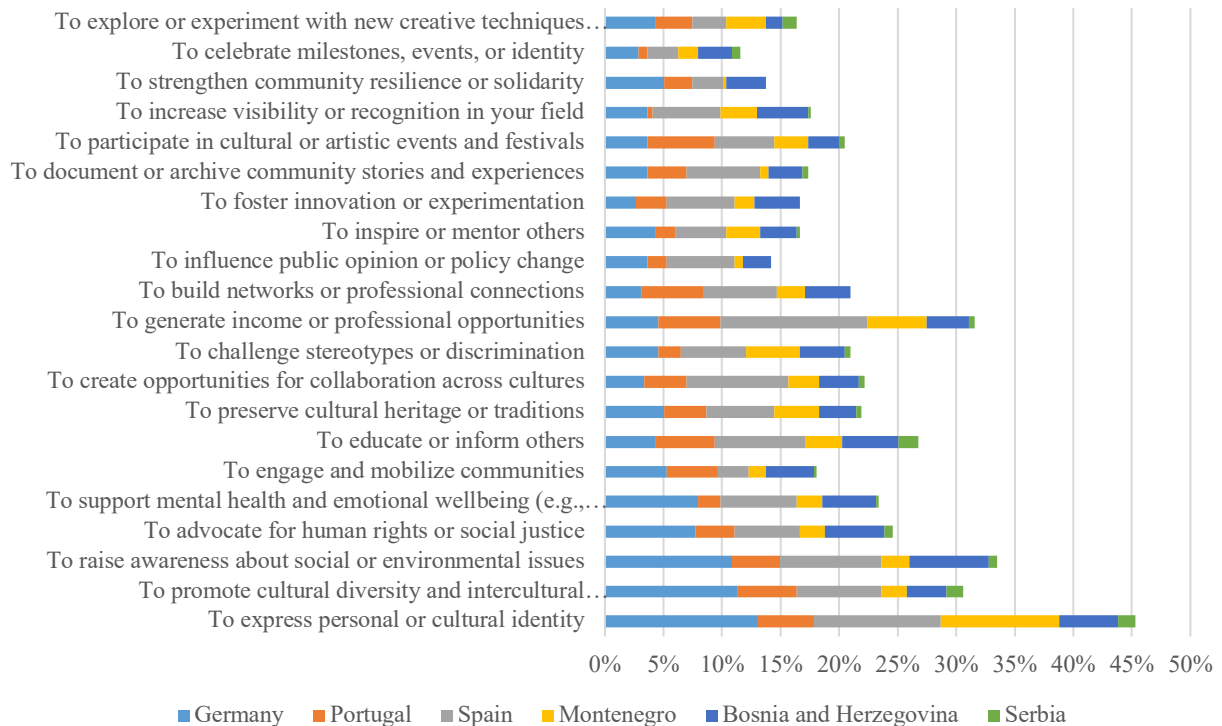
Uncertainty emerges as a defining feature among newcomers. As many as **112 respondents (39.16%)** selected “*I am not sure*”, pointing to a widespread lack of clarity regarding future professional direction. In contrast, a more clearly defined commitment remains limited: **93 respondents (32.52%)** report a firm intention to build their careers **exclusively within their current creative focus**.

Country-level results illustrate notable variation in these transition intentions. **Montenegro** stands out with the **largest number of participants (131 in total)**, characterised by particularly high levels of uncertainty (**64 respondents; 22.38%**) and a sizable group (**29 respondents; 10.14%**) considering a **somewhat similar creative role**. **Serbia (51 respondents)** and **Bosnia and Herzegovina (39 respondents)** display more evenly distributed preferences across creative and non-creative options, while still recording meaningful levels of uncertainty (**Serbia: 20 respondents; Bosnia and Herzegovina: 7 respondents**). **Germany, with 9 respondents**, shows limited variation but indicates some interest in shifts **within the creative field**. **Portugal, with 56 respondents**, reports almost no intention to move toward alternative creative roles, yet demonstrates **strong uncertainty (18 respondents; 6.29%)** alongside a comparatively high number of respondents wishing to **remain within their current creative interest (37 respondents; 12.94%)**. **Spain reported no entries** in this segment.

Overall, the findings indicate that individuals **without creative work experience** are significantly more likely to remain **uncertain or open to broad exploration**, including

potential transitions **outside the creative sector**, in contrast to experienced creatives who tend to demonstrate **greater stability and clearer career intentions**.

Purposes for Using Creative Work Among Individuals With Working Experience Across Six Countries (Multiple Responses, N=415)



Among 415 respondents with work experience, creative work is used for a remarkably wide range of social, cultural, educational, and professional purposes, reflected in a total of **1,927 selections** across all categories. Overall, the most common use is **expressing personal or cultural identity**, reported **188 times (45.30%)**, followed by **raising awareness about social or environmental issues (139; 33.49%)**, **generating income or professional opportunities (131; 31.57%)**, and **promoting cultural diversity and intercultural understanding (127; 30.60%)**. These findings indicate that experienced creatives strongly position their work at the intersection of identity formation, civic engagement, and professional development.

Other prominent functions include **advocating for human rights or social justice (102; 24.58%)**, **creating opportunities for collaboration across cultures (92; 22.17%)**, **participating in cultural or artistic events and festivals (85; 20.48%)**, and **engaging and mobilising communities (75; 18.07%)**. Creative work is also frequently used to **educate or inform others (111; 26.75%)**, **build professional networks (87; 20.96%)**, and **increase visibility or recognition (73; 17.59%)**, highlighting its role as both a social instrument and a professional resource. Additional uses include **documenting or archiving community stories and experiences (72; 17.35%)**, **fostering innovation and experimentation (69; 16.63%)**, **exploring new creative techniques or media (68; 16.39%)**, **influencing public opinion or policy change (59; 14.22%)**, **strengthening community resilience or solidarity (57; 13.73%)**, and **celebrating milestones, events, or identity (48; 11.57%)**, demonstrating how creative practices function as tools for empowerment, healing, and collective memory.

Country-level insights reveal clear national differences in how creative work is applied. **Germany** demonstrates a broad and socially engaged creative landscape, with strong emphasis

on **identity expression (54; 13.01%)**, **diversity promotion (47; 11.33%)**, **awareness-raising (45; 10.84%)**, **wellbeing support (33; 7.95%)**, and **education (18; 4.34%)**, alongside notable engagement in **heritage documentation (21; 5.06%)**, **challenging discrimination (19; 4.58%)**, **building networks (13; 3.13%)**, and **increasing visibility (15; 3.61%)**.

Portugal presents a balanced profile, combining **identity expression (20; 4.82%)**, **diversity promotion (21; 5.06%)**, **awareness-raising (17; 4.10%)**, **human rights advocacy (14; 3.37%)**, **wellbeing support (8; 1.93%)**, and **community engagement (18; 4.34%)**, with distinct strengths in **heritage preservation (15; 3.61%)**, **cross-cultural collaboration (15; 3.61%)**, and **innovation (11; 2.65%)**.

Spain records the highest overall volume of responses, with pronounced emphasis on **education (32; 7.71%)**, **wellbeing (27; 6.51%)**, **identity expression (45; 10.84%)**, **awareness-raising (36; 8.67%)**, **diversity promotion (30; 7.23%)**, and **community engagement (11; 2.65%)**. Focus group participants emphasized that creative impact is achieved “**less by owning the idea itself and more by the experience around it**”, highlighting an approach centered on participation and collective experience. Work in Spain spans **campaigns, festivals, animation, gaming, literature, photography, theatre, music, comics, and sustainable fashion**, illustrating a socially engaged, outward-facing, and experience-oriented creative culture.

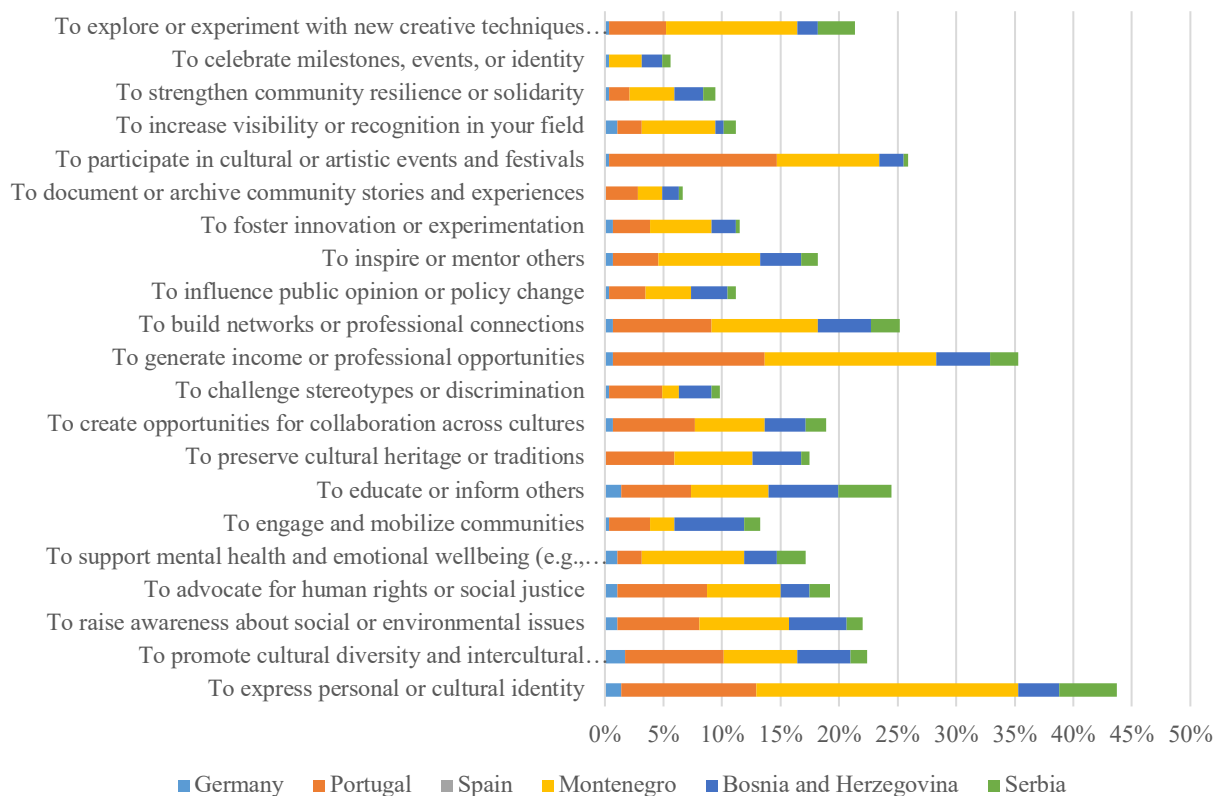
Montenegro places strong emphasis on community-focused and professional functions, notably **generating income or professional opportunities (21; 5.06%)**, **identity expression (42; 10.12%)**, **preserving heritage (16; 3.86%)**, **challenging stereotypes or discrimination (19; 4.58%)**, and **inspiring or mentoring others (12; 2.89%)**. Focus group insights show that young creatives in Montenegro demonstrate a **developed creative design sensibility that transcends disciplinary boundaries**, with skills transferable across **interior design, illustration, visual identity, branding, and multimedia production**. This highlights that formal arts education fosters not only specialists but **adaptive creators capable of innovatively applying skills across multiple contexts**.

Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrates high engagement in **awareness-raising (28; 6.75%)**, **identity expression (21; 5.06%)**, **diversity promotion (14; 3.37%)**, **wellbeing support (19; 4.58%)**, **human rights advocacy (21; 5.06%)**, and **education (20; 4.82%)**, alongside notable use of creativity for **challenging stereotypes (16; 3.86%)**, **building networks (16; 3.86%)**, and **participation in festivals (11; 2.65%)**, reflecting a strongly **activist and community-engaged profile**.

Finally, **Serbia**, despite lower overall volumes, shows a diverse range of creative purposes, including **identity expression (6; 1.45%)**, **diversity promotion (6; 1.45%)**, **awareness-raising (3; 0.72%)**, **human rights advocacy (3; 0.72%)**, **education (7; 1.69%)**, and **wellbeing (1; 0.24%)**. Focus group participants highlighted that creative work serves as a tool for **social change**, including **design activism, music as bridge, campaigns inspiring change, films shifting perceptions, literature empowerment, games connecting cultures, sustainable fashion, photography as voice, theatre activism, youth activism, festivals as bridges, animation stories, gaming projects, and comics activism**, reflecting a **multi-purpose creative ecosystem even in a smaller market context**.

Overall, the combined results reveal a creative sector deeply embedded in **social, cultural, psychological, and professional spheres**. Across all six countries, creativity functions simultaneously as a channel for **identity expression, societal transformation, public awareness, emotional support, cultural preservation, and economic opportunity**. The strong presence of **human rights advocacy, community engagement, cross-cultural collaboration, and anti-discrimination practices**, alongside the focus group insights, highlights the essential role of creative work in shaping **inclusive, resilient, and socially engaged communities across Europe and the Western Balkans**.

Intended or Actual Uses of Creative Work Among Respondents Without Prior Work Experience Across Six Countries (Multiple Answers, N=286)



Among respondents without prior working experience in the creative sector (286 participants), creative work is widely intended or envisioned as serving multiple, overlapping purposes, reflecting a combination of personal expression, social engagement, and early professional aspirations. The most frequently cited motivation is expressing personal or cultural identity (125; 43.71%), followed by generating income or professional opportunities (101; 35.31%), indicating that even at an early stage, creativity is closely linked to both self-realisation and economic expectations. Strong social orientations are also evident, particularly in promoting cultural diversity and intercultural understanding (64; 22.38%) and raising awareness about social or environmental issues (63; 22.03%).

A substantial share of respondents intend to use creative work for educational, wellbeing, and community-oriented purposes, including educating or informing others (70; 24.48%), participating in cultural or artistic events and festivals (74; 25.87%), building networks or professional connections (72; 25.17%), and exploring new creative techniques or media (61; 21.33%). Engagement in human rights or social justice advocacy (55; 19.23%), mental health and wellbeing support (49; 17.13%), cross-cultural collaboration (54; 18.88%), and inspiring or mentoring others (52; 18.18%) further illustrates that newcomers already perceive creative practice as a tool for social contribution and collective impact. Additional, though less frequent, purposes include preserving cultural heritage or traditions (50; 17.48%), challenging stereotypes or discrimination (28; 9.79%), influencing public opinion or policy change (32; 11.19%), fostering innovation (33; 11.54%), documenting

community stories (19; 6.64%), strengthening community resilience or solidarity (27; 9.44%), and celebrating milestones, events, or identity (16; 5.59%).

Country-level patterns reveal notable differences in how respondents without experience intend to apply their creative work. **Germany** shows relatively even but low-volume engagement across most categories, including **identity expression (4; 1.40%), diversity promotion (5; 1.75%), awareness-raising (3; 1.05%), human rights advocacy (3; 1.05%),** and **wellbeing support (3; 1.05%),** with similarly modest representation in **education (4; 1.40%), cross-cultural collaboration (2; 0.70%), income generation (2; 0.70%), network building (2; 0.70%), innovation (2; 0.70%), visibility (3; 1.05%),** and **celebrating milestones (1; 0.35%),** reflecting a **small-scale but socially conscious orientation.**

Portugal demonstrates a more **intensive and diversified engagement,** with particularly strong emphasis on **participating in cultural or artistic events and festivals (41; 14.34%), generating income or professional opportunities (37; 12.94%),** and **identity expression (33; 11.54%).** This is complemented by meaningful engagement in **diversity promotion (24; 8.39%), network building (24; 8.39%), human rights advocacy (22; 7.69%), awareness-raising (20; 6.99%), cross-cultural collaboration (20; 6.99%), education (17; 5.94%), heritage preservation (17; 5.94%), mentoring (11; 3.85%), community mobilization (10; 3.50%),** and **exploring new techniques (14; 4.90%),** pointing to a **balanced and innovation-driven creative outlook.**

Montenegro records the **highest proportions across many categories,** reflecting a strongly **community-oriented and multi-purpose creative orientation.** Respondents report high engagement in **identity expression (64; 22.38%), income generation (42; 14.69%), exploring new techniques or media (32; 11.19%), network building (26; 9.09%), mentoring others (25; 8.74%), events and festivals (25; 8.74%), wellbeing support (25; 8.74%), awareness-raising (22; 7.69%), education (19; 6.64%), heritage preservation (19; 6.64%), human rights advocacy (18; 6.29%), visibility (18; 6.29%), cross-cultural collaboration (17; 5.94%), innovation (15; 5.24%), solidarity (11; 3.85%),** and **celebrating milestones (8; 2.80%),** underscoring the role of creativity as a **social, professional, and developmental resource.**

Bosnia and Herzegovina shows **moderate but consistent engagement** across a wide range of purposes, including **community engagement (17; 5.94%), education (17; 5.94%), awareness-raising (14; 4.90%), diversity promotion (13; 4.55%), income generation (13; 4.55%), network building (13; 4.55%), heritage preservation (12; 4.20%), identity expression (10; 3.50%), mentoring (10; 3.50%), human rights advocacy (7; 2.45%), solidarity (7; 2.45%), wellbeing support (8; 2.80%), innovation (6; 2.10%), events (6; 2.10%), milestones (5; 1.75%),** and **exploring new techniques (5; 1.75%),** reflecting a **blend of advocacy, participation, and professional development goals.**

Serbia displays lower but still meaningful engagement, with strongest representation in **identity expression (14; 4.90%), education (13; 4.55%), exploring new techniques (9; 3.15%), income generation (7; 2.45%), network building (7; 2.45%),** and **wellbeing support (7; 2.45%),** alongside participation in **human rights advocacy (5; 1.75%), awareness-raising (4; 1.40%), community mobilization (4; 1.40%), mentoring (4; 1.40%), diversity promotion (4; 1.40%), visibility (3; 1.05%), solidarity (3; 1.05%), heritage preservation (2; 0.70%), milestones (2; 0.70%), events (1; 0.35%),** and **innovation (1; 0.35%),** indicating a **functional but smaller-scale creative ecosystem.**

Overall, these findings demonstrate that **even before entering the labour market,** young people perceive creative work as **multidimensional,** combining **personal expression, social advocacy, community engagement, and professional ambition.** The marked national differences underline how **local contexts, opportunities, and cultural infrastructures** shape early expectations and intended uses of creative practice across countries.

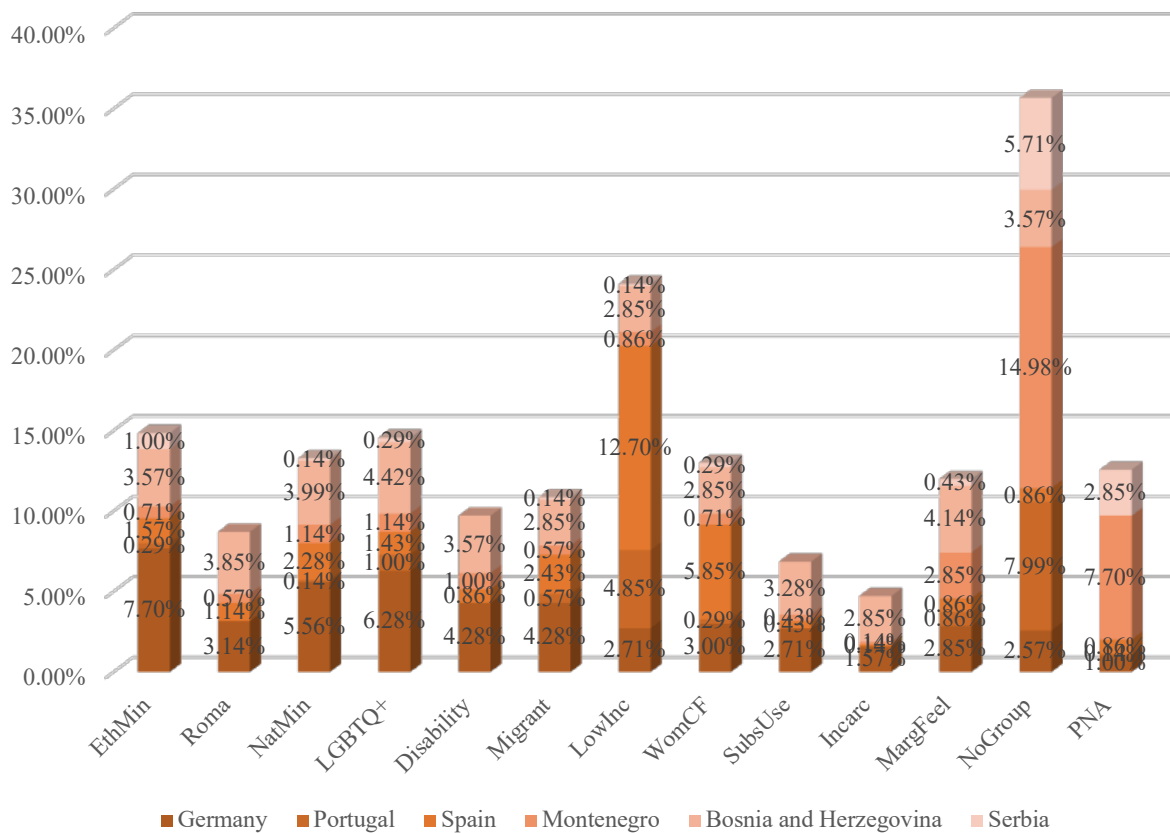
5.2 Barriers and Drivers of Professional Growth in CCI

To understand the barriers and drivers shaping professional growth in the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI), this analysis examined both early-career and experienced creative professionals across six countries: Germany, Portugal, Spain, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. Drawing on survey responses and focus groups, the assessment provides insight into the obstacles and enabling conditions affecting both entry into the sector and long-term professionalisation, encompassing financial, technical, social, regulatory, and psychological dimensions. It considers respondents with prior CCI experience as well as those without, exploring patterns of perceived marginalisation, access to resources and networks, skill deficits, mentorship, market understanding, and motivational factors influencing career choices.

Based on data from 701 respondents, the study highlights intersecting forms of disadvantage across socio-economic, gender, ethnic, health, and identity-related dimensions, alongside structural, institutional, and psychological barriers. Country-level patterns reveal differences in the prevalence of financial constraints, skill gaps, mentorship availability, recognition of creative professions, and access to education and training. The analysis also identifies key drivers of professional development, including intrinsic motivation, practical experience, peer influence, collaboration, exposure to multicultural and interdisciplinary environments, and responsiveness to market trends.

The study addresses the impact of marginalisation, financial and technical constraints, limited mentorship and networks, low recognition of creative professions, psychosocial challenges, and access to education and guidance. It also examines the main drivers of career choices, including personal interests, feedback, collaboration, role models, and engagement with cultural, social, and technological influences. Overall, these findings reveal a multi-dimensional landscape of barriers and enablers, underscoring the need for integrated interventions—such as targeted training, structured mentorship, financial support, and structural reforms—to foster sustainable career development and equitable participation in the CCI across Europe.

Identification with Marginalised or Underrepresented Groups Among Respondents Across Six Countries (Multiple Responses, N = 701)



Abbreviations Used in the Graph

EthMin – Ethnic or racial minority

Roma – Roma community

NatMin – National minority

LGBTQ+ – LGBTQ+ identity

Disability – Disability (physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental health-related)

Migrant – Refugee, displaced person, or migrant

LowInc – Low-income background or disadvantaged area

WomCF – Woman in a male-dominated creative field

SubsUse – Former or current substance user

Incarc – Former or current incarcerated person

MargFeel – Feels socially or professionally marginalised

NoGroup – Does not identify with any marginalised group

PNA – Prefer not to answer

The analysis of responses from **701 participants** across **Germany, Portugal, Spain, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia** demonstrates a complex landscape of marginalisation within the creative sector. Because respondents were allowed to select multiple categories, the data reflect overlapping and intersecting forms of disadvantage. Across the full sample, **250 respondents (35.66%)** reported not identifying with any marginalised or underrepresented group (**NoGroup**), while **88 respondents (12.55%)** preferred not to answer (**PNA**), indicating that identity-based disclosure is sensitive for a notable portion of young creatives.

A considerable share of participants reported belonging to groups facing socio-economic or structural disadvantages. The largest category overall was **LowInc (169 respondents; 24.11%)**, referring to individuals from low-income backgrounds or economically

disadvantaged areas. Spain accounted for the highest proportion within this group (**89 respondents; 12.70% of all 701 participants**), followed by Portugal (**34; 4.85%**) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (**20; 2.85%**). Germany also reported **19 respondents (2.71%)**, while Montenegro (**6; 0.86%**) and Serbia (**1; 0.14%**) showed smaller shares, reflecting different national socio-economic structures and levels of income inequality.

Gender-related marginalisation also emerged as a significant factor, with **WomCF (women in male-dominated creative fields)** representing **91 respondents (12.98%)**. Spain showed the highest concentration (**41 respondents; 5.85%**), followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina (**20; 2.85%**) and Germany (**21; 3.00%**). These numbers illustrate persistent gender imbalances in specific cultural and creative subsectors, particularly in technical arts, production, music, and film.

Identity-based groups feature prominently across the dataset. **LGBTQ+ respondents** constituted **14.55% (102 individuals)**, most prominently in Germany (**44; 6.28%**) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (**31; 4.42%**), while Spain accounted for **10 (1.43%)**. Ethnic and racial minorities (**EthMin**) represented **104 respondents (14.84%)**, with Germany again reporting the highest share (**54; 7.70%**), followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina (**25; 3.57%**) and Spain (**11; 1.57%**). The **Roma community** was represented by **61 respondents (8.70%)**, primarily from Bosnia and Herzegovina (**27; 3.85%**), Spain (**8; 1.14%**), Germany (**22; 3.14%**), and Montenegro (**4; 0.57%**). Similarly, **national minority identification (NatMin)** accounted for **93 respondents (13.27%)**, with Germany contributing **39 (5.56%)**, Bosnia and Herzegovina **28 (3.99%)**, and Spain **16 (2.28%)**.

Health-related and mobility-related vulnerabilities also appeared in the dataset. **Disability** was reported by **68 respondents (9.70%)**, most frequently in Germany (**30; 4.28%**) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (**25; 3.57%**). **Migrant status (Migrant)** accounted for **76 respondents (10.84%)**, highest in Spain (**17; 2.43%**) and Germany (**30; 4.28%**), reflecting broader migration patterns within Europe.

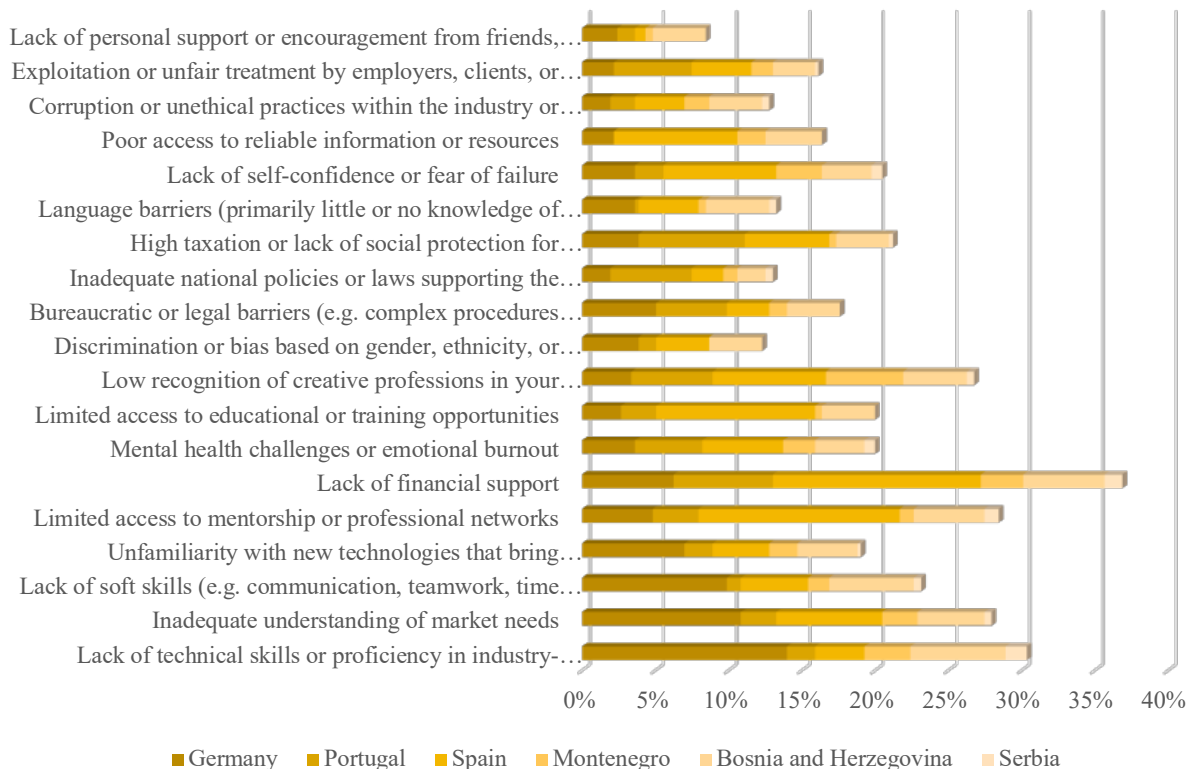
Social vulnerability indicators, although smaller in absolute numbers, provide crucial insights into creative sector inclusion. **Former or current substance use (SubsUse)** was acknowledged by **48 respondents (6.85%)**, including **23 in Bosnia and Herzegovina (3.28%)** and **19 in Germany (2.71%)**. **Incarceration background (Incarc)** was identified by **33 participants (4.71%)**, with **20 from Bosnia and Herzegovina (2.85%)** and **11 from Germany (1.57%)**. These figures—though modest—demonstrate the presence of individuals with significant reintegration challenges participating in the creative sphere.

A notable group included those who did not formally belong to any specific identity category but nonetheless felt marginalised in the creative field. This category (**MargFeel**) consisted of **84 respondents (11.98%)**, with the largest shares in Montenegro (**20; 2.85%**) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (**29; 4.14%**). This highlights the existence of **structural or professional marginalisation** not captured by traditional identity classifications—such as exclusion due to limited networks, lack of mentorship, geographical isolation, or barriers to resources and recognition.

Country-level patterns indicate distinct sociocultural dynamics. Germany exhibited the widest distribution across nearly all categories, implying a broad spectrum of intersecting vulnerabilities within a large and diverse creative workforce. Bosnia and Herzegovina displayed consistently high representation across almost every category, showing the impact of ethnic complexity, socio-economic disparities, and social reintegration issues. Montenegro presented a unique profile, with the highest share of respondents identifying with no marginalised group (**105; 14.98%**) and a comparatively high proportion preferring not to answer (**54; 7.70%**), indicating possible cultural hesitations around self-identification. Portugal showed one of the lowest levels of identity-based marginalisation, reflected in its **56 respondents (7.99%)** who reported no marginalisation. Serbia exhibited low numerical

representation across all categories, likely reflecting sampling size (75 respondents), but still showed relevant shares in categories such as MargFeel (3; 0.43%) and LGBTQ+ (2; 0.29%). Taken together, the findings reveal that marginalisation in the creative sector is multifaceted, varying significantly by country and influenced by social, economic, gender, ethnic, and personal factors. The data underscore the need for targeted policies that address intersectional barriers and improve access, representation, and support mechanisms for underrepresented groups in the cultural and creative industries across Europe.

Main obstacles to professional development (multiple answers) — respondents with CCI work experience (N = 415) Across Six Countries



The analysis of **415 creative professionals with work experience** reveals a highly complex landscape of barriers shaping careers in the **cultural and creative industries (CCI)**, spanning **financial, technical, social, regulatory, and psychological dimensions**. Complemented by **focus groups and in-depth interviews**, the data provide insight into how these challenges manifest in daily practice, influence career strategies, and shape professional opportunities and aspirations.

The most frequently cited barrier is **lack of financial support**, reported by **153 respondents (36.87%)**, reflecting persistent structural underfunding of the sector. Focus group participants emphasized the difficulty of securing **stable work and fair remuneration**. In **Serbia**, participants described: **“Finding steady clients – oversupply, low pay,” “Funding films – lack of state support,”** and **“Income instability – publishing crisis.”** Portuguese participants highlighted **geographic disparities**, noting, **“There’s no professional theatre company in Santarém. Everything happens in Lisbon,”** and **“In Viseu there’s one gallery, one theatre, and no network. You can’t grow if there’s nowhere to perform.”**

Gaps in **technical skills and proficiency with industry tools** were reported by **126 respondents (30.36%)**, while **116 respondents (27.95%)** reported **limited understanding of market needs**. Spanish focus group participants noted: **“There are so many tools, and they’re**

evolving so fast... I don't have time to search around, so sometimes I just use a mediocre one." Limited access to mentorship and professional networks affected 118 respondents (28.43%), especially in Spain (57; 13.73%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (20; 4.82%), and Germany (20; 4.82%).

Low recognition of creative professions was reported by 111 respondents (26.75%), particularly in Montenegro (22; 5.30%), Portugal (23; 5.54%), and Spain (32; 7.71%). Montenegrin participants emphasized that **professional advancement in the creative sector often depends heavily on personal contacts, volunteer work, and engagement in nonprofit projects**, reflecting structural challenges within the industry. Economic instability, low fees, unregulated contracts, and limited exhibition spaces further hinder professional growth. One Montenegrin participant explained that **many artists are forced to rely on private initiatives, social media, and online platforms to showcase their work**, while a Portuguese participant emphasized, **"You need to recognize artistic production as work. Nobody here is unionized, but it's still work."**

Soft skills deficiencies—including communication, teamwork, and time management—were reported by 96 respondents (23.13%), most prominently in Germany (41; 9.88%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (24; 5.78%). **Unfamiliarity with new technologies** affecting competitiveness was reported by 79 respondents (19.04%), notably in Germany (29; 6.99%) and Spain (16; 3.86%). Montenegrin participants highlighted the education-to-labor market gap: **"There is a gap between what we learn and what the market demands."**

Structural and regulatory barriers were also significant. **High taxation and lack of social protection for freelancers** affected 88 respondents (21.20%), particularly in Portugal (30; 7.23%) and Spain (25; 5.78%), while **bureaucratic procedures** impacted 73 respondents (17.59%), especially in Germany (21; 5.06%) and Portugal (20; 4.82%). The **absence of supportive national policies** was reported by 54 respondents (13.01%) and **corruption or unethical practices** affected 53 respondents (12.77%). Focus groups in Montenegro highlighted significant structural and systemic challenges in the creative sector. Professional advancement often depends on **personal contacts, volunteer work, and nonprofit projects**, reflecting limited formal pathways for career development. Artists face the **absence of strong and functional professional associations**, leaving them without support to protect their rights or platforms for collective advocacy. **Technical and regulatory constraints** further limit international competitiveness: subscriptions for professional tools like **Adobe Creative Cloud** are often too expensive for individual creators, certain software licenses are unavailable, online payments through platforms such as **PayPal** are problematic, and complex taxation systems create additional burdens. The online market for selling artworks is underdeveloped due to insufficient infrastructure and the scarcity of professional arts managers, restricting opportunities for exposure and income generation. These structural limitations are reinforced by unfair work conditions, with one participant noting, **"we take on much more than we are paid for, which is often unfair"**, highlighting the lack of mechanisms to ensure professional standards and fair remuneration. The Portuguese focus group also noted **a lack of physical spaces for connection and creation outside urban centers**, urging the development of new cultural hubs in peripheral and rural areas to ensure continuity for local initiatives.

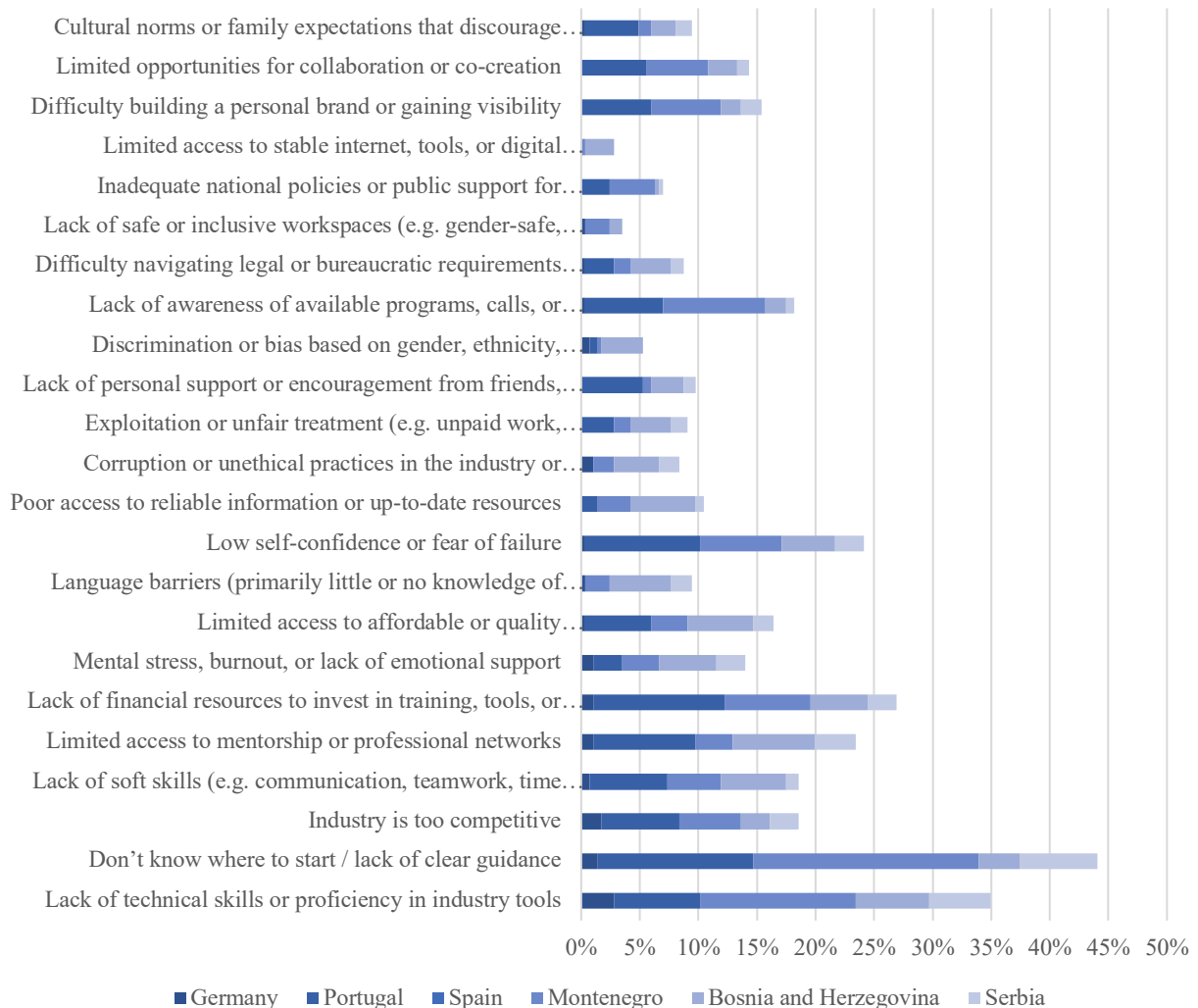
Psychosocial factors further compound challenges. **Mental health issues and burnout** affected 83 respondents (20.00%), and **lack of self-confidence or fear of failure** affected 85 (20.48%). Germany's participants noted that **passion is often exploited**, and subtle biases related to name, accent, or origin can undermine recognition. Personal-level barriers also included **limited access to reliable information** (68; 16.39%), **language barriers** (55; 13.25%), **limited training opportunities** (83; 20.00%), **exploitation by clients or employers** (67; 16.14%), and **insufficient personal support** (35; 8.43%). Serbian participants described

overwork and low pay: **“Overwork – few studios, low pay – clients underpay, burnout – few senior roles.”**

Country-level patterns reveal distinct dynamics. In Germany, main challenges include **technical skills (58; 13.98%), market understanding (45; 10.84%), soft skills (41; 9.88%),** and **technology familiarity (29; 6.99%).** Portugal faces **financial support issues (28; 6.75%), low recognition (23; 5.54%), high taxation (30; 7.23%),** and **lack of supportive policies (23; 5.54%).** Spain is characterized by **limited mentorship (57; 13.73%), financial constraints (59; 14.22%), training opportunities (45; 10.84%), access to resources (35; 8.43%),** and **low recognition (32; 7.71%).** Montenegro faces **low recognition (22; 5.30%), technical skills gaps (13; 3.13%), financial support deficits (12; 2.89%),** and **low self-confidence (13; 3.13%),** exacerbated by **limited infrastructure and institutional support.** Bosnia and Herzegovina exhibits **moderate challenges across most categories,** while Serbia reports generally lower counts, with **financial support (5; 1.20%), technical skills (6; 1.45%),** and **mentorship (4; 0.96%)** as the main obstacles. Focus groups emphasize **instability, geographic disparities, and migration as a perceived path to professional growth.**

Overall, these findings illustrate the **multi-dimensional barriers** faced by young creative professionals, combining **financial constraints, skills gaps, weak institutional frameworks, fragmented networks, and psychosocial pressures.** Addressing these barriers will require **integrated interventions,** including **sustained funding, technical and soft-skills training, structured mentorship, streamlined administrative procedures, and policies recognizing creative professions,** to enable **professional growth, labor market integration, and sustainable careers** across the surveyed countries.

Obstacles to Starting or Developing a Creative Career Among Respondents Without Work Experience (N=286) Across Six Countries



The analysis of **286 creative professionals without work experience** highlights a range of barriers that impede the initiation and development of a creative career. The most significant obstacles relate to **lack of technical skills and unclear starting points**, reflecting both gaps in capacity and guidance for newcomers. Specifically, **44.06% of respondents (126) reported not knowing where to start or lacking clear guidance**, while **34.97% (100) indicated insufficient technical skills or proficiency in industry tools**. This emphasizes that early-career creatives often face uncertainty in navigating the sector alongside skill limitations. Financial constraints are also prominent, with **26.92% (77) citing lack of resources to invest in training, tools, or equipment**, suggesting that access to funding and initial investment remains a crucial barrier.

Soft skills deficits—including communication, teamwork, and time management—were reported by **18.53% (53)** of respondents, while **industry competitiveness** was identified by **18.53% (53)**, highlighting perceptions of both personal and structural hurdles. **Limited access to mentorship or professional networks** affects **23.43% (67)** of respondents, underscoring the importance of structured guidance and social capital in early stages. **Mental stress, burnout, or lack of emotional support** was reported by **13.99% (40)**, while **limited access**

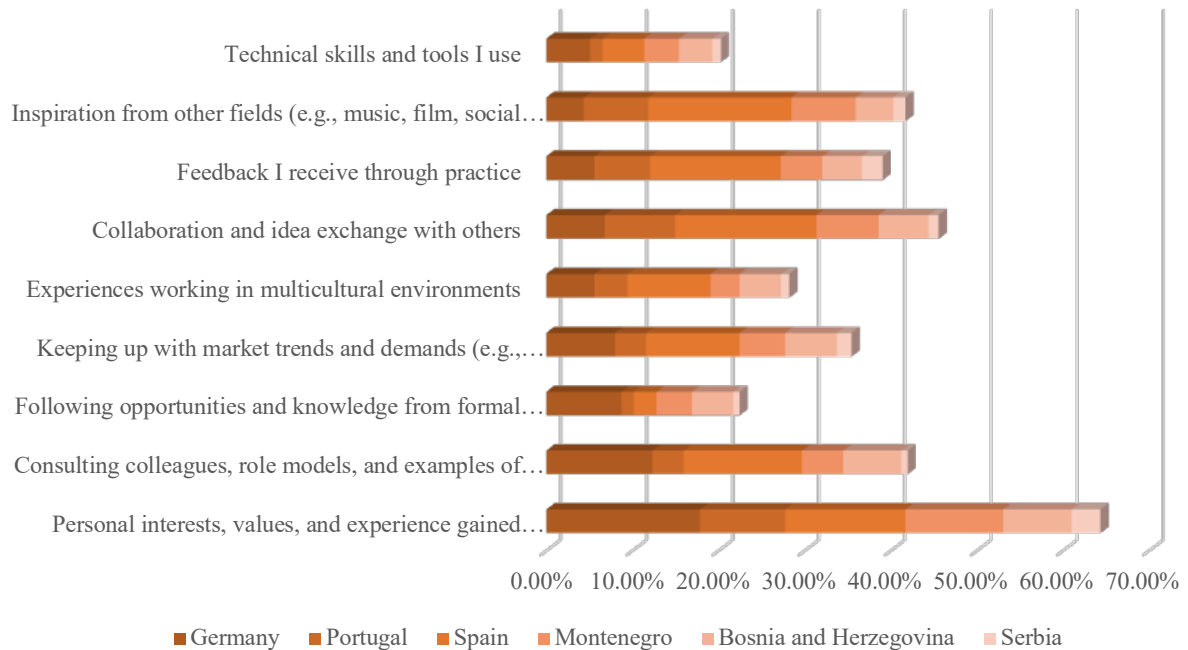
to **affordable or quality educational opportunities** affected **16.43% (47)**, pointing to the need for accessible training and well-being support.

Additional barriers include **low self-confidence or fear of failure (69; 24.13%)**, **poor access to reliable information or up-to-date resources (30; 10.49%)**, **language barriers limiting access to opportunities (27; 9.44%)**, and **difficulty building a personal brand or gaining visibility (44; 15.38%)**, reflecting psychological, informational, and visibility-related challenges even before entering the professional field. **Exploitation or unfair treatment (26; 9.09%)**, **cultural norms or family expectations discouraging creative careers (27; 9.44%)**, **lack of awareness of funding programs (52; 18.18%)**, and **difficulty navigating legal or bureaucratic requirements (25; 8.74%)** further illustrate social, structural, and institutional obstacles. Less frequent but relevant issues include **lack of safe or inclusive workspaces (10; 3.50%)** and **inadequate national policies or public support for creative professions (20; 6.99%)**, which point to gaps in supportive frameworks for new entrants.

Country-level breakdowns reveal marked regional differences. **Montenegro** exhibits the highest incidence of both **technical skills deficits (38; 13.29%)** and **unclear starting points (55; 19.23%)**, along with **financial limitations (21; 7.34%)**, **low self-confidence (20; 6.99%)**, and **difficulty building visibility (17; 5.94%)**, indicating that early-career creatives in this country face both skill and guidance barriers. **Portugal** also shows substantial challenges related to **guidance (38; 13.29%)**, **technical skills (21; 7.34%)**, **financial constraints (32; 11.19%)**, **mentorship access (25; 8.74%)**, and **limited educational access (16; 5.59%)**, emphasizing the need for structured support and capacity-building initiatives. **Germany** reports lower frequencies overall, with **technical skills (8; 2.80%)**, **guidance (4; 1.40%)**, and **industry competitiveness (5; 1.75%)** as the most noted barriers, reflecting relatively stronger preparatory structures. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** presents moderate challenges across multiple categories, including **technical skills (18; 6.29%)**, **guidance (10; 3.50%)**, **mentorship access (20; 6.99%)**, **soft skills (16; 5.59%)**, **education and training opportunities (16; 5.59%)**, and **reliable information (16; 5.59%)**. **Serbia** exhibits smaller absolute numbers but still identifies **guidance (19; 6.64%)**, **technical skills (15; 5.24%)**, and **mentorship access (10; 3.50%)** as the main barriers.

Overall, these findings depict a **multi-faceted challenge for newcomers to the creative sector**, characterized by a combination of **skill deficiencies, lack of clear entry pathways, financial limitations, mentorship gaps, psychological pressures, and social or cultural constraints**. Addressing these obstacles requires comprehensive interventions, including **structured onboarding programs, technical and soft-skills training, accessible mentorship and networking opportunities, financial support mechanisms, guidance on visibility and branding, and psychosocial support**, enabling new creatives to navigate the sector and build sustainable careers.

Factors Shaping Professional Decisions and Creative Approach Among Respondents With Work Experience (N=415) Across Six Countries



The analysis of **415 creative professionals with work experience** reveals a nuanced picture of the drivers behind their professional choices and creative strategies. **Personal interests, values, and experience gained through practice** emerge as the most influential factor, cited by **267 respondents (64.34%)**, demonstrating that intrinsic motivation and hands-on experience are central to decision-making. Closely following this, **consulting colleagues, role models, and observing successful individuals online or offline** is reported by **174 respondents (41.93%)**, highlighting the importance of peer influence, mentorship, and observational learning in shaping professional paths. **Collaboration and idea exchange with others (189; 45.54%)** and **keeping up with market trends and client demands (147; 35.42%)** also play a significant role, indicating that creativity is not only self-driven but responsive to the broader professional environment.

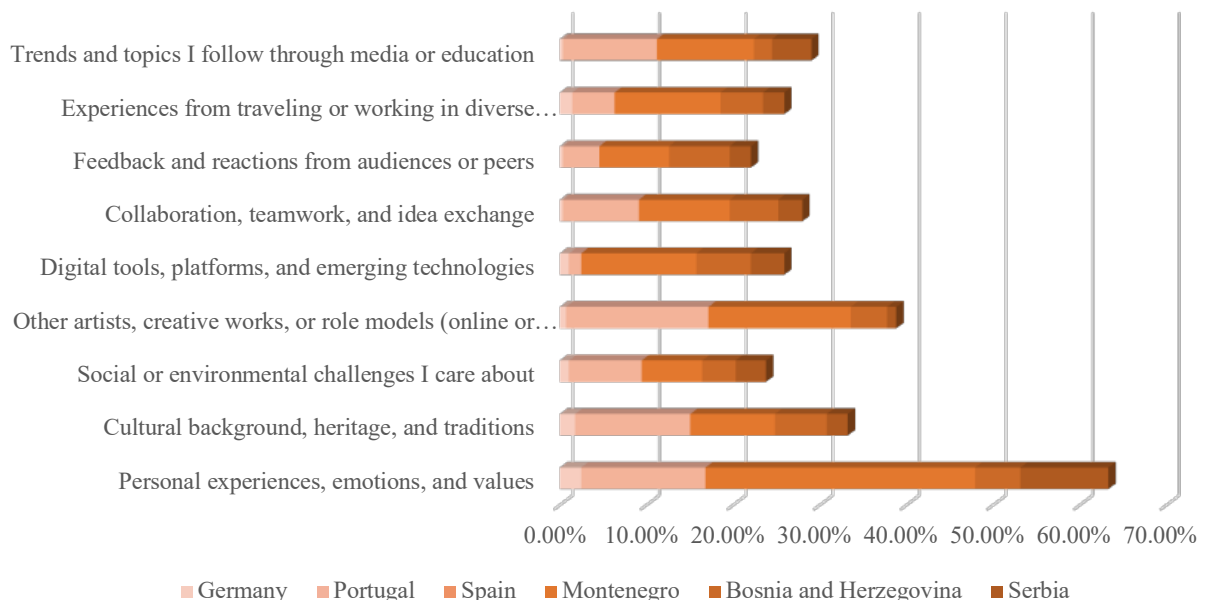
Formal education influences the professional approach of **93 respondents (22.41%)**, while **feedback received through practice** shapes decisions for **162 respondents (39.04%)**, underlining the interplay between structured learning and experiential refinement. **Experiences in multicultural environments (117; 28.19%)** and **inspiration from other fields (173; 41.69%)** further demonstrate that exposure to diverse perspectives and interdisciplinary influences enriches creative processes. The use of **technical skills and tools** informs **technical decisions for 84 respondents (20.24%)**, reflecting the integration of practical competencies into creative problem-solving.

Country-level variations emphasize distinct patterns across regions. In **Germany**, **personal interests (74; 17.83%)** and **consulting colleagues or role models (51; 12.29%)** dominate, with **market trends (33; 7.95%)** and **formal education (36; 8.67%)** also contributing. **Portugal** shows a balanced mix, with **personal interests (41; 9.88%)**, **collaboration (34; 8.19%)**, **feedback (27; 6.51%)**, and **inspiration from other fields (31; 7.47%)** as key factors. **Spain** stands out for strong emphasis on **collaboration (68; 16.39%)**, **inspiration from other fields (69; 16.63%)**, **feedback (63; 15.18%)**, and **personal interests (58; 13.98%)**, reflecting a highly interactive and skill-driven professional environment. **Montenegro** displays reliance

on **personal interests** (47; 11.33%), **collaboration** (30; 7.23%), **inspiration from other fields** (31; 7.47%), **market trends** (22; 5.30%), highlighting a similar trend with slightly lower absolute numbers. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** shows moderate contributions across multiple factors, with **personal interests** (33; 7.95%), **collaboration** (24; 5.78%), **market trends** (25; 6.02%), and **consulting role models** (28; 6.75%) as prominent influences. **Serbia** presents smaller absolute counts due to sample size, but **personal interests** (14; 3.37%) and **feedback** (10; 2.41%) remain the most cited factors.

Overall, the data illustrates that **creative professionals’ decisions are shaped by a combination of intrinsic motivation, peer and mentor influence, practical experience, collaborative exchange, responsiveness to market demands, and technical competencies.** While personal interests remain dominant, **feedback mechanisms, market awareness, and interdisciplinary inspiration** are also essential, emphasizing that professional creativity develops at the intersection of self-driven exploration and external engagement with the creative ecosystem.

Sources of Inspiration for Creative Work Among Respondents Without Work Experience (N=286) Across Six Countries



The analysis of **286 early-career creative professionals without work experience** reveals that **personal experiences, emotions, and values** are the dominant source of inspiration, cited by **181 respondents (63.29%)**, emphasizing the importance of intrinsic motivation and self-reflection in shaping creative output. Following closely, inspiration from **other artists, creative works, or role models** (111; 38.81%) and **trends and topics followed through media or education** (83; 29.02%) demonstrate the significant role of external influences and contemporary discourse in guiding creative ideas. **Collaboration, teamwork, and idea exchange** and **feedback and reactions from audiences or peers** are also important, with **80 (27.97%)** and **63 (22.03%)** respondents, respectively, highlighting the interactive and socially responsive nature of early-stage creative work.

Cultural, social, and technological factors are less dominant but still notable: **cultural background, heritage, and traditions** inspire **95 respondents (33.22%)**, **social or environmental challenges** motivate **68 (23.78%)**, and **digital tools, platforms, and emerging technologies** inform **74 respondents (25.87%)**, reflecting how exposure to both local and

global contexts contributes to creative orientation. Experiences from traveling or working in diverse environments influence **74 respondents (25.87%)**, illustrating the value of cross-cultural exposure in forming perspectives.

Country-level patterns highlight clear regional differences. In **Montenegro**, early-career creatives report the strongest reliance on **personal experiences, emotions, and values (89; 31.12%)**, followed by **inspiration from other artists and role models (47; 16.43%)**, **digital tools (38; 13.29%)**, **collaboration (30; 10.49%)**, and **trends or topics through media (32; 11.19%)**, demonstrating a highly personal yet socially connected creative approach. **Portugal** shows a similar pattern, with **personal experiences (41; 14.34%)**, **role models (47; 16.43%)**, **cultural heritage (38; 13.29%)**, **collaboration (25; 8.74%)**, and **trends (31; 10.84%)** as key motivators. **Germany** reports lower absolute numbers, but **personal experiences (7; 2.45%)**, **multicultural exposure (4; 1.40%)**, and **cultural heritage (5; 1.75%)** remain relevant. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** emphasizes **personal experiences (15; 5.24%)**, **role models (12; 4.20%)**, **collaboration (16; 5.59%)**, and **feedback from audiences (20; 6.99%)**, showing a balanced distribution across multiple sources. **Serbia** identifies **personal experiences (29; 10.14%)** and **trends (13; 4.55%)** as key inspirations, with moderate contributions from collaboration and trends. Spain did not provide responses for this cohort.

Overall, the findings highlight that **early-career creatives draw inspiration from a combination of intrinsic motivations, role models, peer interaction, digital and technological exposure, and engagement with cultural and social issues**. Personal experiences remain the cornerstone, while external feedback, collaboration, and digital tools provide important scaffolding for developing creative practices and exploring innovative directions.

5.3 Support Systems and Resources

Understanding the availability, accessibility, and impact of support systems and resources is essential for mapping how creative professionals develop their careers, acquire new skills, and engage meaningfully in the sector. This study examines both emerging and experienced creatives across Germany, Portugal, Spain, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, focusing on the variety of financial, educational, technical, social, and emotional support mechanisms that shape professional trajectories. By analyzing how creatives navigate formal and informal support, the research provides insight into the interplay between structural opportunities, personal strategies, and professional resilience, including the development of intercultural competence, digital literacy, and entrepreneurial skills in increasingly globalized creative environments.

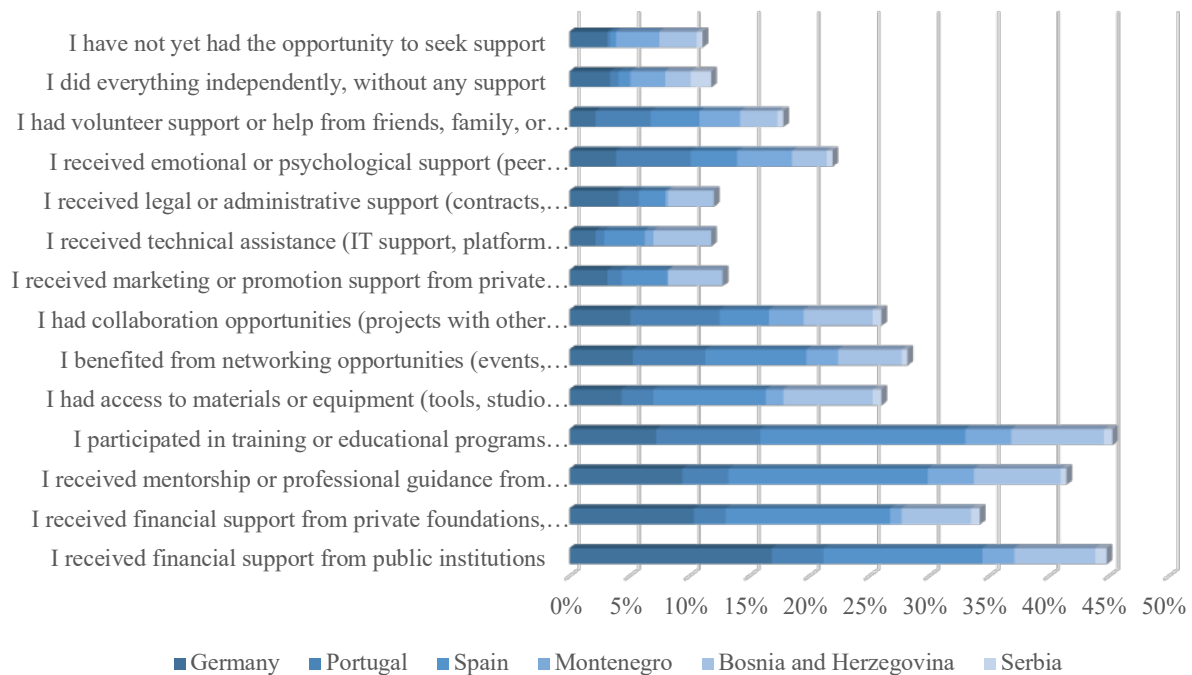
The dataset encompasses 701 respondents, capturing both self-perceived competencies and experiences with support systems, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the diversity and uneven distribution of resources. Support mechanisms range from financial assistance, mentorship, and formal training to networking, collaboration, access to tools and infrastructure, legal and administrative guidance, marketing and promotional support, and emotional or volunteer assistance, highlighting the multifaceted nature of career development in creative industries. Analysis reveals country-level differences in both availability and uptake, illustrating where gaps exist and where targeted interventions could enhance inclusivity, professional growth, and the broader social and cultural impact of creative work.

Specifically, the analysis considers the distribution and use of support mechanisms among respondents with and without prior work experience, the balance between informal networks (family, peers, and personal mentors) and institutional support, and the role of these systems in

motivating engagement, skill-building, career aspirations, and entrepreneurial pathways. Quantitative findings are complemented by qualitative insights from focus groups, which shed light on how creatives experience, apply, and perceive support in practice. These discussions reveal the centrality of mentorship, scenario-based training, access to digital tools, and emotional support in shaping career trajectories, while also highlighting structural gaps in regions with fewer formal programs.

By integrating survey data with focus group narratives, the study illustrates that structured and non-structured support not only facilitates technical skill acquisition but also fosters soft skills such as communication, collaboration, adaptability, critical thinking, creativity, and emotional intelligence, which are vital for navigating competitive, multicultural, and digitally mediated creative landscapes. This combined approach offers a holistic understanding of how support mechanisms influence career outcomes, intercultural competence, and professional resilience, providing evidence to guide capacity-building strategies, policy interventions, and sustainable development initiatives within the creative sector.

Sources of Support for Creative Work Among Professionals with Work Experience (N=415) Across Six Countries



The analysis of responses from 415 creative professionals with work experience illustrates the diversity and accessibility of **support mechanisms** that contribute to the development of creative careers. Support ranges from financial assistance and mentorship to educational programs, networking, collaboration, and personal guidance, though the intensity and types of support differ across countries.

Financial support emerged as a key enabler. Overall, 186 respondents (44.82%) received **funding from public institutions** such as ministries, municipalities, or cultural offices, while 142 respondents (34.22%) benefited from **private foundations, individual donors, or sponsorships**. Country-specific data show **Germany** leading in **public support (70; 16.87%)**, followed by **Spain (55; 13.25%)** and **Bosnia and Herzegovina (28; 6.75%)**. **Private**

financial support was most reported in **Spain (57; 13.73%)**, **Germany (43; 10.36%)**, and **Bosnia and Herzegovina (24; 5.78%)**. **Portugal** and **Montenegro** had smaller shares of **financial support**, reflecting more limited institutional backing, and **Serbia** recorded the lowest counts (**public: 4; 0.96%**, **private: 3; 0.72%**), likely due to smaller sample size and fewer structured programs.

Mentorship and professional guidance was received by **172 respondents (41.45%)**, underscoring the importance of advice from independent mentors, experienced creative professionals, or professional associations. **Spain (69; 16.63%)** and **Germany (39; 9.40%)** showed the highest engagement with mentorship, while **Montenegro (16; 3.86%)** and **Serbia (2; 0.48%)** reported lower participation. In **Portugal**, **focus group participants** highlighted limited access to mentorship, noting that “**You’re lucky if someone more experienced takes you under their wing — otherwise, you just guess your way through.**”. Closely linked, **188 respondents (45.30%)** participated in **training or educational programs** organized by universities, incubators, accelerators, or educational institutions. **Spain** again led (**71; 17.11%**) with **Germany (30; 7.23%)** and **Portugal (36; 8.67%)** also reporting meaningful engagement, highlighting the role of formal skills development in career progression.

Access to materials, tools, and infrastructure was reported by **108 respondents (26.02%)**, mainly in **Bosnia and Herzegovina (31; 7.47%)** and **Spain (39; 9.40%)**, while **networking opportunities** through peer communities, professional groups, or online platforms (e.g., Patreon, Behance, Etsy) were leveraged by **117 respondents (28.19%)**. **Collaboration opportunities through professional associations, unions, or community networks** were reported by **108 respondents (26.02%)**, with **Bosnia and Herzegovina (24; 5.78%)** and **Portugal (31; 7.47%)** leading.

Support also extended to specialized professional services. **Marketing or promotion support** from companies, sponsors, or online platforms reached **53 respondents (12.77%)**, **technical assistance** (IT support, platform setup) was reported by **49 respondents (11.81%)**, and **legal or administrative support** (contracts, copyright, business setup) by **50 respondents (12.05%)**. **Emotional or psychological support**—often provided by friends, family, or peer groups—was acknowledged by **91 respondents (21.93%)**, while **volunteer support from personal networks** was reported by **74 respondents (17.83%)**.

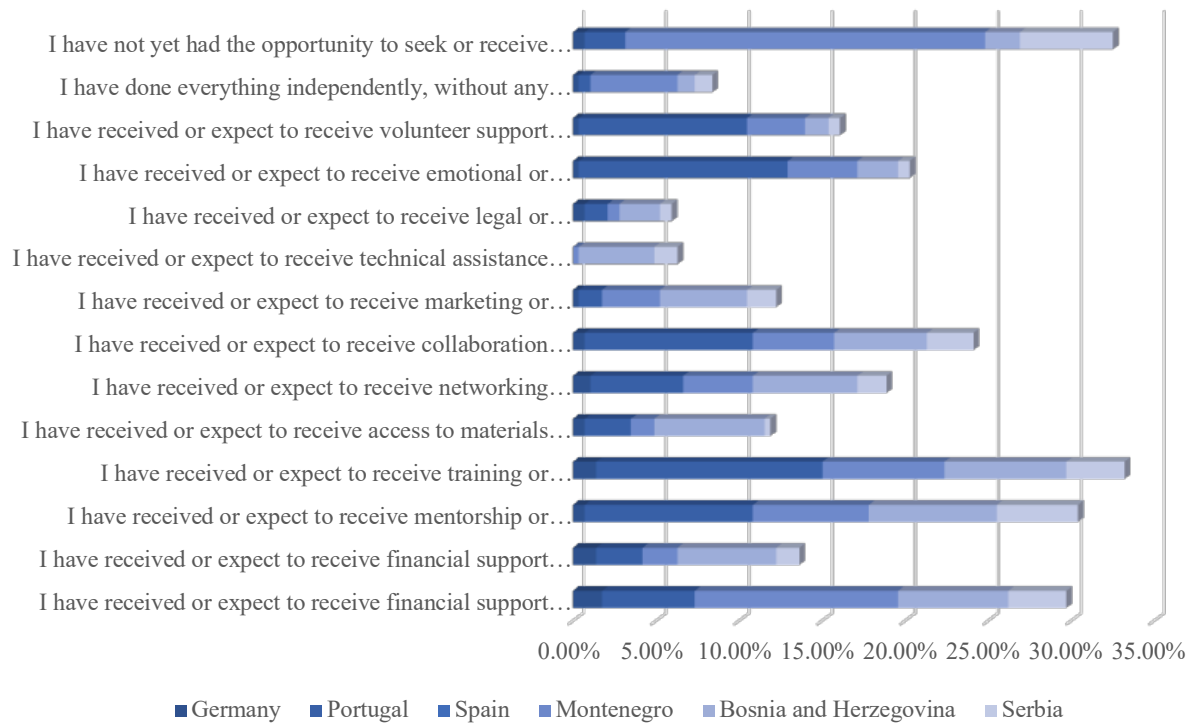
Despite the availability of these mechanisms, a notable proportion of respondents still operates independently: **49 respondents (11.81%)** reported **managing their creative work without any support**, and **46 respondents (11.08%)** **had not yet sought support**, indicating gaps in awareness or accessibility.

Country-level variations highlight regional differences in the structure and uptake of support mechanisms: **Germany** showed strong engagement with **public funding (70; 16.87%)**, **private funding (43; 10.36%)**, and **mentorship (39; 9.40%)**, reflecting robust institutional and peer networks. **Spain** demonstrated the highest use of **public (55; 13.25%)** and **private financial support (57; 13.73%)**, **mentorship (69; 16.63%)**, and **structured educational programs (71; 17.11%)**, illustrating the role of diverse support streams in a competitive creative ecosystem. **Portugal** benefited from **structured educational programs (36; 8.67%)**, **networking opportunities (25; 6.02%)**, and **collaboration (31; 7.47%)**. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** reported **moderate engagement across funding, mentorship, and networking**, while **Montenegro** had **limited access to formal programs** but showed relatively **high reliance on emotional or personal support (19; 4.58%)**. **Serbia’s** overall lower counts reflect both smaller sample size and constrained access to structured support, though family and peer support still play a crucial role.

Overall, the data depict a **multi-dimensional support landscape** where creative professionals rely on a mix of financial backing, mentorship, formal training, networking, collaboration, and personal encouragement. Country-specific disparities suggest the need for **targeted policies**

and programs to improve access to structured support mechanisms, ensure equitable opportunities for all creative professionals, and strengthen the sustainability of the creative sector.

Types and Sources of Support Received or Expected by Creatives Without Working Experience (N=286) Across Six Countries (Multiple Responses)



The analysis of 286 respondents without prior working experience reveals a complex and uneven landscape of support systems across the six surveyed countries. Overall, the data shows that young and inexperienced creatives primarily rely on institutional financial support, structured training programmes, access to materials and equipment, and community-based networks, while emotional, legal, and technical supports remain underutilised and unevenly accessible across regions.

Financial support from public institutions emerges as one of the most frequently received or expected forms of assistance, accounting for **29.72%** of all selections. This mechanism is particularly significant in **Montenegro (35; 12.24%)**, **Bosnia and Herzegovina (19; 6.64%)**, and **Portugal (16; 5.59%)**, where young creatives rely strongly on government-funded cultural grants, municipal programmes, and formal support channels. **Germany (5; 1.75%)** and **Serbia (10; 3.50%)** report far lower levels. **Private financial support**—including donations, foundations, and individual sponsors—has an even stronger presence at **13.64%**, heavily driven by **Portugal (8; 2.80%)** and **Bosnia and Herzegovina (17; 5.94%)**, while **Montenegro (6; 2.10%)**, **Serbia (4; 1.40%)**, and **Germany (4; 1.40%)** demonstrate smaller but notable contributions.

Mentorship and professional guidance represent **30.42%** of total selections, with **Portugal (29; 10.14%)** and **Bosnia and Herzegovina (22; 7.69%)** emerging as the strongest contributor, suggesting a more active ecosystem of creative associations or informal mentoring

networks. **Montenegro (20; 6.99%)**, **Serbia (14; 4.90%)**, and **Germany (2; 0.70%)** report relatively lower engagement.

Training and educational programmes—including courses, workshops, and bootcamps organised by universities and incubators—are a key support mechanism (**95; 33.22%**). **Portugal** leads with **13.64% (39)**, followed by **Montenegro (21; 7.34%)**, **Bosnia and Herzegovina (21; 7.34%)**, and **Serbia (10; 3.50%)**. Germany contributes **1.40% (4)**, indicating access but at a modest scale.

Access to materials, equipment, software, or studio space—provided by NGOs, CSOs, or private companies—represents a substantial **11.89%** of responses. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** stands out as the strongest provider (**19; 6.64%**), followed by **Portugal (8; 2.80%)**, **Montenegro (4; 1.40%)**, **Germany (2; 0.70%)**, and **Serbia (1; 0.35%)**.

Networking opportunities represent **18.88%** of all selections, with **Portugal (16; 5.59%)** and **Bosnia and Herzegovina (18; 6.29%)** leading. **Collaboration opportunities** follow a similar regional pattern (**69; 24.13%**), with **Bosnia and Herzegovina (16; 5.59%)** and **Portugal (29; 10.14%)** as key contributors. These patterns underline the importance of peer-based creative communities and collective work culture in the Western Balkans.

Marketing and promotion support totals **12.24%**, with **Bosnia and Herzegovina (15; 5.24%)** and **Montenegro (10; 3.50%)** representing an exceptionally strong share, highlighting its well-developed digital creative sector and active online creative communities. **Portugal (4; 1.40%)**, **Serbia (5; 1.75%)** and **Germany (1; 0.35%)** show smaller contributions. **Technical assistance** follows at **6.29%**, with **Bosnia and Herzegovina (13; 4.55%)** and **Serbia (4; 1.40%)** taking leading positions.

Legal and administrative support—critical for contracts, copyrights, and business registration—remains limited at **5.94%**, but **Bosnia and Herzegovina** demonstrates the **highest share (7; 2.45%)**. **Portugal (4; 1.40%)**, **Germany (2; 0.70%)**, **Montenegro (2; 0.70%)**, and **Serbia (2; 0.70%)** show modest presence.

Emotional or psychological support remains medium in individual country percentages (0.00–12.59%), but collectively reaches **20.28% (58 responses)**, showing that although recognised, these support systems are structurally weak. **Volunteer support or informal assistance** shows a bit lower pattern, totalling **16.08%** overall—driven overwhelmingly by **Portugal (29; 10.14%)**, followed by **Montenegro (10; 3.50%)**, **Bosnia and Herzegovina (4; 1.40%)**, and **Serbia (2; 0.70%)**. **Germany** contributes **0.35% (1)**.

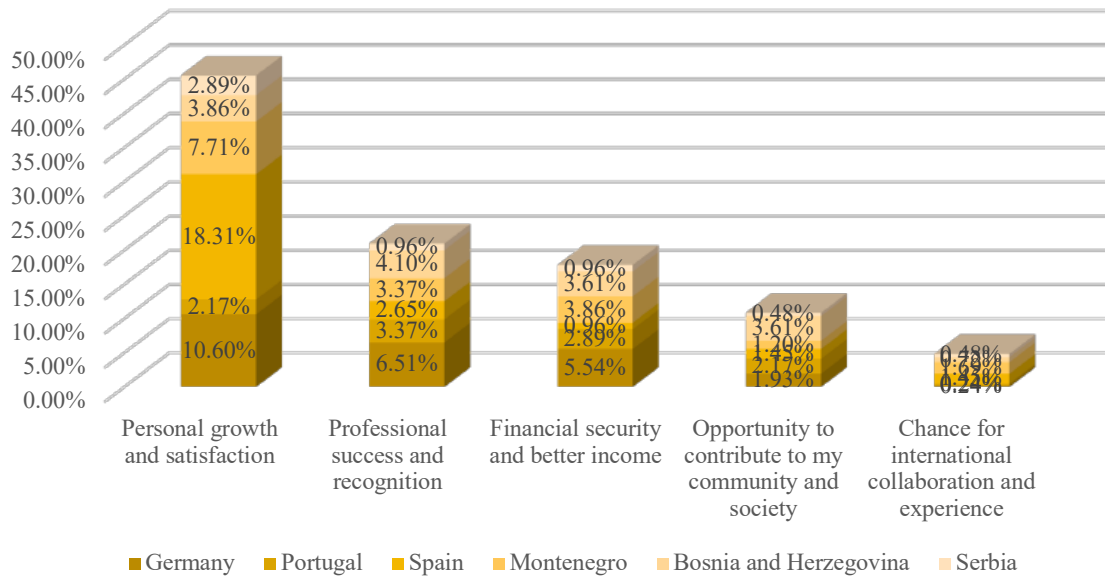
A striking finding is that a significant share of respondents (**93; 32.52%**) report not yet having had the opportunity to seek support or having done everything independently (**24; 8.39%**). **Montenegro** contributes the **highest portion (62; 21.68% and 15; 5.24%)**, followed by **Serbia (16; 5.59% and 3; 1.05%)**, **Portugal (7; 2.45% and 2; 0.70%)**, **Bosnia and Herzegovina (6; 2.10% and 3; 1.05%)**, and **Germany (2; 0.70% and 1; 0.35%)**. This underscores the structural gaps and limited accessibility of formal support mechanisms for emerging creatives, especially in smaller or less developed creative markets.

Overall, the dataset demonstrates clear regional differences: Western Balkan countries such as Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia rely more heavily on public institutions, informal networks, and ad-hoc community support, reflecting ecosystems where both personal and institutional assistance compensate for systemic gaps. Portugal, by contrast, shows the most diverse and well-developed support system, combining strong institutional programmes with private-sector engagement, university-led training ecosystems, and active creative communities. Germany and Spain appear underrepresented in the dataset, likely due to small sample sizes rather than an absence of support infrastructures.

These insights highlight both the opportunities and the persistent challenges faced by young creatives entering the labour market, emphasising the need for stronger mentorship structures,

expanded mental health support, improved access to technical and legal assistance, and the development of sustainable and diversified funding models across all regions.

**Motivations for Career Development Among Experienced Creatives (N=415)
Across Six Countries**



The analysis of 415 **respondents with prior working experience** shows clear and consistent motivational patterns across all countries, highlighting both universal drivers and strong regional distinctions. **Personal growth and satisfaction** emerge as the dominant motivation, accounting for **189 responses (45.54%)**, and representing the primary reason creatives continue developing their skills and careers. This internal drive is especially prominent in **Spain (18.31%)** and **Germany (10.60%)**, with notable contributions from Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Portugal, and Serbia. Across all six countries, creativity appears fundamentally anchored in self-expression, personal fulfilment, and the desire for continual improvement.

The second strongest motivator is **professional success and recognition** with **87 responses (20.96%)**, reflecting a significant aspiration for visibility, credibility, and acknowledgment in the creative field. **Germany** leads in this category with **6.51%**, followed by **Bosnia and Herzegovina (17; 4.10%)**, **Montenegro (14; 3.37%)**, **Portugal (14; 3.37%)**, and **Spain (11; 2.65%)**. **Serbia** contributes minimally (**4; 0.96%**), suggesting fewer structured pathways for formal recognition in its local creative ecosystem. This indicates that while recognition matters everywhere, it becomes especially important in environments where institutional support or industry structures create clear benchmarks for career progression.

Financial security and better income motivate **74 respondents (17.83%)**, but the importance of financial stability varies by national context. In the Western Balkans, especially **Montenegro (16; 3.86%)** and **Bosnia and Herzegovina (15; 3.61%)**, income-related motivations are more pronounced, reflecting economic precarity within the creative sector. **Germany** also shows a notable share (**23; 5.54%**), pinpointing that even in stronger economies, creatives still seek better financial conditions. Conversely, **Spain (4; 0.96%)** and **Serbia (4; 0.96%)** show relatively low financial motivation, and **Portugal** occupies a moderate

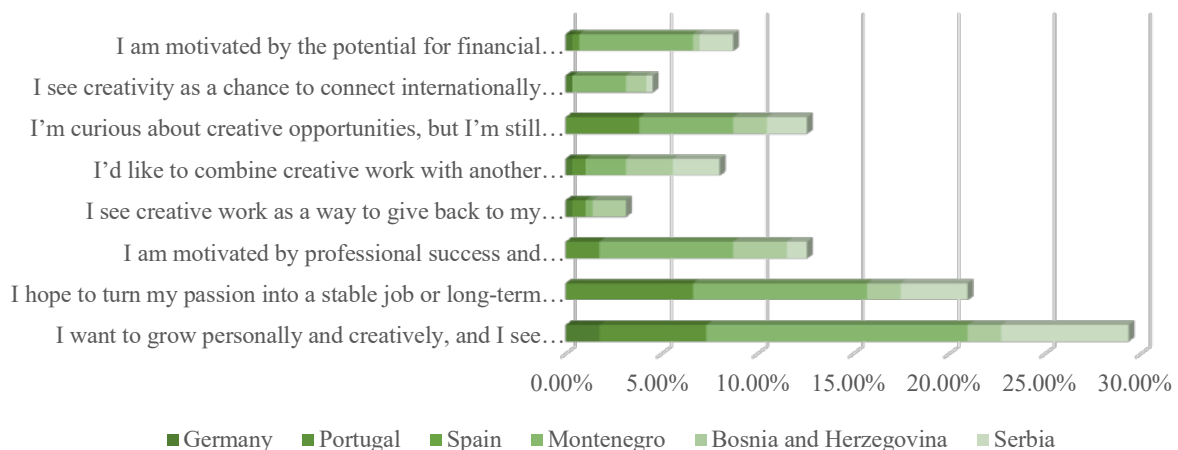
position (12; 2.89%). These values highlight how financial motivations correlate closely with local market security and opportunities for sustainable creative employment.

The motivation to **contribute to community and society** accounts for 45 responses (10.84%). This socially driven orientation is strongest in **Bosnia and Herzegovina (15; 3.61%)** and present in **Spain (6; 1.45%), Portugal (9; 2.17%), Montenegro (5; 1.20%),** and **Germany (8; 1.93%)**. **Serbia** again shows the lowest share (2; 0.48%). This pattern is especially reflective of the Western Balkan context, where creativity often intersects with cultural preservation, community identity, and grassroots engagement.

Finally, **international collaboration and experience** represent the smallest category with 20 responses (4.82%). Interest in international mobility is most visible in **Montenegro (7; 1.69%),** followed by **Spain (6; 1.45%)** and **Bosnia and Herzegovina (3; 0.72%)**. **Germany and Portugal** report minimal interest (1; 0.24% each), suggesting they may already have easier access to international networks and therefore see global opportunities as less aspirational. **Serbia** reports 0.48% (2), again indicating limited accessible pathways for international engagement.

Overall, the dataset reveals a clear motivational hierarchy: intrinsic motivations dominate in all countries, followed by aspirations for recognition and financial stability. Western Balkan countries show more balanced motivational profiles shaped by economic realities and community-oriented values, while Spain and Germany display strong intrinsic motives linked to mature creative ecosystems. Portugal remains relatively evenly distributed across categories, reflecting a stable and diverse creative landscape. International aspirations remain modest but relevant, particularly in smaller markets seeking greater exposure and mobility beyond national boundaries.

Motivations and Five-Year Aspirations Among Those Without Working Experience (N=286) Across Six Countries



The dataset for **respondents without working experience** (286 participants) provides a detailed picture of how young and emerging creatives across six countries think about their future in the creative sector. Their motivations and five-year aspirations cluster around personal growth, stability, recognition, community engagement, hybrid careers, curiosity, international exposure, and financial independence, but the intensity and distribution of these motivations differ significantly across regions.

Overall, **personal and creative growth** is the single strongest driver, accounting for 29.37% of all responses (84 participants). Montenegro leads in this category with 39 respondents

(13.64%), followed by **Portugal (16; 5.59%)** and **Serbia (19; 6.64%)**. These countries clearly show a creative youth cohort that is eager to develop skills, experiment, and remain in a learning phase, which signals both ambition and a perceived need for additional structured support.

The second-largest cluster of motivations—**hoping to turn creative passion into a stable job or long-term collaboration**—represents **20.98%** of responses (**60 respondents**). This is especially prevalent in **Montenegro (26; 9.09%)** and **Portugal (19; 6.64%)**, reflecting a strong desire for professionalization within creative industries, but also perhaps a lack of existing stable pathways. **Germany** and **Bosnia and Herzegovina** report very low values here, but this mirrors their small sample size rather than indicating weaker interest.

Professional success and recognition with the goal of working independently gathers **12.59%** of all answers (**36 respondents**). Montenegro again stands out with **20 (6.99%)**, confirming it as the most aspirational country in the dataset—its respondents show a strong entrepreneurial mindset and readiness to position themselves as independent creators.

Community-oriented motivations are present but modest. Only **9 respondents (3.15%)** see creative work primarily as a way to give back to their community—although **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Portugal** contain most of these responses.

Hybrid career paths also emerge as a meaningful trend. **23 respondents (8.04%)** want to **combine creative work with another profession**, with the highest numbers in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Serbia (7; 2.45% each)**. This reflects economic pragmatism and the recognition that creative sectors in the region often struggle to provide stable full-time employment for beginners.

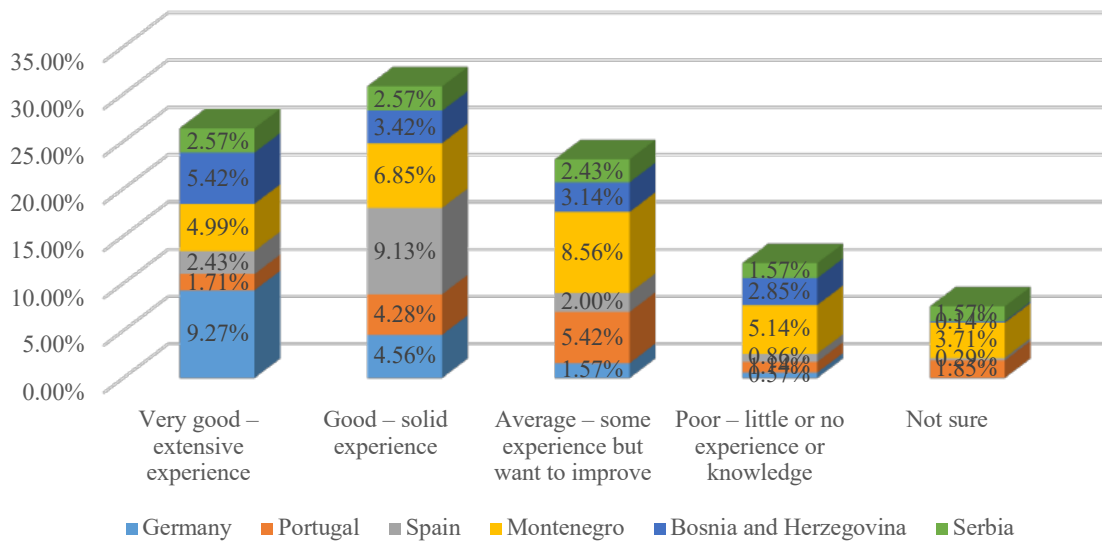
Curiosity-driven respondents—those who are exploring creative careers but still uncertain—account for **12.59%** of the dataset (**36 respondents**). **Montenegro (14; 4.90%)** and **Portugal (11; 3.85%)** dominate this group, indicating a need for clearer guidance, mentorship, career services, and structured entry points into the sector.

International aspirations are less common but still significant: **13 respondents (4.55%)** see creativity as a pathway to cross-cultural learning and global collaboration. This motivation is most visible in **Montenegro (8; 2.80%)** and **Bosnia and Herzegovina (3; 1.05%)**, aligning with the broader trend of emerging creatives looking for mobility and exposure.

Finally, **financial independence through creative work** motivates **25 respondents (8.74%)**. Although not dominant, its presence suggests initial awareness of economic potential in the creative industries—particularly in **Montenegro (17; 5.94%)** and **Serbia (5; 1.75%)**.

In sum, the data reveals a creative generation that is motivated primarily by personal development and long-term career stability, but also increasingly aware of entrepreneurial opportunities, international mobility, and the potential social impact of creativity. Montenegro emerges as the most dynamic and aspirational country across almost all indicators, while Portugal demonstrates a balanced distribution of motivations. Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina show consistent but smaller groups, and Germany's low figures stem largely from a very small sample size. This motivational landscape highlights a strong need for structured learning opportunities, mentorship, professional pathways, and international networking to harness the aspirations of young creatives across the region.

Self-Assessment of Knowledge and Ability to Work in International or Multicultural Teams (N=701) Across Six Countries



The dataset on **intercultural and international teamwork competence**, based on **701 respondents across six countries**, provides a detailed picture of how creatives assess their **readiness to work in multicultural and international environments**. Overall, more than half of respondents report strong skills: **26.39% (185 respondents) rate their knowledge and ability as very good with extensive experience**, while **30.81% (216 respondents) describe their skills as good with solid experience**. This means that **57.20% of the full sample already feels comfortable operating in diverse professional settings**, suggesting a solid foundation for international collaboration.

Country-level data highlight significant differences. **Germany shows the highest number of respondents with very good skills (65, 9.27%)**, and an additional 32 (4.56%) report good experience, reflecting **broad exposure to international teamwork**. Spain also demonstrates strong competence: **17 respondents (2.43%) report very good experience and 64 (9.13%) report good experience**. Portugal’s respondents are more concentrated in mid-level experience: **38 (5.42%) report average skills and a desire to improve, 30 (4.28%) report good skills, 12 (1.71%) very good, and 13 (1.85%) remain unsure of their abilities**, indicating both exposure and gaps among young creatives.

In the Western Balkans, **Montenegro exhibits a wide distribution**, with 35 respondents (4.99%) reporting very good experience, 48 (6.85%) good, 60 (8.56%) average, 36 (5.14%) poor, and 26 (3.71%) unsure. **Focus group participants highlighted that working in international teams and through digitally mediated communication allows the exchange of diverse aesthetic approaches and cultural narratives, expanding their understanding of the social role of art**. Intercultural competencies are perceived not merely as adaptive skills but as tools for creating shared spaces of understanding and innovation. One participant noted, **“Intercultural communication between students and professors is key for the development of the faculty and the country,”** emphasizing the value of international experiences in shaping critical thinking and creative expression. Exchange programs with students and professors from EU countries and the United States provide access to new working methods, digital tools, and pedagogical approaches not always available locally, broadening professional repertoires and fostering cultural empathy. Returning participants apply these experiences locally, introducing fresh ideas, visual styles, and learning approaches, thereby

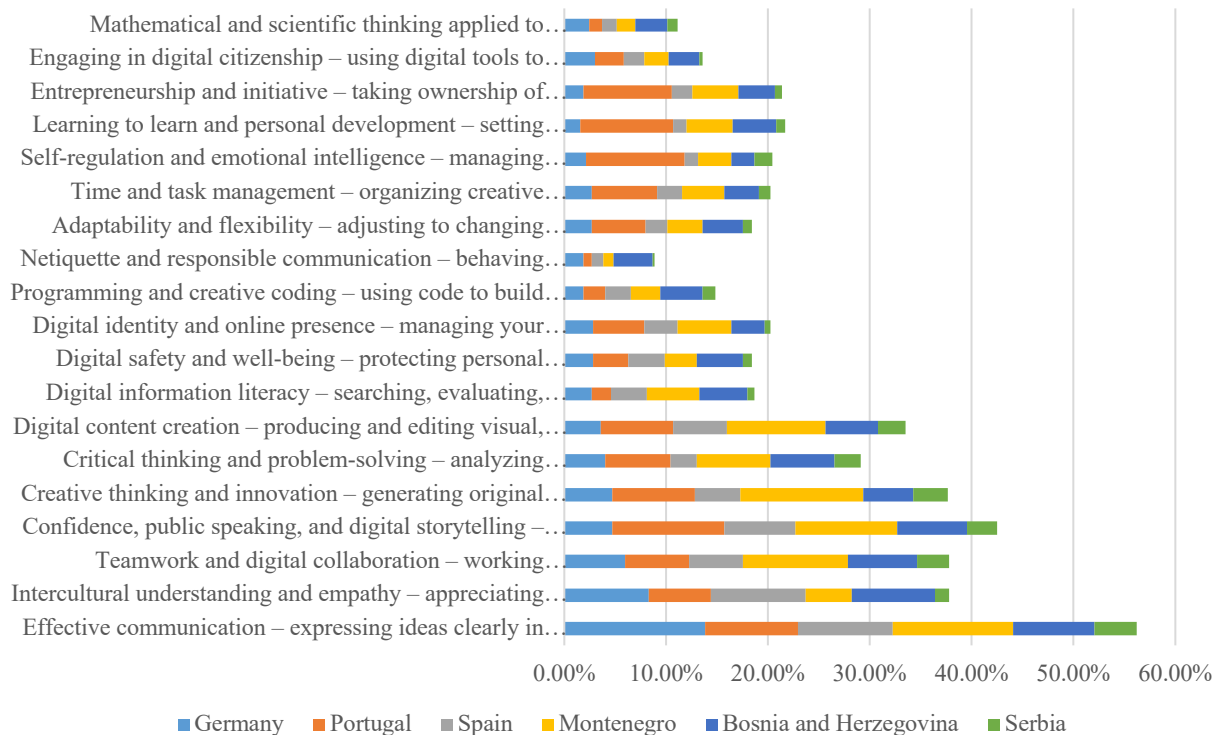
enriching domestic academic and cultural environments. As one respondent explained, “**Art itself is intercultural; every experience enriches perspective and creativity.**” These insights illustrate that intercultural competence involves both understanding others and developing self-reflection and adaptability, which are essential for producing socially engaged and globally aware creative work.

Bosnia and Herzegovina shows **38 respondents (5.42%) with very good skills, 24 (3.42%) good, 22 (3.14%) average, 20 (2.85%) poor, and 1 (0.14%) unsure**, reflecting similar disparities, with **focus groups** noting that **intercultural competence is increasingly relevant due to online work with international clients and audiences**. **Serbia** reports **18 respondents (2.57%) with very good skills, 18 (2.57%) good, 17 (2.43%) average, 11 (1.57%) poor, and 11 (1.57%) unsure**, indicating that **approximately 15% of respondents feel unprepared for multicultural teamwork**.

Across the full dataset, **23.11% (162 respondents) classify their skills as average, actively expressing a desire for improvement. Poor or minimal experience is reported by 12.13% (85 respondents), while 7.56% (53 respondents) are unsure**, underlining gaps in **exposure, mentorship, and practical opportunities**. These patterns reveal **structural barriers in several countries, particularly in the Western Balkans, where limited access to mobility programs, cross-cultural collaborations, and international networks restricts skill development for some emerging creatives**.

Taken together, the data demonstrate that while **a solid majority of respondents already possess strong international and intercultural competencies, substantial gaps remain. Montenegro, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina exhibit the most pronounced divides between experienced and inexperienced participants**. These findings underscore the need for **capacity-building measures such as exchange programs, cross-cultural workshops, multilingual training, and international residencies to bridge readiness gaps and equip young creatives with the competence needed to thrive in diverse global creative environments**.

Soft and Digital Competences Desired for Creative and Intercultural Development (701 respondents) Across Six Countries



The dataset on soft and digital competences, encompassing 701 respondents across Germany, Portugal, Spain, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, presents a comprehensive view of the skills creatives aim to develop in order to strengthen their careers and intercultural collaboration capacities. The responses reveal both widely shared priorities and significant country-level variations, reflecting differences in creative ecosystems, access to training, and exposure to international collaboration.

Effective communication emerges as the most desired skill, selected by **394 respondents (56.21%)**. This includes clear expression of ideas in person and online, with adaptation to different audiences. **Intercultural understanding and empathy** are equally important, chosen by **265 respondents (37.80%)**, highlighting a strong recognition that collaboration across cultural boundaries is essential in creative professions. Similarly, **teamwork and digital collaboration** are prioritized by **265 respondents (37.80%)**, indicating the importance of mastering collaborative tools and participating effectively in diverse, geographically distributed teams.

Confidence, public speaking, and digital storytelling are identified by **298 respondents (42.51%)** as key areas for development, reflecting the need to present creative ideas persuasively. **Creative thinking and innovation** are selected by **264 respondents (37.66%)**, showing that experimentation, originality, and risk-taking are central to respondents' professional ambitions. **Critical thinking and problem-solving** follow with **204 respondents (29.10%)**, highlighting a desire for skills in analyzing complex situations and generating solutions using both digital and non-digital methods.

Digital content creation—producing and editing visual, audio, textual, or multimedia content—is sought by **235 respondents (33.52%)**, while **digital information literacy**—searching, evaluating, and managing content responsibly—is selected by **131 respondents**

(18.69%). **Digital safety and well-being**, including mental health awareness and environmentally responsible technology use, is identified by **129 respondents (18.40%)**, and **managing digital identity and online presence** is desired by **142 respondents (20.26%)**, reflecting the necessity of professionalism and visibility in digital creative spaces. **Programming and creative coding** is noted by **104 respondents (14.84%)**, demonstrating interest in generative, interactive, or algorithmic creative projects, while **netiquette and responsible digital communication** is selected by **62 respondents (8.84%)**.

Adaptability and flexibility in adjusting to changing tools, workflows, and intercultural settings is selected by **129 respondents (18.40%)**, with **time and task management** following at **142 respondents (20.26%)**, showing the importance of practical organizational skills. **Self-regulation and emotional intelligence, learning to learn, entrepreneurship and initiative, engagement in digital citizenship, and applying mathematical and scientific thinking to creativity** are moderately represented (**78–152 respondents, 11.13%–21.68%**), reflecting awareness of cognitive, emotional, and strategic competencies needed for sustainable creative careers.

Country-level analysis shows clear variations in skill priorities across the six countries. **Germany** leads in **effective communication (97, 13.84%)** and **intercultural understanding (58, 8.27%)**, while **teamwork and digital collaboration** are less emphasized (**42, 5.99%**), suggesting respondents feel confident in collaborative contexts. **Portugal** prioritizes **confidence, public speaking, and digital storytelling (77, 10.98%)**, **creative thinking (57, 8.13%)**, and **self-regulation and emotional intelligence (68, 9.70%)**, with **effective communication (64, 9.13%)** and **learning to learn (64, 9.13%)** also important, reflecting strong institutional support and innovation hubs. **Spain** emphasizes **effective communication (65, 9.27%)** and **intercultural understanding (65, 9.27%)**, alongside **confidence (49, 6.99%)**, **teamwork (37, 5.28%)**, and **creative thinking (31, 4.42%)**, indicating focus on global collaboration and presentation skills. **Montenegro**, with the largest Western Balkan sample (205), shows high demand for **teamwork and digital collaboration (72; 10.27%)**, **creative thinking (85, 12.13%)**, and **confidence and storytelling (70, 9.99%)**, while **effective communication (83, 11.84%)** is also strong; other areas such as **digital content creation (68, 9.70%)**, **digital literacy (36, 5.14%)**, **learning to learn (32, 4.56%)**, and **entrepreneurship (32, 4.56%)** show room for growth. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** demonstrates balanced interest across soft and digital skills, notably **effective communication (56, 7.99%)**, **intercultural understanding (57, 8.13%)**, **teamwork (48, 6.85%)**, **confidence (48, 6.85%)**, **critical thinking (44, 6.28%)**, and **digital content creation (36, 5.14%)**. **Serbia** reports generally lower numbers, with **effective communication (29, 4.14%)** and **creative thinking (24, 3.42%)** leading, followed by **teamwork (22; 3.14%)**, **confidence (21, 3.00%)**, **critical thinking (18, 2.57%)**, and **intercultural understanding (10, 1.43%)**, while **programming (9, 1.28%)** and **digital content creation (19, 2.71%)** remain underrepresented, highlighting gaps in training and access to advanced creative tools.

Focus groups complement survey findings on soft and digital skills among 701 creative professionals across Germany, Portugal, Spain, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, providing detailed insight into how these competences are applied and developed in practice.

In **Spain**, participants emphasized the **transformative role of AI and digital tools**. They noted that AI-enhanced tools significantly improve efficiency: **“Any digital tool with AI is much more useful than before - anything that has AI inside it is 100% more effective than the same service without it. Prompting makes all the difference.”** They also expressed a mixture of fascination and caution: **“ChatGPT feels like aliens invading our lives... but at the same time, I can’t live without it.”** Practical challenges related to **software compatibility** were highlighted: **“Everyone is expected to know the basics - Word, Google Docs, PowerPoint.**

But sometimes formats don't transfer well between Mac and Microsoft." Soft skills were repeatedly stressed as essential for career development: **"Communication is essential - you have to be able to sell yourself and your work better as an artist,"** and **"critical thinking is crucial for deciding what to communicate and to whom."** Participants also reflected on teamwork in digital environments, noting: **"Teamwork is essential, but creating together online is still complicated - it's hard to make art in real time,"** and emphasized the value of intercultural thinking: **"learning to think and create beyond your own cultural frame."** In Serbia, soft skills are framed as **practical survival tools**, developed through experience rather than formal education. Participants stressed **communication, collaboration, presentation, storytelling, empathy, problem-solving, adaptability, patience, negotiation, resilience, flexibility, precision, and creativity** as essential to navigate client relations, unpaid work, and professional uncertainty. Many noted that these skills are acquired after encountering challenges like miscommunication, overwork, or underpayment.

German participants stressed that **soft skills are central to sustainable careers**, including **negotiation, client communication, boundary-setting, handling feedback, conflict resolution, time and stress management, and presenting work convincingly**. They highlighted that these abilities are crucial for **transforming creative talent into fair pay and long-term collaboration**. Discussions also included **digital skills, AI, mental health, community, and non-formal learning**, linking professional competence to broader social and ethical considerations.

In Montenegro, participants reported strong digital proficiency, particularly with **Adobe software (Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign)**, essential for graphic design, typography, and visual materials. Some use **Figma for UX/UI design**, while others employ **3D software and digital tools** to complement traditional techniques such as printmaking on stone, zinc, and silk. These practices enable the **preservation of cultural heritage and experimentation with new media**. Montenegrin participants highlighted **communication, teamwork, self-management, organization, and emotional intelligence** as central to professional success. They observed: **"Graphic designers are least designers, and most managers, communicators, and marketers."** Teamwork was emphasized: **"Teamwork and flexibility are necessary in all engagements."** Emotional intelligence and self-regulation were also considered vital: **"It is important to remove personal emotions from the conversation for productive solutions."** In Portugal, participants emphasized **digital literacy, self-management, financial literacy, creativity, curiosity, and critical thinking**. Practical skills for navigating professional realities were stressed: **"You need to know how to search for information, issue invoices, and sell yourself — not just create."** The value of **time and freedom to explore in art education** was noted: **"Art education is about time and space to create, not just technique."** Soft skills such as **communication, negotiation, self-organization, and self-care** were seen as essential but seldom formally taught: **"Self-management means knowing your limits. I worked without rest, accepted disrespect, and burned out. Now I'm my own boss; I have to set boundaries."** Participants also highlighted **interpersonal and collaborative skills** as crucial for professional resilience.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, soft skills were regarded as **essential professional survival tools**, often learned after negative experiences rather than formal education. Competences included **negotiation, setting boundaries, managing client expectations, responding to feedback, conflict resolution, and mental health protection**. Participants advocated for **scenario-based and practice-oriented training**, emphasizing the real-world applicability of soft skills in creative professions.

Across all countries, **soft and digital skills were viewed as strategies for career resilience, professional self-advocacy, and creative autonomy**. Digital competencies include **content creation, digital literacy, UX/UI design, 3D and hybrid techniques, and AI-assisted tools**,

while soft skills cover **communication, teamwork, confidence, critical thinking, self-management, emotional intelligence, and adaptability**. Focus groups highlighted that these skills are cultivated through **practical experience, non-formal learning, and reflective practice**, not solely through formal education. Participants linked these competencies to **career sustainability, international collaboration, and personal well-being**, emphasizing their role in thriving in **digitally mediated, collaborative, and global creative environments**.

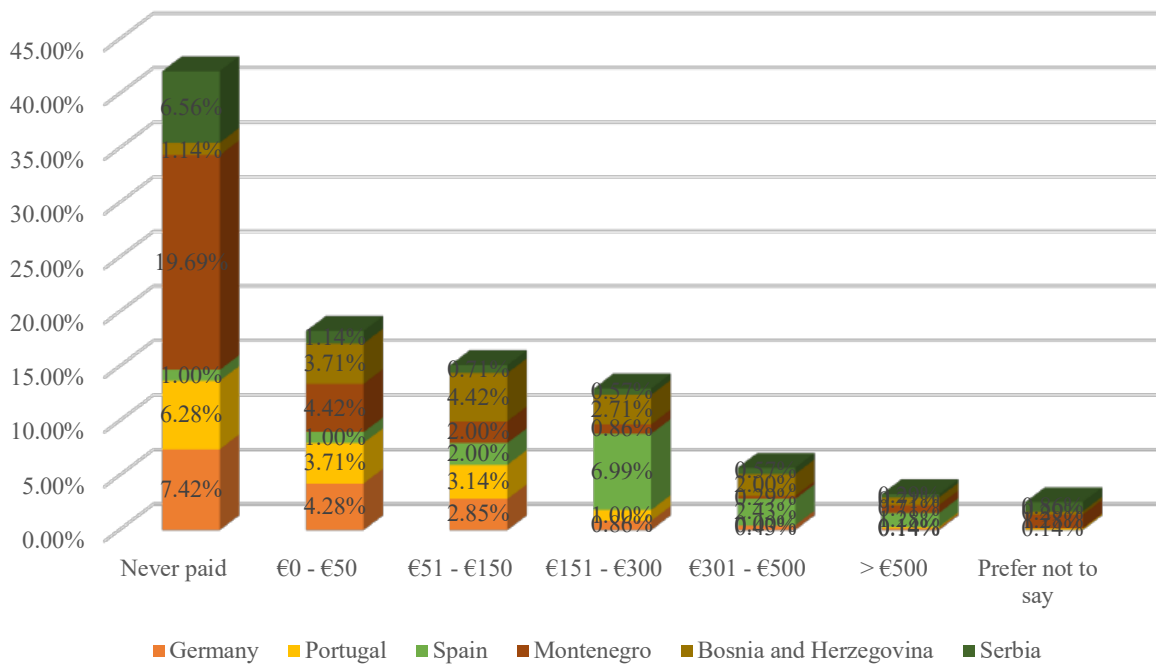
Survey data align with qualitative insights: **effective communication, intercultural understanding, teamwork, confidence, creative thinking, critical thinking, digital literacy, and self-management** dominate as priorities. Notably, Western Balkan countries, particularly **Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia**, show lower absolute numbers and greater need for targeted interventions. Capacity-building programs, including **mentorship, cross-border exchanges, scenario-based workshops, and access to advanced digital tools**, are crucial for bridging these gaps and ensuring that emerging creatives can fully participate in **global creative industries**.

5.4 Preferences and Challenges in Non-Formal Learning

This section examines the attitudes, motivations, and obstacles faced by creatives in engaging with non-formal education and training. It explores preferences regarding learning formats, approaches, and program participation, while also addressing practical, financial, and time-related constraints that shape involvement. The analysis combines quantitative survey data with qualitative insights gathered through focus groups, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of both statistical trends and lived experiences across participating countries.

The findings presented in the following subsections draw on responses related to willingness to financially invest in courses and training, interest in soft skills and intercultural communication programs, preferred learning methods, and the amount of time respondents are able to dedicate to skill development. By integrating survey results with focus group reflections, this section identifies both structural barriers—such as affordability, accessibility, and workload—and motivational factors influencing participation. Together, these insights inform the design of non-formal learning interventions that are context-sensitive, inclusive, and responsive to the real conditions faced by young creatives in different national environments.

Willingness to Invest in Professional Development – Paid Courses and Trainings Across Six Countries



The dataset of 701 respondents reveals varied patterns in investing financially in professional development through courses, trainings, or boot camps, highlighting both economic and motivational differences across countries. Overall, a significant proportion (**42.08%, 295 respondents**) have never paid for any relevant training, indicating barriers such as financial constraints, limited access, or reliance on free or institutional programs.

Country-level insights show clear differences: **Montenegro** leads in the “never paid” category with **138 respondents (19.69%)**, reflecting either economic limitations or a high dependence on public or informal learning opportunities. **Germany (52, 7.42%)** and **Serbia (46, 6.56%)** also report relatively high proportions of **non-investing** participants, whereas Spain and Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrate greater willingness to invest financially.

Small investments (€0–€50) are most common among **Germany (30, 4.28%)**, **Portugal (26, 3.71%)**, and **Montenegro (31, 4.42%)**, suggesting that short workshops, webinars, or introductory sessions are accessible and attractive to creatives in these countries. **Moderate investments (€51–€150)** show notable uptake in **Germany (20, 2.85%)**, **Portugal (22, 3.14%)**, and **Bosnia and Herzegovina (31, 4.42%)**, indicating a readiness among certain populations to engage in multi-session courses or specialized training programs.

Higher investments (€151–€300) are less frequent but appear mainly in **Spain (49, 6.99%)** and **Bosnia and Herzegovina (19, 2.71%)**, reflecting targeted participation in boot camps or professional certification programs. **Very high investments (€301–€500 and >€500)** are rare, with **Spain** leading slightly (**17, 2.43% for €301–€500 and 9; 1.28% for >€500**), signaling that only a small elite segment pursues advanced or long-term professional development opportunities.

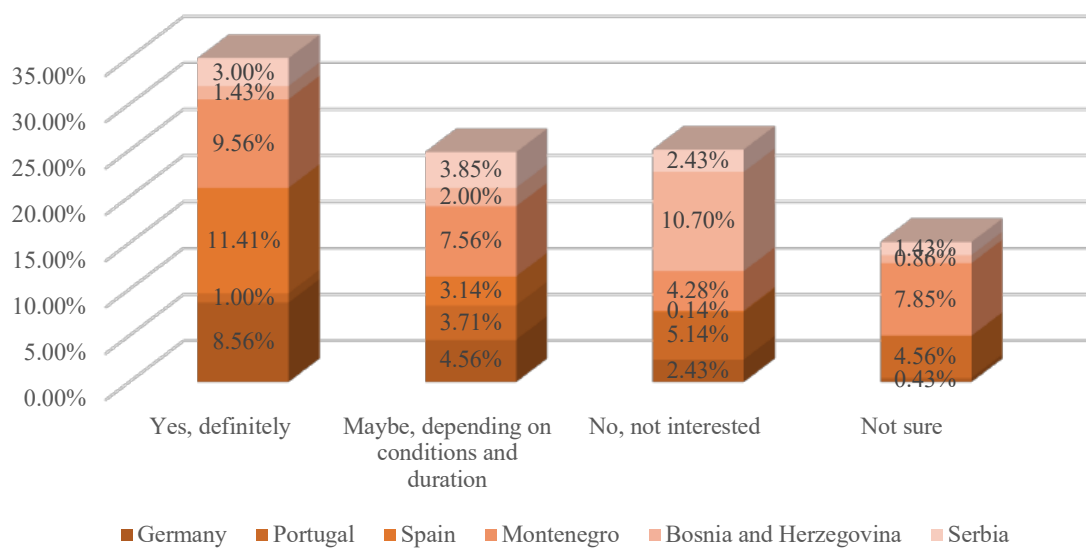
A minor share of respondents preferred **not to disclose their expenditures (18, 2.57%)**, indicating sensitivity around financial data.

Overall, the analysis underscores strong heterogeneity: Western Balkan countries like Montenegro exhibit both the highest share of participants who have never invested and relatively low engagement in paid programs, reflecting structural and economic barriers.

Portugal and Spain, in contrast, show more active participation in small to moderate paid programs, highlighting better access, higher disposable income, or stronger culture of continuous learning. Germany reflects a mix of moderate engagement, with most participants opting for smaller-scale investments.

These findings suggest that non-formal learning programs aiming at skill development, soft skills, or intercultural competencies should consider affordability, modular formats, and financial support schemes to increase accessibility and participation across all countries, particularly in the Western Balkans.

Interest in Participating in Soft Skills and Intercultural Communication Programs Across Six Countries



The dataset of 701 respondents highlights a **generally high interest in programs aimed at developing soft skills and intercultural communication**, though significant variation exists between countries. Overall, **34.95% (245 respondents)** expressed clear interest (“**Yes, definitely**”), while another **24.82% (174 respondents)** indicated **conditional interest**, depending on program specifics such as duration, format, or accessibility. A smaller group, **25.11% (176 respondents)**, are **unsure or hesitant**, and **15.12% (106 respondents)** are explicitly not interested.

At the country level, **Spain** demonstrates the **highest absolute interest**, with **80 respondents (11.41%)** stating a definite willingness to participate, reflecting the strong emphasis on international collaboration and professional development in its creative sector. **Germany** also shows substantial motivation, with **60 respondents (8.56%)** expressing **definite interest** and an additional **32 (4.56%) conditional interest**, indicating a solid demand for skill enhancement despite an already strong baseline of competencies.

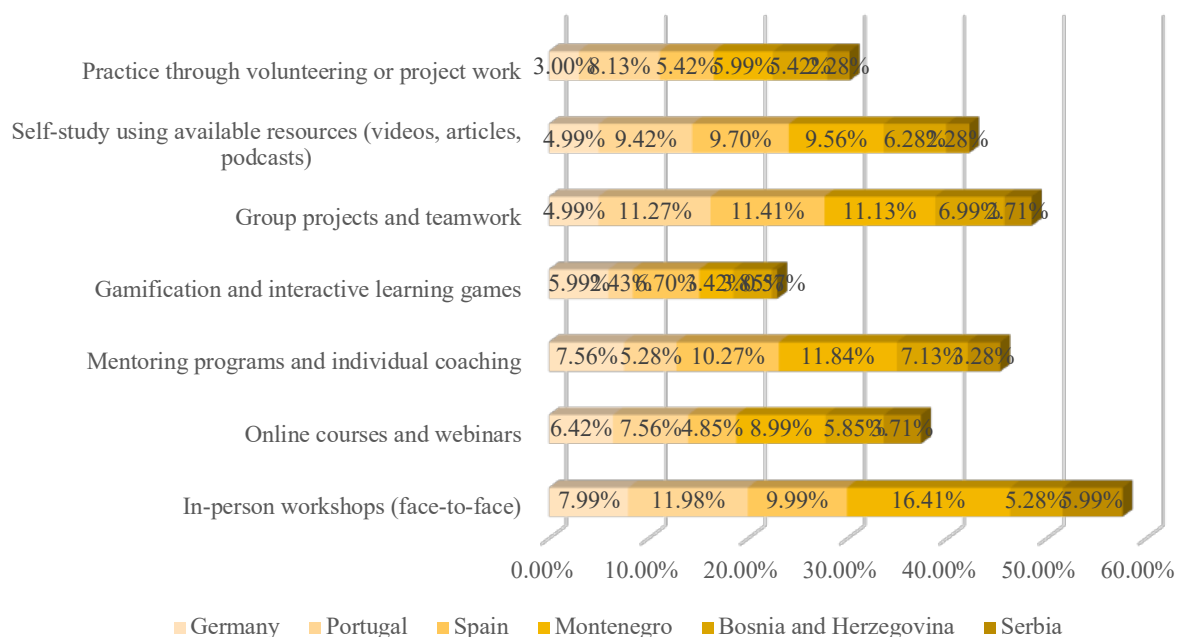
Montenegro exhibits a mixed pattern: **67 respondents (9.56%)** are **definitely interested**, **53 (7.56%)** are **conditionally interested**, **30 (4.28%)** are **hesitant**, and **55 (7.85%)** are **unsure**. This distribution highlights a sizable core motivated to engage in development programs, while uncertainty and conditionality suggest that program accessibility, structure, and support are key factors for participation in Western Balkan contexts.

Portugal shows moderate engagement, with only **7 respondents (1.00%)** **definitely interested**, but a significant **26 (3.71%)** **conditionally interested** and **32 (4.56%)** **unsure**,

reflecting a cautious approach possibly due to prior exposure or competing learning opportunities. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** stands out for the high proportion of respondents **not interested (75, 10.70%)**, suggesting either limited perceived relevance or barriers to participation, while **Serbia** shows moderate engagement, with **21 respondents (3.00%) definitely interested** and **27 (3.85%) conditionally interested**.

These results indicate that while there is a strong general appetite for programs targeting soft skills and intercultural competencies, successful program design must account for local contexts, offer flexible conditions, and address potential barriers such as program duration, format, and accessibility. Countries like Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina may benefit particularly from awareness campaigns and supportive measures to convert conditional interest and uncertainty into active participation.

Preferred Learning Methods for Developing Soft Skills and Intercultural Competencies Across Six Countries



The dataset of **701 respondents**, who were able to select multiple options, provides a detailed and nuanced overview of **learning preferences for soft skills and intercultural competencies** within the creative sector. The results reveal a strong preference for **experiential, practice-oriented, and community-based learning**, complemented by **digital resources, mentoring, and self-directed approaches**.

In-person workshops are the most widely preferred method, with **404 selections (57.63%)**, highlighting the high value placed on **direct interaction, hands-on practice, and immediate feedback**. Montenegro records the highest number (**115; 16.41%**), followed by Portugal (**84; 11.98%**) and Spain (**70; 9.99%**). Germany (**56; 7.99%**) and Serbia (**42; 5.99%**) show significant engagement, while Bosnia and Herzegovina reports lower uptake (**37; 5.28%**), reflecting structural limitations.

Focus group insights strongly reinforce these trends. In **Montenegro**, participants emphasized that **non-formal education**—workshops, summer schools, and residencies—plays a crucial role in professional development, facilitating networking, interdisciplinary exchange, and confidence building. As one participant explained, **“Workshops and residency programs**

enable networking and the practical acquisition of skills.” These experiences allow students to apply theory, experiment with techniques and digital tools, and develop collaboration skills across cultural and disciplinary boundaries. Hybrid learning models, combining physical and digital spaces, were highlighted as particularly valuable, enabling students to explore, share work, and collaborate without restrictions. The importance of digital platforms was stressed: **“A platform that makes it easy to find literature and resources.”** Experiential learning was further reinforced by another participant: **“The best experience is when the instructor guides us through a museum, and we work practically, live.”**

In **Portugal**, participants described learning as **participatory and experiential**, valuing peer exchange and hands-on practice over formal instruction. One participant stated, **“You learn from people who’ve been through it. That’s how you really grow,”** while another noted, **“You learn by doing, not by listening. Practice is what raises questions.”** Non-formal initiatives such as youth exchanges, community theatre projects, or independent residencies were described as transformative but fragmented and underfunded, accessible mainly to those already connected to artistic networks. Barriers included costs, lack of local offerings, poor communication about programs, and travel distances. Ideal learning spaces were envisioned as **open, collaborative, interdisciplinary hubs led by experienced practitioners**, blending artistic practice, critical discussion, and collective creation: **“A space where people teach each other — not a classroom, but a community.”**

Spanish participants echoed the importance of **learning by doing**, especially when online collaboration presents challenges: **“Music would be amazing to collaborate on digitally, but the lag makes real-time impossible,”** **“I usually learn by doing – if I don’t need to use a skill, I forget it quickly,”** and **“Creating together online is still complicated.”** Online resources serve as a complementary strategy: **“When I get stuck, I search for a YouTube tutorial. It’s faster than taking a whole course.”**

Online courses and webinars received **262 selections (37.38%)**, with Montenegro (63; 8.99%) and Portugal (53; 7.56%) showing the highest uptake, followed by Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain, and Serbia. These formats provide **flexible and accessible learning opportunities**, allowing creatives to maintain continuity in skill development where local or formal programs are limited. Portuguese participants highlighted that software skills acquired in school often deteriorate without practice: **“I learned Photoshop in school, but after a year without using it, I forgot everything. Now I prefer intuitive tools like Canva.”**

Mentoring programs and individual coaching were selected by **318 respondents (45.36%)**, with Montenegro (83; 11.84%) and Spain (72; 10.27%) leading. Germany (53; 7.56%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (50; 7.13%) follow, while Portugal (37; 5.28%) and Serbia (23; 3.28%) show lower uptake. Focus group participants emphasized mentorship as crucial for both **technical development and navigating precarious work realities**. German participants expressed that many existing trainings are **generic and overly theoretical**, and advocated for **sector-specific, scenario-based learning**, addressing challenges such as unpaid work, difficult clients, intercultural misunderstandings, and online backlash.

Group projects and teamwork were chosen by **340 respondents (48.50%)**, highlighting the centrality of **collaborative and peer-based learning**. Spain (80; 11.41%), Portugal (79; 11.27%), and Montenegro (78; 11.13%) show the highest engagement, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, and Serbia. Focus groups described **ideal learning formats** as **open, collaborative, and interdisciplinary spaces**, including **open studios, digital hubs, multimedia labs, VR and game hubs, animation and 3D studios, writers’ collectives, darkrooms, and shared ateliers**. Participants across Bosnia and Herzegovina emphasized **hybrid hubs**, combining online continuity with intensive in-person sessions, mentorship, and peer exchange.

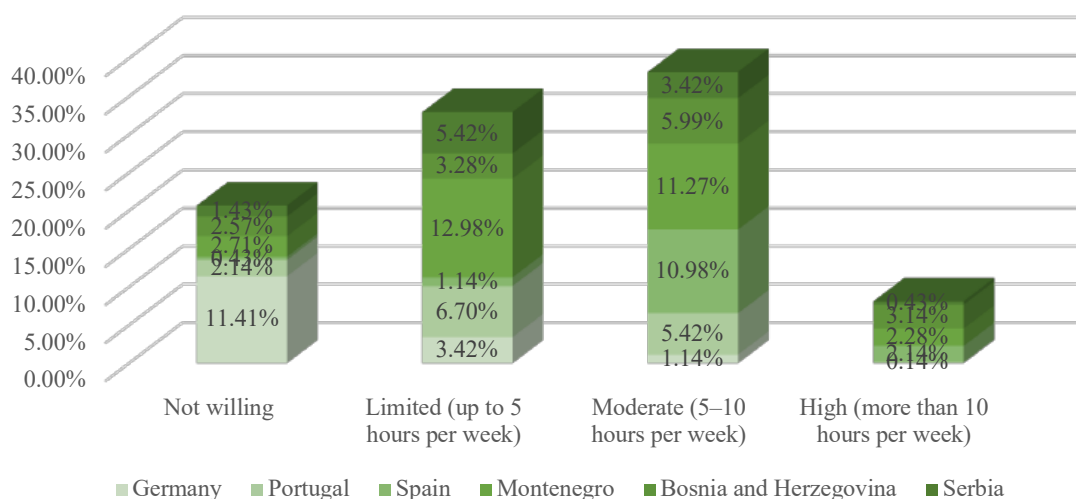
Gamification and interactive learning were selected by **161 respondents (22.97%)**, with the highest interest in Spain and Germany. German focus group participants highlighted the effectiveness of **role-plays, simulations, and debates**, allowing experimentation and reframing failure as a learning process.

Self-study was selected by **296 respondents (42.23%)**, led by Spain, Montenegro, and Portugal. Participants described **independent learning through videos, articles, podcasts, and peer guidance** as essential for compensating gaps in formal education and limited access to structured programs.

Practice through volunteering or project-based work was chosen by **212 respondents (30.24%)**, with Portugal and Montenegro leading. Participants emphasized that **real-world experience bridges theory and practice**, particularly in supportive, non-formal environments where peers face similar challenges and mentors understand local creative and economic realities. One participant highlighted the importance of media literacy: **“Media literacy is key because designers must understand how audiences receive information.”**

Overall, **regional patterns** are clear. Western Balkan countries, especially Montenegro and Serbia, show a pronounced preference for **hands-on, in-person, mentorship-based, and project-oriented learning**, reflecting both high motivation and gaps in formal education. Spain and Portugal favor **hybrid approaches**, integrating collaboration, self-directed learning, and digital tools. Germany shows balanced preferences with a strong demand for **scenario-based, sector-specific, and interactive training**. Bosnia and Herzegovina emphasizes **hybrid creative hubs** combining online continuity, in-person intensives, mentorship, and peer support. The findings indicate that **effective non-formal learning strategies** should prioritize **in-person workshops, mentoring, collaborative projects, and hybrid hubs**, complemented by **online courses, self-study, gamified learning, and volunteering**. These approaches cultivate **soft skills, intercultural competence, professional resilience, and a sense of belonging**, enabling creatives to navigate complex, multicultural, and digitally mediated professional environments.

Willingness to Invest Time in Additional Skill Development Across Six Countries



The dataset of 701 respondents highlights the varying levels of willingness to **dedicate time to skill development in the creative sector**. Overall, the largest share of respondents (**38.23%**,

268) is willing to **invest a moderate amount of time, between 5–10 hours per week**. This indicates a strong readiness among creatives to engage consistently in structured learning.

Limited investment of up to 5 hours per week is reported by **231 respondents (32.95%)**, suggesting that a substantial portion prefers manageable weekly commitments, balancing learning with other professional or personal obligations. A smaller group, **57 respondents (8.13%)**, is willing to invest a **high amount of time, more than 10 hours weekly**, showing strong motivation among a committed minority.

Conversely, **145 respondents (20.68%)** indicate they are **not willing to allocate additional time**, highlighting potential barriers such as workload, financial constraints, or lack of access to suitable programs.

Country-level patterns reveal notable differences. **Germany** reports the highest proportion of respondents **not willing to invest time (80, 11.41%)**, with only **8 (1.14%) ready for moderate engagement and none exceeding 10 hours per week**, indicating possible constraints or lower motivation for additional learning. **Portugal** shows a balanced profile, with **47 (6.70%) limited, 38 (5.42%) moderate, and 1 (0.14%) high investment**, reflecting moderate readiness for structured learning.

Spain exhibits the strongest commitment, with **77 respondents (10.98%) willing to engage 5–10 hours weekly and 15 (2.14%) more than 10 hours**, while very few are **unwilling (3, 0.43%)**, indicating high motivation and capacity for skill development. **Montenegro's** respondents favor **limited (91, 12.98%) and moderate (79, 11.27%)** weekly investment, with **16 (2.28%)** ready for **high commitment**, suggesting a practical but engaged approach. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** shows **42 (5.99%) moderate and 22 (3.14%) high commitment**, with **23 (3.28%) limited and 18 (2.57%) not willing**. Serbia reports a similar pattern with **24 (3.42%) moderate, 3 (0.43%) high, 38 (5.42%) limited, and 10 (1.43%) not willing**.

These findings underline the importance of designing flexible, scalable learning opportunities. Programs offering modular engagement, a combination of short and moderate weekly commitments, and options for deeper immersion will best accommodate diverse motivation levels, balancing the needs of highly committed learners with those constrained by time or other obligations.

6 Conclusions, Recommendations, and Lessons Learned

The analysis of the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs) across Spain, Germany, Portugal, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrates that youth engagement in creative sectors is both dynamic and innovative, yet constrained by structural and systemic barriers. Data collected through desk research, surveys, and focus groups reveal that young creatives exhibit high intrinsic motivation, adaptability, and entrepreneurial spirit, but face challenges related to economic precarity, limited institutional support, skills gaps, and unequal access to resources and opportunities.

Building on this evidence, the following **conclusions** summarize the key patterns, trends, and challenges that characterize the participation and professional development of young creatives across these six countries:

1. Sector Growth and Potential

Across Spain, Germany, Portugal, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the CCIs demonstrate strong growth potential, robust youth engagement, and increasing reliance on digital and freelance work. Mature markets, such as Spain and Germany, benefit from scale, policy frameworks, and diversified sector opportunities, while Serbia shows strategic

positioning through growing SMEs and fiscal incentives. Emerging or smaller ecosystems—Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Portugal—face structural fragility, weaker integration between education, labor markets, and cultural policy, and limited long-term institutional support.

2. Education and Learning Pathways

Formal education provides essential theoretical and technical foundations, but practical skills, digital competencies, and entrepreneurial readiness are often cultivated through informal learning, online platforms, and mentorship. Countries with established infrastructures, like Germany and Spain, offer broader access to higher education, vocational training, EU programs, and digital learning networks. In contrast, smaller or emerging ecosystems rely heavily on informal, hybrid, and project-based learning to bridge gaps between education and professional practice.

3. Mobility, Access, and Regional Inequalities

Persistent regional disparities—such as limited cultural venues, poor transport, high living costs, and uneven broadband access—affect youth participation, particularly in rural or peripheral areas. Financial, infrastructural, and digital barriers restrict access to education, training, residencies, and international collaborations. Digital platforms, hybrid programs, VR/AR technologies, and community-based “digital inclusion hubs” help mitigate these gaps, enabling broader participation regardless of geographic location.

4. Youth Employment and Early Career Engagement

Young creatives across all countries face irregular income, precarious employment, unregulated internships, and limited social protection. Early professional experience varies: Germany and Spain provide structured pathways, apprenticeships, and residencies, while Montenegro, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina show higher concentrations of youth at the start of their careers. Many navigate informal or freelance pathways, combining multiple roles and relying on personal networks. Transition from education to sustainable employment is uneven, highlighting the need for mentorship, structured programs, and career guidance.

5. Income and Economic Precarity

Creative-sector income remains unstable across all contexts. A substantial share earns below €500 per month, while few exceed €1,200. Many rely on secondary income streams, family support, temporary projects, or informal work. National patterns vary: Spain and Germany show higher reliance on creative work income; Montenegro relies heavily on family or partner support; Serbia demonstrates limited engagement with formal creative income. Strengthening professionalization, funding opportunities, and wage standards is essential to reduce financial instability.

6. Motivations, Aspirations, and Career Intentions

Young creatives are primarily motivated by personal development, social impact, and long-term career stability, complemented by entrepreneurial ambitions and international mobility. Western Balkan countries emphasize community-oriented and economic realities, while Spain and Germany reflect strong intrinsic motivations in mature creative ecosystems. Career intentions differ by experience: those without prior creative work experience are more exploratory and uncertain, whereas experienced creatives show higher stability and clearer trajectories.

7. Skills, Competencies, and Capacity-Building Needs

Digital and soft skills—communication, teamwork, creative and critical thinking, self-management, emotional intelligence, UX/UI, 3D, hybrid, and AI-assisted tools—are essential for career resilience and autonomy. Western Balkan countries, particularly Montenegro, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, show pronounced gaps in technical, digital, and soft skills. Effective capacity-building requires mentorship, non-formal learning, international exchanges, scenario-based workshops, and access to advanced digital tools.

8. Learning Preferences and Non-Formal Education

Hands-on, project-based, mentorship-driven, and hybrid learning formats are strongly preferred, especially in Western Balkan countries. Spain and Portugal favor hybrid and digital approaches, Germany prefers scenario-based, sector-specific, interactive training, and Bosnia and Herzegovina values hybrid creative hubs. Flexibility, modular engagement, and short-to-moderate program duration support diverse motivation levels and increase accessibility, particularly where financial and infrastructural barriers exist.

9. Support Systems and Institutional Landscape

Young creatives rely on a combination of formal institutions, informal networks, personal encouragement, and community-based initiatives. Western Balkan countries depend more on public institutions, ad-hoc support, and informal networks, while Portugal shows a mix of institutional, private, and university-led support. Germany and Spain are underrepresented in survey data but benefit from mature support infrastructures. Targeted policies, sustained funding, mentorship, mental health support, and professional guidance are needed to ensure equitable access and long-term sustainability.

10. Inclusion, Marginalisation, and Equity

Marginalized youth—including women, Roma, Egyptians, migrants, youth with disabilities, and those from low-income or rural areas—face compounded barriers, including social stigma, limited networks, and economic constraints. Structural inequality impacts access to education, training, employment, and income. Effective interventions require integrated policies across culture, education, and social frameworks, fostering participation, career development, and agency in creative decision-making.

11. Creativity as a Multi-Dimensional Driver

Creative work serves not only as a professional pursuit but also as a vehicle for identity expression, societal transformation, community engagement, human rights advocacy, and emotional support. Across all countries, young people perceive creativity as simultaneously personal, social, and economic, highlighting the need for holistic approaches that integrate artistic practice, skills development, and social impact.

12. Internationalization and Cross-Cultural Competence

Most respondents possess foundational intercultural and international skills, but gaps remain, particularly among inexperienced creatives in Montenegro, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Exchange programs, cross-cultural workshops, multilingual training, and international residencies are essential for preparing youth to participate in global creative environments and fostering mobility.

The insights derived from the conclusions highlight key patterns, challenges, and opportunities across the Creative and Cultural Industries in the six countries studied. These findings inform a **set of practical lessons learned**, reflecting both systemic observations and on-the-ground

experiences, which can guide future program design, policy interventions, and capacity-building initiatives:

1. Youth Engagement Requires Multi-Modal Approaches

Young creatives respond to a combination of formal education, non-formal learning, mentorship, and online platforms. Relying solely on traditional educational structures limits access, especially in smaller or emerging CCI ecosystems. Programs should combine hands-on workshops, hybrid formats, and peer-to-peer learning to maximize engagement.

2. Structural Support is Key to Sustainable Careers

Early professional experience, work-based learning, and apprenticeships significantly influence career sustainability. Countries with mature ecosystems (Germany, Spain) demonstrate faster transitions into professional roles. In smaller or emerging markets, targeted interventions are necessary to bridge gaps in initial employment and support long-term career pathways.

3. Economic Precarity Requires Holistic Interventions

Income instability, irregular contracts, and reliance on secondary income are common across all countries. Supporting youth in the CCI sector requires combining funding schemes, wage standard improvements, social protection, and guidance on diversifying income streams to reduce economic vulnerability.

4. Digital Competencies and Soft Skills are Essential

Digital literacy, AI-assisted tools, hybrid techniques, and creative software, alongside soft skills like teamwork, critical thinking, and self-management, are critical for resilience and employability. Programs must prioritize practical, applied skills development in combination with reflective practice and mentorship.

5. Regional and Infrastructure Gaps Shape Access

Physical mobility constraints, limited cultural infrastructure in rural areas, and digital divides exacerbate inequities in CCI participation. Decentralized hubs, online platforms, VR/AR integration, and community-based initiatives are effective strategies to overcome these barriers.

6. Non-Formal Learning Must Be Accessible and Flexible

Financial, logistical, and time-related constraints can limit participation. Lessons show that modular, short-duration, and affordable programs with hybrid participation options increase accessibility, particularly in Western Balkan contexts where economic barriers are significant.

7. Marginalized Youth Face Intersectional Barriers

Women, Roma, Egyptians, migrants, youth with disabilities, and those from low-income backgrounds experience compounded social, cultural, and economic barriers. Targeted strategies, including mentorship, inclusive funding, accessible programs, and anti-discrimination measures, are necessary to foster equity and representation in CCI.

8. Mentorship and Peer Learning Amplify Impact

Focus groups indicate that mentoring, role models, and peer exchange significantly influence skill acquisition, confidence, and professional orientation. Programs that integrate structured mentorship and collaborative projects are more effective than purely instructional approaches.

9. Policy Coherence and Institutional Coordination Matter

Countries with integrated policy frameworks linking education, labor markets, and cultural support (Germany, Spain) demonstrate stronger sectoral outcomes. Fragmented governance and reliance on short-term or project-based funding in Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Portugal highlight the importance of coordinated, long-term strategies for CCI development.

10. Creativity is Multi-Dimensional

Youth perceive creative work not only as a professional pursuit but also as a channel for personal expression, social impact, community engagement, and cultural preservation. Programs that integrate creative practice with social advocacy, human rights, and community-oriented projects enhance both personal and sectoral development.

11. International Exposure Strengthens Competence

Cross-cultural experience, exchange programs, multilingual training, and international residencies improve adaptability, global networks, and employability. Emerging CCI ecosystems must actively create pathways for international engagement to develop competitive creative talent.

12. Motivation and Aspirations are Context-Specific

Intrinsic motivation dominates across all countries, but economic realities, community values, and available opportunities shape ambitions. Programs should account for these differences by offering tailored support, professional pathways, and guidance aligned with local and regional conditions.

13. Integrated Interventions Maximize Impact

Isolated initiatives addressing skills, funding, or mentorship are less effective. Lessons indicate that comprehensive approaches combining financial support, digital inclusion, training, mentorship, and networking create sustainable impact, enhance career resilience, and strengthen the overall creative ecosystem.

14. Early Career Support is Critical

The transition from education to employment is often fragmented, particularly in smaller markets. Structured onboarding, internships, work-based learning, and targeted guidance are essential to prevent youth from exiting the sector prematurely and to enable skill accumulation.

15. Continuous Feedback and Adaptive Design Enhance Relevance

Programs that incorporate participant feedback, monitor engagement, and adapt formats to emerging needs are more successful. Flexibility in content, duration, and delivery modality ensures higher participation, relevance, and alignment with evolving labor market demands.

Building on these lessons, the **following evidence-based recommendations** provide actionable guidance for stakeholders to address structural barriers, enhance youth participation, and foster sustainable, resilient, and equitable creative ecosystems. They translate observed challenges and best practices into concrete strategies for policy, education, professional pathways, and international collaboration:

1. Strengthen Youth-Focused Policy and Institutional Frameworks

- Develop integrated, youth-oriented policies that link education, labor markets, cultural policy, and digital development, with particular attention to smaller or emerging ecosystems such as Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Portugal.
- Establish youth representation mechanisms within cultural decision-making bodies to ensure policies reflect young creatives' needs and aspirations.
- Promote inclusive funding models that combine public, private, and international support, reducing reliance on short-term or project-based financing, and fostering long-term sustainability.

2. Expand Access to Education and Skills Development

- Support formal education as a foundation for technical, theoretical, and interdisciplinary skills, while simultaneously expanding non-formal, digital, and online learning opportunities.
- Develop structured programs bridging education and employment, including internships, apprenticeships, residencies, and work-based learning tailored to national contexts.
- Emphasize practical competencies, digital skills (UX/UI, 3D design, AI tools, content creation), and soft skills (communication, teamwork, adaptability, critical thinking, self-management) as central pillars for career resilience.
- Implement modular, flexible, and affordable programs to accommodate diverse motivations, time constraints, and financial capacities, particularly in Western Balkan countries.
- Promote peer learning, scenario-based training, and reflective practice to foster critical thinking, collaboration, and self-management.

3. Improve Mobility, Access, and Infrastructure

- Invest in decentralized creative hubs and community-based digital inclusion initiatives to reduce geographic and infrastructural barriers, enabling youth from rural or peripheral areas to access training, mentorship, and professional networks.
- Provide financial support mechanisms for relocation, tuition, equipment, and living costs to reduce participation barriers, particularly for socio-economically disadvantaged youth.
- Expand hybrid and remote opportunities through VR/AR technologies, online platforms, and international collaborations, enabling mobility without the need for relocation.

4. Foster Early Career Experience and Professional Pathways

- Facilitate structured pathways into the labor market, including targeted internships, project-based roles, apprenticeships, and mentorship programs.
- Provide guidance on professionalization, project management, freelance work, and sustainable income generation.
- Promote cross-sectoral collaborations and international exposure to diversify career opportunities and expand professional networks.
- Support young creatives in navigating self-employment management, income diversification, and formalization of creative professions.

5. Address Economic Precarity and Promote Sustainable Careers

- Establish minimum wage or funding standards for creative work, complemented by social protection schemes for freelancers and early-career professionals.
- Expand scholarships, grants, and micro-financing opportunities to support both skill acquisition and creative production.
- Encourage long-term planning and career guidance programs to stabilize early-career trajectories and reduce dependence on secondary income streams or informal support.

6. Promote Inclusion and Equity

- Develop targeted measures for marginalized youth, including women, Roma, Egyptians, migrants, persons with disabilities, and youth from low-income or rural backgrounds.
- Implement intersectional approaches combining cultural, educational, and social interventions to address systemic barriers and enable full participation.
- Support initiatives that empower youth as agents of change, enabling them to influence cultural programming, policy decisions, and community projects.

7. Support Motivation, Mentorship, and Peer Learning

- Establish mentorship networks pairing early-career creatives with experienced professionals to enhance skill development, confidence, and sector navigation.
- Encourage peer learning and collaborative projects through co-creation, group work, and knowledge sharing, complementing formal and informal training.
- Integrate personal development, social impact, and creative expression as central elements in program design.
- Recognize intrinsic motivation and social impact aspirations as key drivers of creative engagement, incorporating these into program planning and evaluation.

8. Facilitate International Exposure and Networking

- Provide opportunities for cross-border exchanges, residencies, and multilingual training, particularly for young creatives in emerging markets.
- Promote international collaborations to develop intercultural competencies, expand creative horizons, and strengthen global career readiness.
- Integrate digital platforms that enable remote participation in international projects, online residencies, and global networks.
- Support access to international mentorship and collaborations, ensuring equitable participation for youth with limited mobility.

9. Enhance Research, Monitoring, and Data Collection

- Invest in age-disaggregated, gender-sensitive, and regionally specific data collection to inform policies, programs, and funding allocations.
- Strengthen tracking of youth engagement, skills development, and labor market outcomes in the CCI sector.
- Conduct longitudinal monitoring of youth career trajectories to measure intervention impacts and identify systemic gaps.
- Use survey and focus group feedback to continuously adapt programs, ensuring relevance to emerging skill demands, sector trends, and local contexts.

10. Foster Integrated, Multi-Level Interventions

- Promote interventions that combine education, labor, culture, and social policy to address multi-dimensional challenges holistically.
- Encourage collaboration between public institutions, NGOs, universities, creative hubs, and private sector stakeholders to deliver cohesive support structures.
- Integrate technical, soft, entrepreneurial, and psychosocial skills within programs to enhance resilience, career sustainability, and creative autonomy.
- Adopt comprehensive, multi-level strategies that maximize impact, strengthen the overall creative ecosystem, and ensure that interventions reinforce one another across sectors and levels.

By integrating the conclusions, lessons learned, and evidence-based recommendations, this comprehensive analysis can serve as a strategic foundation for stakeholders—including policymakers, educators, cultural institutions, and community organizations—to design and implement coordinated, multi-level interventions. It provides a reference framework for strengthening youth engagement, promoting equity, and fostering sustainable, resilient, and innovative creative ecosystems across Europe and the Western Balkans, guiding both policy development and practical programmatic action.

7 Feasibility Study Results

The DigiCreate Feasibility Study applies a structured evaluation framework to assess the practical implementation of a non-formal, virtual mentoring and training methodology across six countries. While feasibility studies are traditionally associated with large infrastructure projects, this study adapts the same rigorous, multi-dimensional approach to a five-day, six-hours-per-day blended online programme, designed to deliver workshops, interactive role-playing simulations, debates, gamification, and collaborative exercises for young creatives in the CCI sector.

The study examines the following dimensions to determine the viability and scalability of the methodology:

- **Technical Feasibility:** evaluation of virtual learning platforms, broadband availability, IT infrastructure, technical support, and licensing requirements to ensure reliable and secure delivery.
- **Economic Feasibility:** analysis of trainer availability, remuneration, overall budgetary constraints, potential co-financing models, and financial risks, including inflation, to confirm cost-effectiveness.
- **Organizational Feasibility:** assessment of consortium partners' capacity, staff expertise, and institutional readiness to deliver and manage the virtual programme efficiently.
- **Legal and Regulatory Feasibility:** review of national regulations, data protection requirements, and any permits or approvals necessary for virtual non-formal education delivery.
- **Time Feasibility:** consideration of the programme schedule, including daily duration, participant engagement, preparation time, and avoidance of conflicts with weekends, holidays, or exam periods (planned from February 2026).

- **Stakeholder Engagement and Risk Assessment:** consultations with 3–5 key national actors—including cultural institutions, youth hubs, and education providers—to evaluate interest, potential support, co-funding opportunities, and adoption prospects.
- **Methodology Relevance:** assessment of the educational approach’s effectiveness in engaging young creatives, fostering skill development, and meeting the professional needs of the CCI sector.

The study is conducted collaboratively by the project consortium, leveraging the specific expertise of each partner: **Youth Power Germany EV (YP-DE)** in project coordination and management; **Evolutionary Archetypes Consulting SL (EAC)** in impact assessment and dissemination; **Contextos (Portugal)** in virtual exchange focus groups and development of the Online Creative Hive Open Digital Toolbox; **UniTesla (Serbia)** in digital media, project management, and virtual exchange; **SPIN (Bosnia and Herzegovina)** in the creation of the DigiCreate Online Platform and e-learning courses; **NVO GLAS (Montenegro)** in validating the methodological framework; and **UoM and FPEP Bar (Montenegro)** in academic guidance, legal expertise, digital skills, and virtual event management.

This comprehensive, multi-dimensional assessment identifies enabling factors, potential constraints, and context-specific adaptations, forming a robust evidence base for practical recommendations on virtual delivery, national implementation, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement. The results ensure that the DigiCreate methodology can be implemented in a realistic, scalable, and sustainable manner, providing an engaging, inclusive, and professional development experience for young creatives across Europe and the Western Balkans.

7.1 Technical and Technological Feasibility

The technical and technological feasibility of the DigiCreate methodology has been assessed across all participating countries—Germany, Spain, Portugal, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro—focusing on the consortium’s capacity to deliver a five-day, six-hours-per-day blended online programme that combines structured workshops, interactive role-playing simulations, debates, gamification, and collaborative exercises. The evaluation considers digital infrastructure, platform suitability, technical readiness, alternative solutions, and mitigation strategies to ensure smooth implementation and inclusive participation for young creatives in the cultural and creative sectors (CCIs).

Across the consortium countries, digital infrastructure is generally sufficient to support the DigiCreate model. Germany demonstrates robust broadband coverage, including gigabit-capable networks for most households, with minimal digital inequality affecting low-income or rural populations. Urban areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, including Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Mostar, Podgorica, and Nikšić, offer stable broadband suitable for synchronous online learning, while rural and remote areas experience slower speeds, higher latency, and occasional instability. Portugal, Serbia, and Spain show high urban connectivity complemented by widespread digital tool use in education and youth work. Overall, the **main challenge is digital inequality rather than a lack of connectivity, necessitating targeted measures to ensure equitable access.** Partner organisations report a **high level of digital readiness, with trainers and facilitators experienced in hybrid and online formats, and participants generally equipped with adequate hardware and stable internet connections.** Where connectivity issues occur, **asynchronous alternatives** such as session recordings,

downloadable materials, and follow-up discussions ensure continuity of learning and inclusivity.

Consortium partners already use widely available, **low-cost, and EU-compliant platforms fully compatible with DigiCreate activities**. These include **Learning Management Systems** such as **Moodle** and **E-indeks**, video-conferencing tools including **Zoom**, **Microsoft Teams**, **Google Meet**, **BigBlueButton**, and **alfaview**, as well as collaborative environments such as shared documents, **digital whiteboards (Miro, Jamboard)**, and **messaging platforms (Slack, WhatsApp, Discord)**. These platforms support **breakout rooms, polls, screen sharing, collaborative exercises, gamification, and moderated discussions, enabling full implementation of workshops, debates, and role-playing simulations without the need for specialized or high-cost technology**. Higher-tier accounts, such as **Zoom Pro or Business**, **Microsoft Teams for Education/NGOs**, and **Google Workspace for Education/NGOs**, provide sufficient capacity, unlimited call duration, and appropriate moderation tools, with YouthPower Germany offering access to their Zoom Business account if needed. Technical compatibility has been assessed: Microsoft Teams requires only around 5 Mbps for smooth performance, functions well on older CPUs and mobile devices, and its web version is fully capable; Google Meet has low CPU and RAM requirements but performance may vary depending on the browser; Zoom offers stable bandwidth adjustment but requires 10–20 Mbps and slightly more processing power, and may be less reliable for screen sharing on mobile devices. Feature coverage is ranked with Teams providing the most robust breakout room management and collaborative options, Zoom allowing effective session management, and Google Meet fulfilling basic requirements but offering more limited interactive capabilities for complex sessions. Supplementary tools such as Miro support real-time visual collaboration, brainstorming, mapping, and co-creation exercises, while Kahoot and Mentimeter facilitate gamified activities, polls, quizzes, and instant feedback. These platforms are easy to access, work well on mobile devices, and place minimal demands on participants' hardware and connectivity, ensuring inclusivity. Stakeholders consistently prefer open-source or free tools to enhance accessibility, minimize costs, and avoid long-term licensing dependencies.

All partner organisations demonstrate **strong digital maturity**. Trainers are familiar with **online pedagogical techniques, including interactive exercises and gamification, while participants possess the necessary hardware and digital literacy to engage effectively**. Technical support is provided both through **formal IT units in higher education institutions, such as FITI, UoM, UniTesla, and FPEP Bar, and through ad-hoc support from NGOs and youth organisations, including YP-DE, Contextos, SPIN, and NVO GLAS**. This combination ensures real-time assistance during live sessions. The existing hybrid and digital culture established since 2020 enables DigiCreate to build on familiar tools and workflows without requiring major new investments in infrastructure.

Given the uneven quality of internet connectivity and variations in participants' digital competencies, **several mitigation strategies are recommended:**

- **Flexible participation modes**, including camera-off, audio-only, or mobile access, and the **use of organisational or public facilities with reliable connectivity**, such as youth centres, libraries, NGO offices, or cultural hubs, will facilitate inclusion.
- **Peer and facilitator guidance for participants with limited digital skills, asynchronous access to session recordings and downloadable materials, and streamlined platform usage** with technical briefings and simple “how-to” guides further mitigate potential barriers.

- **Contingency options** such as dial-in telephone access or offline participation via local LMS platforms ensure continuity if technical issues arise.

Overall, the **technical and technological environment across all consortium countries is moderately to highly feasible** for implementing the DigiCreate methodology. **Existing digital infrastructure, widely used platforms, and partner experience provide a solid foundation**, while **targeted support measures address disparities and technical risks**. The principal **challenge is not infrastructure availability per se, but digital inequality and differences in participants' digital literacy, which require inclusive design, flexible delivery formats, adaptive implementation, and proactive technical support**. With these measures in place, the consortium is well-prepared to implement the DigiCreate model virtually and inclusively, leveraging practical, hands-on digital exercises, gamification, and widely accessible tools.

7.2 Economic Feasibility

The economic feasibility of implementing the DigiCreate methodology has been thoroughly assessed across all consortium countries—Germany, Spain, Portugal, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro—focusing on the costs associated with delivering a five-day, six-hours-per-day blended online programme that combines structured workshops, interactive role-playing simulations, debates, gamification, and collaborative exercises. The evaluation considers trainer remuneration, operational and administrative costs, licensing and platform expenses, co-funding opportunities, and financial risks, while also assessing cost-effectiveness, resource optimisation, and sustainability.

Labour costs constitute the primary financial component of the DigiCreate programme. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, average net salaries remain well below EU averages, and the minimum wage varies between entities but is comparatively low. Within non-formal education, youth work, and creative training, facilitators and trainers are commonly engaged on a fee-based or short-term contractual basis. Experienced trainers in youth work, digital skills, or creative education are typically remunerated at €10–20 per hour, while entry-level trainers or co-facilitators may receive lower rates. For one five-day DigiCreate cycle, including approximately 30 contact hours and preparation, coordination, and follow-up, a realistic workload per trainer is 40–50 hours. Engaging two trainers at an average rate of €12–18 per hour results in **total facilitation costs of €1,000–1,800 per cycle**. In Germany, higher wage levels yield estimated costs of €1,900–3,000 per cycle for two trainers, reflecting the mid-€20 hourly range typical for adult education instructors, while other consortium countries demonstrate comparable or slightly lower rates in accordance with local labour markets. These figures indicate that DigiCreate's **human resource requirements are economically manageable across all partner countries**, provided that fair compensation standards are maintained and workloads are realistically planned.

Beyond trainer fees, additional costs include licences or hosting fees for video-conferencing and collaborative platforms, translation and localisation of training materials, and coordination and administration expenses related to participant recruitment, communication, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. From a software perspective, the programme is designed to rely primarily on open-source and widely accessible tools, thereby minimising financial exposure to high licensing fees. Core activities can be delivered through **platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet**, many of which are **already available through institutional subscriptions**. Where paid licences are required, standard professional

subscriptions typically range between €10 and €25 per user per month, which remains financially manageable within Erasmus+ budget structures. Collaborative tools for project management, brainstorming, and digital co-creation—such as Miro, Trello, Canva, or similar platforms—also offer free tiers or discounted educational/non-profit plans, significantly reducing recurring costs.

In addition, creative and digital production software, when needed for specific exercises, can be accessed through **open-source alternatives (e.g. GIMP, Inkscape, Audacity, Blender) at no cost, or through educational licences of professional software suites that are frequently already held by universities, cultural centres, or NGOs.** Where short-term access to premium creative tools is required, monthly subscription models allow flexible budgeting without long-term financial commitments. Cloud storage and file-sharing services similarly offer free or low-cost plans that are sufficient for the scale of the programme. As a result, **total software-related costs per implementation cycle remain relatively low and do not represent a structural financial burden.**

Modest participant support measures, such as **certificates, small incentives, or travel reimbursements,** may also be included, though travel costs are minimal due to the programme's **digital-first design.** Across all consortium countries, **existing infrastructure and institutional resources offer opportunities to reduce costs through in-kind contributions.** NGOs, youth centres, universities, and cultural institutions frequently provide meeting spaces, equipment, staff time, and access to digital platforms as part of routine operations, while many partner organisations already operate within Erasmus+, Creative Europe, and other donor-funded frameworks, enabling integration of DigiCreate activities into ongoing programmes.

The DigiCreate model is **particularly cost-efficient because it is structured as a lightweight, digitally delivered intervention.** Training and mentoring activities are **largely online, eliminating the need for significant travel, accommodation, or venue expenses for core learning activities, unless participants access technically equipped public or organisational facilities.** Cost per participant in digital logistics is very low, primarily because **existing infrastructure, institutional subscriptions, and open-source tools can be used without additional capital investment.** The economic model resembles a lean digital service, where the principal expenditure is dedicated staff time rather than infrastructure or technology acquisition.

Stakeholders consistently emphasised that the **primary investment is human rather than technical, underscoring the importance of prioritising budgets for mentors, facilitators, coordinators, and support staff.** Organisations are encouraged to maximise the **use of existing equipment and connectivity, avoiding unnecessary purchases, in alignment with Erasmus+ principles where staff time and capacity building constitute the central investment categories.** Financial risks remain moderate but require structured management. Key risks include **rising labour costs and statutory minimum wage increases, inflation and potential volatility in trainer fees, operational expenses, software licensing or hosting costs, and the possible underestimation of coordination, outreach, monitoring, and evaluation workload**—particularly in contexts with fragmented institutional responsibilities and high outreach needs. Additional risks relate to **staff workload and availability for intensive programme cycles, the potential need for modest additional equipment (such as headsets or webcams in specific cases), and dependence on project-based funding,** which may affect long-term continuity if follow-up resources are not secured. These risks can be

effectively mitigated through careful **workload planning and realistic allocation of staff responsibilities, transparent budgeting of coordination and administrative hours, and the inclusion of small contingency allocations to address minor equipment needs or short-term software requirements. Regular financial monitoring** can help anticipate inflationary impacts and adjust trainer fees or operational lines accordingly. Most importantly, **integrating DigiCreate into long-term organisational programme portfolios**—building on accumulated expertise, partnerships, and demonstrated impact—reduces dependence on single funding cycles and strengthens sustainability beyond the funded pilot phase.

In **Portugal, the economic environment is highly supportive**, with staff workload, equipment requirements, and post-project continuity assessed as manageable, while reliance on free and open-source platforms further enhances cost-efficiency and long-term financial sustainability. In Montenegro, additional co-financing from the **Ministry of Regional Investment and Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organizations, as permitted under national legislation, guarantees full coverage of project expenses and strengthens continuity beyond EU funding**. This co-financing mechanism, combined with in-kind contributions and prudent budget management, further reinforces the programme’s economic sustainability.

Overall, the **economic feasibility of the DigiCreate methodology is assessed as high**. Labour and operational costs remain proportionate across all consortium countries, and software and platform expenses are controlled through strategic reliance on open-source solutions, institutional licences, and flexible subscription models. The digital-first structure substantially limits structural overheads, while targeted mitigation strategies, resource optimisation, co-financing, and in-kind support ensure long-term financial sustainability. The level of investment is fully justified by anticipated outcomes, including enhanced employability, strengthened digital and creative competencies, increased engagement in the cultural and creative sectors, and reinforced institutional capacity across partner countries.

7.3 Organizational Feasibility

The consortium partners collectively demonstrate strong organizational capacity to implement the DigiCreate methodology across all planned activities. The eight partners—Youth Power Germany (YP-DE), Evolutionary Archetypes Consulting (EAC), Contextos, UniTesla, SPIN, NVO GLAS, University of Montenegro (UoM), and FPEP Bar—bring complementary expertise in youth work, non-formal education, digital facilitation, cultural projects, and higher education, ensuring full coverage of all work packages and project activities.

Human resources across the consortium are sufficient to deliver the planned five-day, six-hours-per-day programme. Each organisation reports **a pool of qualified trainers, facilitators, and mentors with experience in interactive, participatory methods, including group work, simulations, role-playing, debates, and experiential learning**. Facilitators have practical experience with online delivery, video-conferencing platforms, and collaborative digital tools, enabling smooth implementation of workshops, virtual exchanges, and focus groups. Partners have prior experience working with diverse groups, including youth with fewer opportunities, migrants, rural youth, and participants with varying digital skills.

From an organisational perspective, **main potential risks include staff turnover or unavailability during key project periods, competing project deadlines, and uneven experience in digital facilitation among team members**. These risks are considered manageable given the consortium’s existing capacity and experience. Mitigation strategies

include **identifying backup facilitators within each organisation**, integrating DigiCreate timelines into existing annual planning cycles, and providing short internal briefings or training on DigiCreate-specific methods and tools. **Clear allocation of responsibilities for coordination, facilitation, and technical support across all partners** ensures that workload is realistically distributed.

Organisational structures across the consortium are flexible and adaptive, allowing for online, blended, and face-to-face modalities. Administrative routines—including planning, participant recruitment, monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and follow-up—are already established within each partner organisation. NGOs and youth organisations such as SPIN, NVO GLAS, and Contextos have extensive experience with EU-funded projects, cultural programmes, and youth-focused initiatives, while higher education partners (UniTesla, UoM, FPEP Bar) provide robust academic infrastructure, digital tools, and support for quality assurance and continuous monitoring. YouthPower Germany, as the project coordinator, ensures overall coordination, management, and alignment across partners.

Given these capacities, the **consortium demonstrates strong organisational feasibility** for DigiCreate. The combination of experienced human resources, adaptable organisational structures, integrated digital tools, and clear coordination mechanisms provides a solid foundation for implementing intensive, high-quality pilot activities across all participating countries. Existing operational procedures and prior project experience ensure that potential organisational risks are mitigated, making the consortium well-prepared to deliver the programme effectively and sustainably.

7.4 Legal and Regulatory Feasibility

The legal and regulatory framework across the consortium countries supports the implementation of the DigiCreate methodology, encompassing data protection, labour compliance, digital service use, and participant consent for photography and recordings. All partner organisations have experience operating within EU-funded and donor-supported projects, ensuring adherence to national and international standards.

Germany: Data protection is governed by the **EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, Regulation (EU) 2016/679)** and the **Federal Data Protection Act (Bundesdatenschutzgesetz – BDSG, 2018)**, supplemented by the **Telecommunications-Telemedia Data Protection Act (TTDSG, 2021)**, which regulates cookies, tracking, and telemedia services. These laws require secure handling of personal data, informed consent for participation, and explicit permissions for photography, video recordings, and dissemination of learning materials. Mentors and trainers are contracted under national labour law, covering working time, remuneration, and voluntary work. Youth protection legislation at the level of the Länder applies if minors participate, including parental consent and safeguarding measures.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Law on the Protection of Personal Data (Official Gazette of BiH, No. 66/13) aligns with GDPR principles and regulates lawful data processing, transparency, and data subject rights. Organisations store participant data on domestic servers, ensuring security and compliance. There are no legal restrictions on using digital platforms for online education. Mentors and trainers are engaged according to entity-level labour laws in the Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska, including contracts, remuneration, and working time. Participant consent is required for photography, video recording, and data processing. Child protection laws apply for participants under 18, including parental consent and supervision measures.

Serbia: Personal data protection is regulated under the **Law on Personal Data Protection (Official Gazette of RS, No. 87/2018)**, which mirrors GDPR standards. Consent for participation, data collection, photography, and recordings is mandatory. Mentors and trainers are engaged in accordance with the **Labour Law of the Republic of Serbia**, including rules on contracts, remuneration, and volunteering.

Portugal: Data protection is governed by the **General Data Protection Regulation (Regulamento Geral de Proteção de Dados – RGPD, Law No. 58/2019)**, ensuring privacy, secure data storage, and informed consent for participation, photography, and video recordings. Labour and volunteer laws regulate engagement of trainers and mentors, including contractual clarity and compliance with working time and remuneration rules.

Spain: The **Organic Law 3/2018 on Personal Data Protection and Guarantee of Digital Rights (LOPDGDD)** complements GDPR requirements, establishing obligations for secure data handling, participant consent for online participation, and photography/video use. Trainers and mentors are contracted under national labour legislation.

Montenegro: The **Law on Personal Data Protection (Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 79/2018)** provides the framework for GDPR-aligned data protection, informed consent, and secure storage of participant data, photographs, and recordings. Trainers and mentors are engaged under the **Labour Law**, which regulates contracts, remuneration, and voluntary participation.

Across all partner countries, **no specific permits, certifications, or official approvals are required to conduct virtual mentoring, focus groups, workshops, or blended learning activities.** Legal compliance requires:

- Clear documentation of consent forms for participation, photography, and video recordings.
- Use of GDPR-compliant or demonstrably EU-aligned digital platforms, preferably hosted on EU servers.
- Transparent management of cookies, analytics, and third-party tools.
- Secure storage of personal data, recordings, and project documentation with controlled access and defined retention periods.

Organisations are experienced in implementing GDPR-equivalent standards, particularly in Erasmus+ and EU-funded initiatives. This ensures that DigiCreate can **operate without structural legal obstacles while safeguarding participant rights, privacy, and data security.** The methodology is fully aligned with national labour and volunteer laws, and formal agreements clearly define roles, responsibilities, and protections for all mentors and trainers. Overall, legal and regulatory feasibility is high across all consortium countries, building on established practices and routines rather than requiring fundamental procedural changes.

7.5 Time Feasibility

The implementation of the DigiCreate mentoring and training model requires careful consideration of participants' availability and schedules, as young people often combine formal education, part-time work, internships, or project-based activities. The programme encompasses a total of 30 learning hours, which can be flexibly structured to accommodate diverse participant commitments while maintaining the quality of the learning experience.

Participants frequently balance education or employment with other responsibilities, making rigid schedules challenging and increasing the risk of drop-out. Academic and work calendars vary, and many participants may have irregular or unpredictable hours. To ensure time

feasibility, the programme is designed to allow flexibility through modular and adaptive delivery.

Recommended adaptations include:

- **Modular scheduling:** Deliver shorter synchronous modules, for example 4 hours of live sessions per day, complemented by 2 hours of asynchronous guided activities, group work, or reflection. This approach allows participants to engage meaningfully without overloading daily schedules while maintaining the total learning hours.
- **Block delivery:** Split the programme into two or more blocks (e.g., 3 + 2 days) delivered over consecutive weeks to reduce daily intensity while maintaining total learning hours. This accommodates participants who manage multiple responsibilities such as study, work, or internships.
- **After-work or weekend modules:** Offer sessions during late afternoons, evenings, or weekends to cater to participants with daytime commitments. Evening and weekend slots increase accessibility for those with irregular working hours, particularly in creative and cultural sectors.
- **Calendar alignment:** Avoid peak exam periods, semester endings, or holiday months (e.g., August and typical exam months like June/July). Coordinate scheduling with partner organisations, youth centres, and relevant institutions to maximise participation and minimise conflicts with academic or professional obligations.
- **Flexible asynchronous options:** Complement live sessions with guided self-study, group activities, reflection exercises, and access to session recordings. This ensures participants who cannot attend synchronously can still achieve full learning outcomes.
- **Clear communication:** Provide all schedules, expectations, preparatory materials, and instructions well in advance, enabling participants to plan effectively and ensuring smooth participation. This includes highlighting mandatory live sessions, deadlines for asynchronous tasks, and guidance for technical requirements or platform use.
- **Dedicated preparation and follow-up:** Allocate sufficient time for participant recruitment, mentor training, and preparatory briefings prior to programme delivery. Additionally, a dedicated post-programme period is reserved for evaluation, adaptation, and reporting to ensure systematic review of outcomes, incorporation of feedback, and preparation of comprehensive reports supporting continuous improvement and accountability.
- **Risk mitigation:** These measures collectively address the primary time-related risk: participants' limited availability due to formal education, work, or personal commitments. Modular scheduling, flexible block delivery, after-work/weekend options, calendar alignment, asynchronous components, and clear communication together ensure that the DigiCreate programme can be implemented realistically without compromising learning quality or participation rates.

Adequate time and resources are allocated for participant recruitment, mentor training, and all preparatory activities. Recruitment phases are strategically planned to begin at least one month prior to programme commencement, and mentor capacity-building sessions are scheduled well in advance to ensure readiness.

With these provisions, time feasibility is positive: the DigiCreate methodology can be realistically integrated into participants' daily routines without compromising learning objectives or engagement. Flexible scheduling combined with blended synchronous and asynchronous delivery allows participants with diverse educational and employment backgrounds to fully benefit from the programme. Feedback from consortium partners indicates that after-work schedules, shorter modules, and clear, early communication are

particularly effective strategies to mitigate time constraints and maximise attendance and learning outcomes.

7.6 Stakeholder Engagement and Risk Assessment

Effective implementation of the DigiCreate mentoring and training model relies on the active engagement of a diverse range of stakeholders who contribute resources, expertise, and outreach to young participants. Key stakeholders include **youth organisations, youth centres, and NGOs active in non-formal education, digital skills development, inclusion, and youth employment**. These actors often have strong outreach capacities, particularly towards young people with fewer opportunities, and play a central role in participant recruitment and local engagement.

Cultural and creative hubs, media labs, and coworking spaces provide authentic project environments, access to mentors, and connections to the creative sector. **Universities and faculties, particularly in arts, humanities, IT, and social sciences, as well as private higher education institutions**, contribute trainers, guest speakers, and participants. **Employment services and local Job Centres** support outreach, activation programmes, and skills development. **Municipal youth services and local authorities** enhance visibility, provide venues or co-funding, and integrate DigiCreate activities into local youth, education, and cultural strategies.

These stakeholders have demonstrated **willingness to actively contribute via promotional activities, mentorship support, joint planning, resource sharing, and coordinated implementation efforts**. They offer **critical expertise and established networks**, which enhance the programme's outreach, credibility, and overall effectiveness. Also, they have expressed readiness to **provide space, technical assistance, co-funding where feasible, and active engagement in joint delivery and participant support**.

Effective stakeholder engagement depends on early coordination, clear role distribution, and alignment of DigiCreate activities with existing youth, education, and employment initiatives. Structured communication channels, regular updates, and clearly defined responsibilities ensure that stakeholders understand their roles and can contribute effectively.

Several potential risks may affect implementation, primarily related to participant access, engagement, digital literacy, and organisational capacity:

- **Digital inequality and low digital literacy:** Participants from rural areas, low-income households, or with limited prior experience may face challenges using digital platforms.
Mitigation: Pre-training workshops enhance digital competencies and familiarise participants with the virtual learning environment. Access points in youth centres, NGO premises, libraries, or creative hubs, combined with equipment lending where needed, further ensure inclusivity.
- **Limited participant availability:** Participants often balance education, work, internships, project-based activities, or family responsibilities.
Mitigation: Flexible scheduling, modular delivery, and after-work or weekend sessions accommodate diverse commitments. Calendar alignment avoids peak exam periods, semester ends, and public holidays, while partner institutions coordinate scheduling to maximise participation.
- **Low motivation or engagement:** Participants may be less motivated by online-only formats or passive content.

Mitigation: High interactivity, gamification, project-based challenges, role-plays, and real-life creative briefs sustain engagement. Recognition incentives, such as formal certification and public acknowledgment, reinforce motivation.

- **Institutional capacity constraints:** Smaller organisations may face limited staff time or reliance on short-term project funding.

Mitigation: Responsibilities are clearly defined, task division is streamlined, and coordination and reporting processes are simplified. Backup facilitators and flexible internal planning enhance organisational resilience.

- **Data protection and trust concerns:** Handling personal data and recordings, particularly on international digital platforms, may raise privacy concerns.

Mitigation: GDPR-compliant platforms are used, participants receive clear privacy notices, informed consent is obtained, and data are stored securely with controlled access and defined retention periods.

Regular consultations, structured feedback sessions, and collaborative review meetings are embedded throughout the project lifecycle. Open communication channels ensure ongoing dialogue, continuous improvement, alignment with stakeholder expectations, and sustained engagement. Partners provide feedback on scheduling, content delivery, and participant support mechanisms, ensuring the programme remains responsive to the needs of both participants and facilitators.

With these measures, the identified risks are manageable and do not prevent implementation. On the contrary, they highlight areas where DigiCreate can add significant value by addressing structural gaps in access, participation, and engagement for young people. By combining flexible scheduling, interactive learning methods, digital support, recognition incentives, and strategic stakeholder engagement, the DigiCreate programme ensures realistic, inclusive, and high-quality delivery that maximises participation, learning outcomes, and long-term impact.

8 Recommendations for Designing the DigiCreate Methodology

The following section provides **strategic and operational recommendations** intended for **experts, trainers, and programme designers** responsible for developing and structuring the DigiCreate methodology. It does not describe a finalized training programme but instead serves as a **design framework** that translates evidence from **desk research, surveys, focus groups, and the feasibility study** into practical guidance for structuring **content, delivery methods, and learning processes**.

The recommendations outline how the **5-day, 6-hours-per-day blended online training** should be conceptualized and operationalized as a coherent **non-formal education (NFE) intervention** for young creatives in the **Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI)**. It is recommended that the methodology include **workshops, experiential learning, role-play simulations, debates, gamification, collaborative tasks, and project-based work** as core learning approaches.

A key **design recommendation** is the integration of **inter-modular mentoring (between-module mentoring support)**, embedded directly within the learning process rather than delivered as a separate mentoring programme. This is recommended in order to ensure **continuity of learning between training days**, strengthen **peer collaboration**, and support the **practical application of skills through guided tasks and reflective activities**.

The methodology is recommended to be **flexible, learner-centred, and context-sensitive**. It should reflect emerging creative ecosystems in **Montenegro, Serbia, and Bosnia and**

Herzegovina, while also integrating insights from more established CCI contexts in **Spain, Portugal, and Germany**.

The following recommendations are presented in a structured form across the key methodological components.

1. Interactive, Experiential, and Project-Based Learning

Data from surveys, focus groups, and the feasibility study consistently demonstrate that hands-on, participatory approaches significantly enhance digital, technical, and soft skill acquisition, increase motivation, and strengthen sustained engagement. Experiential approaches allow participants to apply concepts in realistic contexts, reflect on outcomes, and develop problem-solving abilities relevant to creative and cultural industries (CCI). Pre-program orientation and tutorials ensure that participants are confident in using digital platforms and collaborative tools, enabling full participation in interactive sessions.

Recommended methodological approaches include:

- **Role-play, simulations, and scenario-based exercises:** Activities are designed to replicate real-world creative industry processes, such as multimedia project development, campaign design, UX/UI prototyping, and AI-assisted content creation. Scenario-based learning also supports exposure to freelance work dynamics, client communication, and portfolio management challenges.
- **Gamification:** The use of badges, challenges, light competition, and point-based systems is recommended to support motivation and sustained engagement. These elements can be embedded into platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Moodle, and Google Workspace to support both synchronous and asynchronous participation.
- **Project-based learning:** Participants are guided to develop tangible outputs such as digital portfolios, multimedia campaigns, websites, VR/AR prototypes, AI-assisted creative works, or interactive storytelling projects. These outputs are designed to reflect local and regional contexts and to support applied learning outcomes. Completion of learning activities may contribute to recognition through YouthPass certificates and micro-credentials.
- **Virtual debates and collaborative discussions:** Structured discussions are used to develop critical thinking, intercultural competence, and communication skills. Topics may include industry trends, ethical issues in digital creation, copyright and licensing, and sustainability in CCI. Real-time engagement is facilitated through tools such as Zoom or BigBlueButton, while asynchronous reflection is supported through Moodle or Teams.
- **Peer feedback and collaborative learning activities:** Structured peer interaction is recommended to strengthen teamwork, co-creation, and reflective learning. Collaborative tools such as Microsoft Teams and Google Workspace support joint production, real-time editing, and continuous feedback across geographically distributed groups.

By embedding interactive, experiential, and project-based approaches, the DigiCreate methodology ensures that learning is **applied, collaborative, and competence-oriented**, in line with non-formal education principles. These approaches strengthen digital, creative, and transversal skills, while supporting inclusive participation of young people across Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain, Portugal, and Germany, preparing them for both employment and freelance pathways within the CCI sector.

2. Curriculum Themes and Content Areas

Based on surveys, focus groups, and the feasibility study, the DigiCreate curriculum is **recommended** to equip young creatives with a balanced set of technical, digital, soft, entrepreneurial, and civic competences, while fostering reflective practice and intercultural understanding. The curriculum is intended to be implemented through **modular learning units** combined with experiential, project-based, and **inter-modular application tasks**, ensuring continuity of learning and practical skill development across the full training cycle. It is designed to be adaptable to diverse educational, cultural, and labour market contexts across Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain, Portugal, and Germany, while remaining **flexible in structure, pacing, and delivery** to accommodate different participant needs and local implementation conditions.

Digital Skills:

- **Content creation:** Video, audio, graphics, web design, interactive storytelling, and multimedia campaigns reflecting local and regional cultural contexts.
- **UX/UI, 3D, hybrid techniques, AR/VR:** Hands-on training in designing immersive digital experiences and interactive prototypes.
- **AI-assisted tools for creative production:** Integrating AI tools in visual, audio, and multimedia projects to enhance creativity and efficiency.
- **Platform literacy:** Microsoft Teams, Google Workspace, Moodle, Zoom, BigBlueButton for live sessions, file sharing, collaboration, and asynchronous learning.
- **Social media management, online networking, and digital portfolios:** Practical skills for self-promotion, career visibility, and engagement in the CCI sector.

Soft Skills:

- **Communication, teamwork, and collaboration:** Effective interaction within diverse teams and across cultural or regional backgrounds.
- **Critical thinking and problem-solving:** Scenario-based exercises, creative problem-solving, and decision-making under simulated real-life industry conditions.
- **Self-management, confidence, and resilience:** Building adaptive strategies to handle uncertainty, workload, and creative challenges.
- **Emotional intelligence and adaptability:** Understanding social cues, constructive feedback, and flexible approaches to collaboration.
- **Creative thinking and innovation:** Encouraging experimentation, ideation, and original solutions within project-based tasks.

Entrepreneurial and Career Skills:

- **Freelancing, project management, and time management:** Practical guidance for managing independent or project-based work, deadlines, and client expectations.
- **Marketing, branding, and personal visibility:** Strategies for self-promotion, professional networking, and portfolio presentation.
- **Fundraising, grant writing, and funding mechanisms:** Tools to access resources, support projects, and sustain creative initiatives.

- **Networking strategies, mentorship engagement, and career planning:** Leveraging professional networks, mentors, and platforms to access opportunities in creative industries.

Social and Civic Engagement:

- **Inclusion, diversity, and intercultural awareness:** Promoting equity, intercultural dialogue, and understanding of local and European creative ecosystems.
- **Community-based creative projects:** Designing initiatives that respond to societal needs, involve local stakeholders, and create visible impact.
- **Advocacy, social entrepreneurship, and creative activism:** Encouraging young creatives to engage in socially meaningful projects, policy dialogue, or cultural campaigns.

Research and Reflection:

- **Personal reflection exercises:** Encouraging self-assessment, learning journals, and insight into personal growth.
- **Scenario analysis and case studies:** Applying knowledge to realistic challenges and evaluating outcomes.
- **Peer and mentor feedback loops:** Structured opportunities for critique, advice, and continuous improvement in both technical and soft skills.

The curriculum framework is recommended to ensure the integrated development of **digital, creative, interpersonal, entrepreneurial, civic, and reflective competences**, while strengthening **learner autonomy, adaptability, confidence, and resilience** required for participation in diverse Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) contexts across all six countries. It should support **flexible pacing and modular adaptation**, enabling implementation across different learning environments, digital access levels, and participant profiles, as well as alignment with local labour market opportunities.

Importantly, the curriculum is structured to ensure **equitable access and inclusion**, particularly for young people facing socio-economic barriers, including Roma and Egyptian youth, women, and participants from low-income or rural backgrounds.

3. Programme Structure and Delivery

Survey and focus group findings indicate that young creatives frequently balance multiple commitments, including formal education, informal work, caregiving responsibilities, and other personal obligations. These constraints require a **flexible, modular, and hybrid learning design** that maximizes participation, accommodates diverse schedules, and ensures sustained engagement throughout the training process.

Recommended structure:

- The programme is delivered over a **five-day consecutive training cycle**, where each day combines structured live facilitation with applied learning tasks, ensuring progressive knowledge development and continuous practical application.

- **Total learning hours:** 30 hours per participant, combining synchronous (live online delivery) and asynchronous (guided independent learning) activities to balance intensity and accessibility.
- **Modular delivery approach:**
 - **Daily format:** 4 hours of live online sessions (interactive workshops, facilitation, group work, scenario-based exercises) + 2 hours of structured asynchronous work (reflection, applied tasks, collaborative assignments)
 - **Block modules:** 2–3 modules delivered over consecutive weeks (e.g., 3 + 2 days format), reducing daily intensity and enabling participants to integrate learning with other responsibilities
- **Inter-modular learning tasks:**

A key feature of the methodology is the integration of structured **inter-modular tasks implemented between training days**, which ensure continuity of learning and practical application of skills through guided peer collaboration, reflective exercises, applied mini-projects, and preparatory or follow-up assignments linked to live sessions, **with continuous mentoring support embedded throughout this phase to guide reflection, collaboration, and application of learning outcomes**. These tasks function as a **structured bridge between modules**, reinforcing learning outcomes and enabling real-time application of knowledge within the training cycle.
- **After-work and weekend sessions:** Sessions may be scheduled outside standard working hours or during weekends to maximize accessibility for participants with employment, education, or caregiving responsibilities.
- **Calendar alignment:** Programme scheduling takes into account local academic and cultural calendars, avoiding exam periods, semester breaks, public holidays, and peak holiday seasons, in coordination with partner organisations, youth centres, cultural hubs, and municipalities.
- **Equity considerations:** Flexible scheduling ensures equitable access for marginalized youth, including Roma and Egyptian communities, women, and participants from low-income or rural backgrounds, enabling full participation without disruption to existing commitments.
- **Curriculum implications:** The modular and flexible structure supports the integration of digital competencies, soft skills, and professional development content, while ensuring space for reflection, mentoring feedback, and applied skill development.

By combining **modular scheduling, hybrid online delivery, inter-modular learning design with embedded mentoring support, and targeted inclusion measures**, DigiCreate ensures that all participants can meaningfully engage in learning while balancing personal, educational, and professional responsibilities. This approach strengthens skill development, enhances professional readiness, and promotes equitable access across diverse national contexts: Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain, Portugal, and Germany.

4. Integrated Learning Support Model (Peer, Expert, Group and Individual Support)

The DigiCreate learning methodology **is proposed as a recommended integrated learning support model**, combining trainer-led facilitation, peer and expert mentoring, structured group work, and individual guidance. The model is intended as a **design recommendation for**

implementation, where support functions are embedded throughout the learning process rather than delivered as separate components. Training delivery and mentoring support are conceptually distinguished, with mentoring primarily supporting inter-modular application and reflection phases.

This model is based on research and focus group findings, which consistently indicate that young creatives benefit from a combination of **structured facilitation, peer learning, and targeted mentoring support**, enabling different dimensions of skills development, reflection, and career progression.

Training Facilitators (Trainers / Experts)

Training delivery is recommended to be led by **professional trainers and expert facilitators**, responsible for the implementation of the 5-day training cycle:

- Deliver live online training sessions (workshops, exercises, group facilitation, input sessions)
- Provide structured input on digital skills, creative production, entrepreneurship, and career development
- Facilitate interactive learning methods (scenario-based learning, debates, simulations, project work)
- Ensure coherence of learning content across modules and alignment with learning outcomes
- Operate within a non-formal education (NFE) facilitation framework

Trainers are primarily responsible for **synchronous learning during live sessions**, ensuring methodological consistency and structured delivery of content.

Mentoring Support (Peer + Expert Mentors)

Mentoring is recommended to be embedded primarily within the **inter-modular learning phase**, supporting application, reflection, and continuation of learning between training days:

Peer Mentors:

- Alumni, advanced learners, or assistant mentors with relevant lived experience
- Support participants during inter-modular tasks (reflection, peer collaboration, mini-project continuation)
- Provide motivational, social, and practical guidance based on experience
- Strengthen peer learning dynamics and confidence-building

Expert Mentors:

- Professionals from creative industries, digital sectors, and education/training environments
- Provide targeted feedback during inter-modular phases (portfolio input, project advice, career guidance)
- Support applied learning in digital production, entrepreneurship, and creative development
- Link learning outputs to real-world industry expectations

Mentoring is therefore **not conceived as a standalone programme component**, but as a structured support mechanism integrated into the learning cycle, primarily between training days.

Group-Based Learning Support

Group learning is recommended as a core collaborative method facilitated during live sessions and extended into inter-modular work:

- Groups of 5–7 participants with mixed skills and backgrounds
- Scenario-based tasks, collaborative projects, and applied creative assignments
- Development of teamwork, problem-solving, digital literacy, and communication skills
- Use of digital platforms (Microsoft Teams, Google Workspace, Moodle, Zoom) for collaboration
- Inclusive design ensuring participation of marginalized groups through structured facilitation

Individual Support (1:1 Guidance)

Individual mentoring support is recommended as a complementary layer:

- Short sessions focused on portfolios, skills development, and career pathways
- Feedback on project outputs and individual progress
- Support for CV development, freelancing, entrepreneurship, and employment readiness
- Delivered online with optional asynchronous follow-up communication

Mentor–Participant Matching Approach

The matching of participants with peer and expert mentors is recommended to be organised at programme level prior to implementation, as part of the **pre-selection and onboarding assessment phase**. The process is based on structured participant profiling, including skills level, digital competencies, learning needs, career interests, and prior experience in creative or digital fields, as well as mentor availability and thematic expertise.

This approach ensures **evidence-based and needs-responsive allocation of mentoring support**, enabling alignment between participant profiles and mentor competencies from the outset of the programme. It is particularly important for ensuring relevance and effectiveness of mentoring during inter-modular learning phases, where support is delivered through flexible, task-based interaction rather than fixed long-term pairings.

The matching process is **coordinated by the programme implementation teams within each consortium partner organisation (lead trainers and project coordinators)**, in alignment with the overall consortium coordination structure. This ensures consistency across participating countries while allowing contextual adaptation at local implementation level. Coordination among partners supports equitable distribution of mentoring resources and coherence with overall programme objectives.

Overall, the approach strengthens **transparency, relevance, and inclusivity in mentor allocation**, while supporting effective learning progression, peer dynamics, and expert guidance within a hybrid, multi-country delivery framework.

Implementation Principle

This model is intended as a **methodological recommendation for programme design**, where distinct but complementary support functions are integrated throughout the learning process:

- **Trainers and facilitators** deliver structured synchronous learning through the 5-day training cycle, including workshops, scenario-based exercises, group facilitation, and guided practical activities.
- **Peer and expert mentors** primarily support participants during inter-modular phases by facilitating reflection, application of learning outcomes, collaborative continuation tasks, and individual guidance linked to ongoing assignments and project work.
- **Group-based learning processes** connect these elements through collaborative tasks, peer exchange, co-creation activities, and applied project development.

The integrated structure is designed to ensure continuity between instruction, application, collaboration, and reflection, while maintaining clear functional distinctions between training delivery and mentoring support. While trainers are responsible for structured content delivery during synchronous sessions, mentors primarily provide continuity and support during inter-modular learning phases.

5. Digital Tools and Accessibility

The DigiCreate program prioritizes inclusive, accessible, and secure use of digital tools to support hybrid and flexible learning for young creatives across Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain, Portugal, and Germany. Surveys, focus groups, and the feasibility study highlight the importance of platforms that are low-bandwidth-friendly, familiar to participants, and equipped with interactive features that enhance engagement, collaboration, and accessibility.

Platform Use and Accessibility:

- **Primary platforms:** Microsoft Teams is recommended for live sessions, collaborative tasks, and mentorship, offering stable performance and breakout room functionality for small-group work. Zoom or BigBlueButton serve as alternative options for interactive workshops and mentoring sessions. Google Workspace supports collaborative document editing, file sharing, and project management, while Moodle functions as the main LMS for course materials, asynchronous tasks, quizzes, and discussion boards.
- **Interactive features:** Breakout rooms, polls, quizzes, and collaborative whiteboards (e.g., Miro, Jamboard) enable scenario-based exercises, peer feedback, and real-time project collaboration, replicating in-person experiential learning. Feasibility study findings confirm that these features significantly increase motivation, participation, and peer-to-peer learning.
- **Asynchronous access and flexibility:** All live sessions are recorded, and downloadable materials are provided to ensure participants with limited internet connectivity or device access can fully engage. Guided asynchronous tasks, reflection exercises, and collaborative assignments via LMS platforms support flexible learning schedules, allowing participants to balance education, informal work, and caregiving responsibilities.

- **Digital literacy support:** Pre-program orientation sessions, tutorials, and demo sessions familiarize participants with platform navigation and interactive features, reducing early-stage dropouts and digital frustration. Participants are guided on using breakout rooms, collaborative tools, and file-sharing platforms to ensure effective participation in group work and mentorship.

Security and Data Protection:

- **GDPR compliance:** All tools are used in accordance with GDPR and relevant local data protection regulations, with secure storage and controlled access to project work and recordings.
- **Ethical and safe use:** Guidelines for responsible online behavior, data handling, and secure communication are provided to all participants and mentors, with particular attention to minors and vulnerable groups, including Roma, Egyptians, women, and low-income youth.

Equity and Inclusion:

- Platform selection, recordings, and asynchronous access ensure equitable participation across all six countries, accommodating diverse digital literacy levels, socio-economic backgrounds, and regional disparities.
- Interactive features such as breakout rooms, polls, and collaborative whiteboards foster inclusive engagement, peer learning, and intercultural exchange.

By integrating low-bandwidth, familiar platforms with interactive features and secure, flexible access, DigiCreate enables all participants to fully engage in hybrid learning activities. This approach strengthens digital skills, collaborative competencies, and equitable participation, ensuring that marginalized youth can meaningfully benefit from mentoring, project-based tasks, and peer-supported learning experiences.

6. Risk Mitigation and Adaptation

The DigiCreate learning model anticipates a range of potential risks and implements strategies to ensure **inclusive, safe, and effective learning** for participants across Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain, Portugal, and Germany.

Digital inequality is addressed by providing access points at youth centres, NGO premises, cultural hubs, and libraries, alongside the possibility of lending devices where feasible. The program combines **hybrid delivery and asynchronous tasks**, ensuring participants with limited internet connectivity or devices can fully engage in learning activities.

Scheduling conflicts are mitigated through **modular program formats, after-work sessions, and weekend options**, allowing participants to balance education, informal work, and caregiving responsibilities without missing key learning opportunities.

Motivation and engagement are supported by embedding **gamified elements, scenario-based exercises, and visible outcomes** such as portfolios, project deliverables, and digital campaigns. Mentoring support—both peer and expert—further ensures sustained participation, confidence-building, and personalized guidance.

Institutional constraints are managed through clear **task division among mentors, facilitators, and partner organizations**, the availability of **backup facilitators**, and simplified reporting procedures to reduce administrative burden. This ensures program continuity even in contexts where local organizational capacity is limited.

Data protection and privacy are prioritized by using **secure, GDPR-compliant platforms**, implementing clear **informed consent procedures**, and maintaining **controlled access to sensitive participant data and project materials**, with particular attention to **minors and vulnerable groups**, including Roma, Egyptians, women, and low-income youth.

By integrating these risk mitigation strategies, DigiCreate ensures that **all participants can engage safely, equitably, and effectively**, minimizing barriers related to technology, scheduling, motivation, institutional capacity, and data protection, and thereby safeguarding the overall quality and impact of the mentoring program.

7. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Feedback

DigiCreate integrates a **comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system** to ensure program quality, continuous improvement, and measurable impact across Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain, Portugal, and Germany. The framework combines **quantitative and qualitative approaches** to capture both participation metrics and learning outcomes.

Quantitative monitoring includes tracking **attendance, pre- and post-program assessments, and platform analytics**, providing insights into engagement levels, completion rates, and digital interaction patterns.

Qualitative evaluation will be conducted through **surveys, focus groups, and mentor debriefs**, capturing participant experiences, satisfaction, skill development, and feedback on mentoring approaches, curriculum content, and digital tools.

Feedback loops are established to allow **continuous adaptation of program elements**, including scheduling, content delivery, and platform use, based on participant needs and contextual constraints identified during implementation. This ensures the program remains flexible, learner-centred, and responsive to diverse regional contexts and participant profiles.

Long-term follow-up occurs 3–6 months after program completion to evaluate the **application of skills, use of digital portfolios, engagement in further studies or employment**, and other indicators of sustained impact. These follow-ups inform future iterations of the mentoring model, curriculum updates, and digital resource optimization.

Through this integrated monitoring, evaluation, and feedback system, DigiCreate ensures that **learning objectives are achieved, participant engagement is maximized, and the program delivers measurable outcomes**, supporting the development of resilient, skilled, and professionally prepared young creatives across all participating countries.

8. Stakeholder Engagement

DigiCreate places **strategic stakeholder engagement** at the core of program design and implementation to ensure relevance, sustainability, and alignment with local creative ecosystems across Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain, Portugal, and Germany. The program actively collaborates with **youth organizations, universities, cultural hubs, municipal authorities, and creative industry partners**, leveraging their expertise, networks, and resources to support participant recruitment, mentoring, and project-based activities.

An **Advisory Board** composed of representatives from **industry, civil society, and education sectors** provides ongoing **strategic guidance, quality assurance, and alignment with local and regional needs**. The board contributes to program planning, evaluation, and adaptation, ensuring that DigiCreate remains responsive to emerging trends in creative and cultural industries (CCI) and addresses structural disparities identified in research and feasibility studies.

Clear and structured **communication of roles and responsibilities** is established among all stakeholders to maintain program coherence, optimize resource sharing, and foster long-term sustainability. Regular consultations, joint planning meetings, and reporting mechanisms ensure that partners are fully engaged, informed, and able to contribute to the success of mentoring, curriculum delivery, and participant support initiatives.

By integrating stakeholder collaboration and strategic oversight, DigiCreate strengthens the connection between young creatives and relevant actors in the CCI ecosystem, supporting **networking, career opportunities, and the practical application of skills**, while fostering a sustainable, inclusive, and context-sensitive learning environment across all participating countries.

The DigiCreate recommendations provide a **coherent methodological framework** for the development of inclusive, practice-oriented non-formal education programmes for young creatives. The approach integrates **experiential learning, modular delivery, inter-modular application tasks, embedded mentoring, digital accessibility, and collaborative learning processes** into a unified learning design that can be adapted across diverse contexts.

A central emphasis is placed on **continuity of learning, flexibility, inclusion, and real-world application of skills**, ensuring that participants progressively build not only technical and creative competences, but also **confidence, collaboration skills, resilience, and employability within the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI)**.

The framework further incorporates **risk mitigation, monitoring and evaluation, and stakeholder engagement** as key operational pillars, supporting quality assurance, responsiveness, and sustainability of implementation. Through cooperation with educational institutions, youth organisations, and creative industry actors, the model strengthens its relevance and connection to real labour market environments.

Overall, the recommendations offer a **scalable and adaptable foundation** for developing learner-centred programmes that support meaningful participation and long-term professional development of young creatives across Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain, Portugal, and Germany.

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10 Annexes

Annex 1 – Research Methodology and Feasibility Study Guide

Annex 1 contains the full methodological framework underpinning the comparative research and feasibility study. It provides a structured overview of the research rationale, objectives, design, implementation process, and reporting structure across all six partner countries.

The annex includes:

- An **introduction outlining the rationale and background** of the research;
- Clearly defined **research goals and objectives**;
- A detailed description of the **research approach and design**, including the theoretical framework;
- Specification of the **research setting, population, sample, and sampling criteria**;
- A comprehensive explanation of **data collection methods and instruments**, including:
 - Desk research;
 - Online/web questionnaire (full structure included);
 - Online focus group framework and question guide;
 - Feasibility study methodology;
- A description of the **data collection procedures** for each method;
- Sections addressing **reliability and validity** of the research process;
- An overview of the **data analysis approach**;
- The structure for **national draft research reports** and the methodology for **final consolidated report preparation**;
- The overall **research timeframe**;
- The template for the *Consent to Participate in Focus Group* form, ensuring compliance with ethical standards and data protection requirements.

This annex serves as the technical and methodological backbone of the publication, ensuring transparency, comparability, and scientific rigor across all participating countries.

Annex 2 – Online Survey Dataset (Excel Format)

This annex contains the consolidated Excel dataset of all respondents from the online survey conducted in six partner countries (Germany, Spain, Portugal, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina). The dataset includes anonymized responses used for the quantitative analysis presented in this publication.

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
- Udruženje Okret (SPIN) – Bosnia & Herzegovina
- Univerzitet Union Nikola Tesla (UnTesla) – Serbia
- Javna Ustanova Univerzitet 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



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.