



# MENRE

Strengthening the mental resilience  
of youth in dealing with crises  
presented on social media

## Transnational Report from Germany, the Czech Republic and Hungary

### Activity 1

MENRE - STRENGTHENING THE MENTAL RESILIENCE OF YOUTH IN  
DEALING WITH CRISES PRESENTED ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Relevance of the Topic for the Target Groups

This document has been drafted by HABA Association for the project MENRE – STRENGTHENING THE MENTAL RESILIENCE OF YOUTH IN DEALING WITH CRISES PRESENTED ON SOCIAL MEDIA, 2024-3-DE04-KA210-YOU-000294460, which has been co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

In all three countries, the mental health of young people has deteriorated in recent times, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic. Adolescents in Germany are facing psychological challenges on an unprecedented scale, with the rate of diagnoses of psychological disorders rising significantly since the start of the pandemic. The DAK report "Children and Young People" (Witte et al. 2023) emphasizes that mental health problems are widespread and increasingly affect adolescents, especially the majority of girls. Numerous studies and reports (e.g., Witte et al. 2023; Schnetzer et al. 2024; WHO 2024) recognize the link between the high psychological burden currently observed among young people and the multiple crises that have occurred since the COVID-19 pandemic, which have caused feelings of prolonged instability, helplessness, and uncertainty. The mental state of Hungarian young people was also assessed in the 2024 Hungarian Youth Survey, which found that one in five Hungarian young people aged 15-34 are less satisfied with their lives. Nineteen percent of girls and 11 percent of boys feel lonely. At the same time, 75 percent of boys and 53 percent of girls responded that they feel good about themselves. Social media use is very widespread: they spend at least 4 hours a day on social media, with excessive use being more common among girls (38 percent). According to researchers, excessive use of social media may be the reason why only 53 percent of girls reported feeling comfortable in their own skin (Pető 2025:27-28).

According to previous research, young people in the three countries studied in the MENRE project are burdened by broadly similar crises, primarily war, the climate crisis, and livelihood issues. Young people in Germany are most concerned about



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war, the poor economic situation (e.g., inflation), climate change, housing, and social polarization (Albert et al. 2024; Schnetzer et al. 2024). Young people also tend to view global developments with increased concern. Those most at risk include adolescents without a stable family environment, children and young people living as refugees, and young people who are socially marginalized due to poverty or other factors (Peter and Asbrand 2025). In the Czech Republic, young people are increasingly exposed to crisis-related content on social media, particularly in relation to recent global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, climate change, and growing social and political tensions. According to a 2022 Hungarian study, consumption of social media content related to the COVID-19 virus and the Russian-Ukrainian war increased feelings of hopelessness and isolation, caused sadness due to the loss of balance and predictability, and called into question their belief in the world, their faith in society and security. Feelings of fear and anxiety, negative thoughts, and depression were common among them (Guld – Balázs 2022:35).

A significant proportion of young people learn about global crises from social media. According to a 2023 report by the Czech National Institute of Mental Health (Národní ústav duševního zdraví 2023) found that 59% of adolescents said they often encounter emotionally stressful content on the internet, and nearly a third reported increased anxiety or stress symptoms related to digital media consumption. Seventy-two percent of Czech teenagers regularly follow crisis-related news on social media platforms, but only 34% feel confident that they can distinguish between reliable and manipulative content (O2 Czech Republic 2022). One of the dangers of crisis content consumed on social media is that fake news, misleading information, rumors, and fake images and deepfake videos created with artificial intelligence can also appear on these platforms. However, young people do not necessarily have the skills and knowledge to filter these out. Czech schools, for example, lack systematic media literacy education, so many young people do not have the tools to critically evaluate the information they consume. The Czech Ministry of Education's 2023 proposal aims to incorporate media education into the curriculum. Managing the emotional and

cognitive effects of crisis content on social media is important not only for the mental well-being of young people, but also for strengthening civic resilience and critical thinking.

Another danger of crisis content spreading on social media is that young people are exposed to crises more intensely than ever before, without filters, often without context and without proper interpretation. This has a significant impact on their mental well-being, sense of security, and optimism about the future (Schnetzer et al. 2024; Kixmüller 2024). A growing number of studies point to a link between increasing psychological stress and the growing use of digital media, as problematic and ill-considered use of social media can have a negative impact on young people's mental well-being (see: WHO 2024).

Teachers and youth workers play an important role in interpreting crisis content and thus reducing negative mental effects. In times of social and global crises with direct local impacts, schools and other social institutions act as key stabilizing structures (Peter and Asbrand 2025). Teachers and other professionals need to be aware of the content that young people consume on social media and understand its impact in order to provide effective assistance and help decision-makers develop appropriate regulations communicating crisis management strategies—including launching campaigns on the topic, possibly involving peer helpers, whose effectiveness has been confirmed by international research (see Pavarini et al. 2023).

Preliminary research findings therefore show that social media plays a significant role in all three countries in bringing news about crises to young people. This news, including fake news, can have a significant negative impact on the mental health of young people. The school system does not prepare young people to counter these effects and to distinguish between false and reliable information. There is therefore a great need for initiatives of this kind, the development of good pedagogical practices, and the involvement of teachers and youth workers.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

The aim of this transnational report is to present the types of crisis-related content that young people in Germany, the Czech Republic and Hungary engage with on social media and to identify the associated social, emotional, and mental effects. It also seeks to highlight best-practice educational offerings in this three countries that support young people in using digital content critically and responsibly.

The research conducted for the purpose of this report is intended to contribute to the targeted support and preparation of young people. Based in this research, the consortium will develop recommendations and propose pedagogical practices that strengthen young people's resilience and their ability to critically and consciously engage with digital content on social media, especially content related to crises or emotionally challenging topics.

In addition, this research will help broaden the scope of action for youth workers and educators by providing them with specialized knowledge and practical recommendations. These insights will support digital media education, such as guiding young people in managing online content, and promote the development of critical thinking skills. These recommendations will be designed to be applicable across national contexts.

This online research draws on contributions from a wide range of sources, including scientific research papers, survey findings, journalistic articles, and interviews. Together, these materials help illuminate the discourse surrounding crisis-related content on social media and its effects on young people. They also serve as a foundation for developing educational offerings and formulating recommendations for the MENRE project.

## 1.3 Definition of Key Terms

### 1.3.1 Crisis Content

Crises are situations or life circumstances that cannot be managed effectively in the moment. In this paper, crisis content refers to material on social media, such as

posts, images, videos, articles, or stories, that present, discuss, or react to events involving significant danger, disruption, or distress. These may include natural disasters, wars, pandemics, violence, political unrest, mental health struggles, or personal tragedies.

Crisis-related content is often emotionally intense and may evoke fear, grief, anger, or anxiety. It can be highly disruptive, as it reflects events that challenge social, emotional, or mental stability. Due to its disturbing nature, such content is frequently shared and spreads rapidly, sometimes without proper verification. It may also include graphic images or videos. Often, this content is framed through personal experiences or fears to create a stronger emotional impact on viewers.

### 1.3.2 Psychosocial Impact

In the context of this report, psychosocial impact refers to the combined psychological and social effects that crisis content on social media can have on young people. It describes how exposure to such content influences a young person's mental health, emotional well-being, behaviour, social relationships, and overall functioning within environments such as school, family, and peer groups.

### 1.4 Research Methodology

Within the framework of Activity 1 of the MENRE project, comprehensive desk research was conducted as an initial step. The online research draws on contributions from a wide range of sources, including scientific research papers and studies, survey findings, academic journal articles, and interviews with experts, as well as newspaper articles to illustrate the media presence of the topic. This review focused on international sources to map the discourse surrounding crisis-related content on social media. Together, these materials help illuminate the discourse surrounding crisis-related content on social media and its effects on young people. They also serve as a foundation for developing educational offerings and formulating recommendations for the MENRE project.



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In a second step, following a survey jointly developed with the consortium, 15 young people in Germany and another 15 in Hungary and 23 young people From the Czech Republic participated in the study. The anonymized surveys were distributed in paper and online format. Participation in the surveys was on a voluntary basis.

In a third step, 4 youth workers in Germany, 5 teachers and youth workers from Hungary and 8 youth workers from the Czech Republic were interviewed using a set of questions developed by the consortium. The youth workers received the project description and the interview guidelines via email and could voluntarily choose to participate in the interview. The interviews were conducted by telephone and/or in person and were not recorded. During the interviews, note-taking was minimized to maintain focus on the conversation. After the interviews, detailed memory protocols were prepared in order to preserve as much information as possible.

### 1.5 Involved Target Groups

In our research two target groups were involved: young people and youth workers.

#### Young people

A total of 53 young people participated in the survey on a voluntary basis from the three countries. The young people were aged between 13 and 26, with respondents in Germany aged between 14 and 17, most respondents in the Czech Republic aged between 17 and 19, and most respondents in Hungary aged between 19 and 22.

#### Youth workers

In total, 17 interviews were carried out with youth workers and teachers from the three countries. The participants selected for the interviews were those with experience working with young people and who demonstrated openness to the topic.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Relevant Psychological Theories

These are relevant psychological theories that help explain how young people are affected by crisis-related content on social media. These theories help explain why



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this type of content has such strong emotional, cognitive, and social impacts on young people, especially during vulnerable periods of development.

#### Cognitive Appraisal Theory by Lazarus and Folkman

This theory explains how people evaluate and respond to stress. Young people assess whether a crisis (e.g. traumatic content online) is threatening and whether they have the resources to cope. If they feel powerless, emotional distress (like anxiety or hopelessness) increases (Lazarus & Folkman 1984).

#### Cultivation Theory by Gerbner

This theory suggests that repeated exposure to media shapes one's perception of reality. Constant crisis content can make young people believe the world is more dangerous or hopeless than it really is, contributing to chronic stress or fear (Gerbner 1969).

#### Psychosocial Development Theory by Erikson

Adolescents are in the stage of "identity vs. role confusion." Exposure to overwhelming or conflicting crisis narratives online can make it harder for them to form a stable sense of self, especially if they're already experiencing personal struggles (Erikson 1968).

## 2.2. Theories Explaining the Impact of Social Media on Young People

These are key psychological and sociological theories that explain the impact of social media on young people, especially in relation to emotional, cognitive, and social development.

#### Uses and Gratifications Theory

This theory suggests that young people actively use social media to fulfill specific needs—such as seeking connection, validation, entertainment, or information (Katz et al. 1973) However, when used to cope with stress or crisis, social media can either help (through support) or harm (through exposure to harmful content or comparison).

#### Social Comparison Theory by Festinger

Young people often compare themselves to peers or influencers online. This can lead to lower self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, or increased anxiety, especially when they perceive others as more successful, attractive, or emotionally unaffected by crises (Festinger 1954).

#### Social Learning Theory by Bandura

Young people learn behaviors by observing others. On social media, they may imitate peers or influencers in how they react to crises, express emotions, or engage in activism or risk-taking. This theory explains both positive and harmful behavioral modeling online (Bandura 1977).

### 2.3. Theories Related to How to Cope with Stress

#### Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping

It directly explains how young people evaluate stressful content (like war, climate disasters, or violence on social media) and how they choose coping responses. It highlights the difference between problem-focused (e.g. limiting screen time, fact-checking) and emotion-focused (e.g., seeking support, emotional expression) strategies. It's highly adaptable to both education (media literacy, self-regulation) and mental health support (counseling, peer support) (Lazarus & Folkman 1984).

#### Psychological Resilience Theory

It shifts focus from just reducing stress to building long-term coping capacity, which is essential for youth repeatedly exposed to digital crises. It emphasizes the role of protective factors—like self-esteem, optimism, supportive relationships, and meaning-making. It aligns well with youth work and educational interventions that aim to strengthen emotional resilience, community support, and positive identity development (Masten 2001).



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### 3. Crises identified during our desk research in the three countries

During our desk research, we identified three main types of crises: personal crises, social crises, and global crises. Of these, we identified the following crises in the individual country reports during our desk research:

#### 3.1 Personal crises

Personal crises are present among young people in all three countries, and they are also encountered in social media. However, the literature we reviewed considers these crises to be significant to varying degrees in each country. While traumatic experiences and mental health problems are prominent in Germany, research in Hungary focuses on the fear of losing social status, the fear of being left out, anxieties, and various addictions. The results are broken down by country below.

Germany:

##### Traumatic Experiences

An experience can become traumatic when the situation exceeds an individual's ability to cope, leaving them feeling overwhelmed. This often results in intense emotional stress, accompanied by feelings of helplessness, fear, and horror. In today's digital age, media literacy and the potential for trauma through digital media are increasingly important. Children and adolescents are exposed to a wide range of content and social interactions that may have potentially traumatic effects. On social media, there are hundreds of accounts dedicated to the topic of trauma, featuring bright colours, cute animals, and affirmations.

##### Mental health Issues

According to Sittenauer (2025), the full spectrum of contemporary mental health and awareness vocabulary can be found in this genre on social media. However, the widespread use of terms like "trauma", the individualized focus on self-care, and the retreat into the private sphere raise concerns. In addition, the commercialisation and



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monetisation of online content, through newsletters and merchandise, make these sugar-coated communities problematic. On one hand, they curate the content that algorithms feed into timelines under the guise of mental health, neurodiversity, and general well-being. This often includes symptom descriptions that encourage self-diagnosis of ADHD or autism, or traumatic videos from strangers that leave viewers feeling disturbed and unsettled.

Hungary:

#### Loss of social status

Loss of social status is considered a personal crisis, a feeling of worthlessness, which can also be triggered in young people if they receive fewer likes than expected, are blocked, unsubscribed from, or see posts from which they have been excluded, or if they are subjected to public cyberbullying (Silk et al. 2024).

#### FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)

Another personal crisis is the so-called FOMO phenomenon among young people. During our desk research, previous studies raised the issue of FOMO among young people. Fear of Missing Out refers to the feeling that young people are missing out on something important if they do not participate in social media interactions or if others are enjoying meaningful experiences or learning about things that they are not (Grúz – Fekete 2022:78).

#### Anxieties

Anxiety and tension arising from concerns about the future or the state of the environment and its impact on human health and safety. These can also be caused by news reports in the media (Prisniakova et al. 2024).

#### Personal addictions

During previous desk research, personal addictions also appeared among personal crises in the literature, e.g. alcohol, drug use, social media addiction or gambling addiction (Pillók – Székely 2022)

Czech Republic:

Personal crises refer to distressing experiences that affect individuals directly, such as mental-health struggles, violence, self-harm, family conflict, bullying, relationship breakdowns or identity-related difficulties. Desk research shows these topics are highly visible across TikTok and Instagram, often in the form of short videos, confession pages, influencer disclosures or mental-health hashtags (ScienceDirect 2024).

### 3.2 Social Crises

The second major group of crises consists of social crises. Among these, economic crises (livelihood and housing problems, as well as inflation and rising prices) play a prominent role among young people in all three countries. The migration crisis is also present in social media in all three countries, which is also on the agenda of young people, and these news items have an impact on their mental state. It is interesting to note that, of the three countries, the topic of emigration is more prominent among young people in Hungary, which may have economic and political reasons. According to the research, fear of war is prominent among young people in Hungary and Germany, and this is also frequently reflected in social media, especially in relation to the Russian-Ukrainian war. The results are broken down by country below.

Germany:

#### Economic Crises

The “SINUS-Jugendstudie” (Calmbach et al. 2024) explores the political concerns of young people. Unsurprisingly, the respondents often refer to topics currently prominent in the media, although these do not necessarily reflect their personal sense of being affected (2024: 156).

#### Refugee and Migration Crises

There is still little research in the academic literature on how social media portrays crises such as migration or refugee crises and how this affects the perceptions of

young people. In the context of migration, media contributions are often discussed in general terms without addressing or incorporating individual user reports.

## War

According to Calmbach et al. (2024: 164-165), Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has triggered strong emotional responses among adolescents, including fear, anxiety, deep empathy for Ukrainians, and a lack of understanding about the reasons behind the conflict. There are hardly any notable differences in these reactions based on gender, education level, or social background.

## Hungary:

### Economic crises

These include the housing crisis, difficulties in accessing housing, impoverishment, unemployment (Pillók – Székely 2022), inflation and homelessness.

### Violent incidents

Street violence, crime, demonstrations, harassment, bullying can also appear on social media platforms.

### Emigration

According to our desk research, emigration (Pillók – Székely 2022) for economic and/or political reasons is also among the crises seen in social media among young people. We found no evidence of this in our own research. However, other studies show that a significant proportion of young Hungarians plan to leave the country, with this figure reaching as high as 45 percent among Hungarian university students (Bodnár 2025). In addition to economic difficulties, the social climate in Hungary also plays a significant role among the reasons for emigration (Szilasi et al. 2024).

### Wars, humanitarian crises, migration

Wars, more recently the Russian-Ukrainian war (Lau et al. 2024), Middle East wars (Lau et al. 2024) and humanitarian crises (Kreutzer et al. 2025), refugee crises, famines are also frequently appearing crisis topics in social media.

Czech Republic:

Social crises include events or conditions affecting communities or groups, such as economic strain, migration, political conflict, social injustice or public-health issues. Desk research indicates that Czech social media often amplify emotionally charged narratives around inflation, housing insecurity, migration, rising prices, and access to mental-health services (European Education and Culture Executive Agency 2025).

### 3.3 Global crises

The third major group of crises identified during our desk research are global crises. Among these, climate crisis-related topics and natural disasters are present in all three countries. Each topic is also prominently featured in social media and affects the mental health of young people. The results are broken down by country below.

Germany:

Natural Disasters

Crisis-related content on natural disasters is widely shared on social media. Social media platforms are also consciously used as tools for crisis management.

Climate Crisis

Content such as burning forests, raging floods, destructive storms, and paralyzing droughts exposes young people to the consequences of climate change on social media, even when they are not directly affected. Evidence from multiple studies indicates that youth are increasingly concerned about climate change (e.g. Kaman et al., 2025). According to the SINUS youth survey “Climate Anxiety” (BARMER 2024/2025), young people in particular experience climate anxiety.

Terrorist Attacks

In the review of online materials, terrorist attacks (Reinemann et al. 2018, Langner 2023) are primarily discussed in the context of youth radicalisation and extremism. It is well known that young people encounter such content on social media. However, there is far less discussion about how exposure to terrorist attack content affects

adolescents' general mental health or their confidence in the future. Likewise, it is rarely examined how young people perceive such content as a form of crisis.

Hungary:

Global pandemics

According to our desk research, negative news about viruses also appears prominently in social media. For example Covid-19 (Vaccaro-Witt et al. 2025; AISumait et al. 2025), H1N1, bird-flu, foot-and-mouth disease virus – the latter caused serious problems in Hungary in 2024/2025.

Climate crisis and natural disasters

Natural disasters such as forest fires (García et al. 2024), drought, record temperatures, heat waves, floods, severe storms, melting polar ice, earthquakes, and climate change issues are frequently featured on social media sites, and young people often encounter and worry about them.

Environmental and nature conservation crises

Nuclear accidents (Lau et al. 2024), oil tanker accidents, fish kills, garbage islands in the oceans, destruction of flora and fauna, species extinction, environmental degradation and animal cruelty are also among the frequently reported crisis topics in social media.

Czech Republic:

Global crises include large-scale events such as wars, natural disasters, climate-related events or global health threats. Desk research shows that visually dramatic content—war footage, floods, wildfires, earthquakes—spreads especially quickly on TikTok and Instagram due to algorithmic amplification.



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## 4. Young people's use of social media and consumption of crisis content in the three countries

### 4.1. Social media use

Social media use is characteristic of young people surveyed in all three countries, with 1-2 hours of daily use being the most common. Among young people in Germany and Hungary, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are the most popular social media platforms, while among young people in the Czech Republic, Instagram is the most widely used. Interestingly, TikTok is not typically used by young people surveyed in the Czech Republic. The least used social media platform in all three countries was X. The results are summarized below by country.

Germany:

The responses are dominated by "never" and "a few times a week" when it comes to social media use. Facebook and X are the least used, with Instagram and TikTok being the most popular among respondents. A significant proportion of respondents use Instagram for more than 3 hours a day. Most respondents use social media for 1-2 hours a day, mainly TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. The second most common category was 3-4 hours of social media use per day, with Instagram being the most common. Some young people reported spending more than 4 hours a day on Instagram (4 responses), TikTok (1 response), and YouTube (1 response), making this the third most common category in terms of daily media use. Longer periods of social media use require the development of skills necessary for critical interpretation and evaluation of content.

Hungary:

The majority of young people surveyed in Hungary spend 1-2 or 3-4 hours a day browsing social media platforms. They are most likely to use Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, and least likely to use X. Seven respondents use Instagram for 1-2 or 3-4 hours a day, and one respondent uses it for more than 4 hours a day. Five respondents use TikTok for 1-2 hours a day, and six respondents use it for 3-4 hours

a day. Eleven respondents use YouTube for at least 1-2 hours a day, with 4 users using it for more than 3 hours. The majority use Facebook for 1-2 hours a day (8 respondents) or a few times a week (6 response).

Czech Republic:

According to the results of the questionnaire survey in the Czech Republic, young people primarily use Instagram among social media platforms, with most respondents using it for 1-2 hours a day. Most respondents use Facebook and YouTube a few times a week. The majority do not use TikTok, with only a few respondents spending 1-2 hours a day on TikTok, but this is not typical. The X platform is hardly used at all. Only a few respondents use Instagram and YouTube for 3-4 hours a day, but this was not typical.

#### 4.2. Browsing crisis-related content on social media:

Of the young people surveyed in the three countries, those in Germany spend the most time browsing crisis content on social media, with one-third of respondents spending 1-2 hours a day consuming such content. However, overall, 10-30 minutes of crisis content consumption per day was most common in all three countries. The results are summarized below by country.

Germany:

Five respondents spend 1-2 hours a day consuming crisis-related content, while another five respondents have never thought about how much time they spend on it. The same number of respondents estimated that they spend approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour a day viewing crisis-related content on social media. The results point to a low level of awareness of the use of media services related to crisis content.

Hungary:

Most respondents spend less than 30 minutes a day consuming crisis content on social media. Five respondents indicated that they spend 10-30 minutes a day, and five respondents spend less than 10 minutes a day consuming such content.



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However, two people responded that they spend 30-60 minutes a day consuming such content.

Czech Republic:

The vast majority of respondents in the Czech Republic also spend 10-30 minutes a day consuming crisis content on social media (13 respondents), with the second most common response being less than 10 minutes a day (5 users).

#### **4.3. The most frequently seen crisis content on social media:**

Young people surveyed in all three countries most often encounter crisis content related to personal crises, wars, and mental health on social media. The results are summarized below by country.

Germany:

According to the MENRE project surveys completed by young people, the most frequently viewed topics on social media are stories about personal crises (e.g., illness, trauma, loss) and wars and armed conflicts (e.g., Russia–Ukraine, Middle East), both of which received 9 responses. These were followed by migration and refugee situations (8 responses). The third most common crisis-related content was mental health problems (e.g., depression, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, ADHD) and violent acts (e.g., accidents, street robberies, violent protests, riots, deaths), each with 7 responses.

Hungary:

The vast majority of young people in Hungary most often encounter social media posts about various personal crises (e.g., illness, trauma, or loss) and war (13-13 responses). This is followed by mental health issues (e.g., depression, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, ADHD), natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, hurricanes), acts of violence (e.g., accidents, robberies, protests, street violence), and content about political instability (12 responses for each). They also frequently see social media posts related to the climate crisis (10 respondents) and content about animal cruelty (9 respondents). More than half of the respondents encounter social media news

about school bullying, economic crisis, environmental disasters, and migrants (8 respondents in each case).

Czech Republic:

The vast majority of young people in the Czech Republic, similar to those in Hungary, most often encounter social media posts about various personal crises (such as illness, trauma, or loss) and war (22-22 responses). This is followed—also at a high rate similar to that of Hungarians—by mental health issues (e.g., depression, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, ADHD) and content about political instability (21 responses for both). Next are social media posts about the climate crisis and violent acts (e.g., accidents, robberies, protests, street violence) (20-20 respondents). The lowest proportion encounter crisis content depicting school bullying (10 respondents).

#### 4.4 Why young people view crisis content

In the MENRE questionnaire survey, we also asked why young people view crisis-related content. The young people surveyed in the Czech Republic and Hungary primarily consume crisis-related content on social media in order to stay well-informed. Among young people in Germany, this reason was only in second place; they mostly watch posts on this topic because of the frequent appearance of crisis content in their news feed. The third most common reason among young people in Germany and Hungary was emotional involvement. The results are summarized below by country.

Germany: The most frequently chosen reason for viewing crisis-related content was "because it is often shared in my news feed" (6 responses), which indicates the strong influence of social media algorithms on access to such content. The second most common responses were "to stay informed about what is happening in the world" and "because it touches me emotionally" (both 5 responses). The next most common reasons (each with 4 responses) were "because it affects my own life or future" and "to feel connected to others who are affected by it."

Hungary: the most common response was to be well-informed about world affairs (10 responses), followed by curiosity about these topics, emotional involvement, and the belief that these events affect their lives/future (8 responses each). The least common responses were a desire to better understand complex problems and to discuss these topics with friends (2 responses each).

Czech Republic: Similar to Hungary, young people in the Czech Republic also view social media content related to crises because they want to be well-informed about world affairs (21 respondents), followed by the reason that crises affect their own lives and future (15 respondents). The desire to better understand the issues was also a motivating factor for the majority of respondents.

#### 4.5. Crises that concern young people most

Our research also assessed which crises young people are most concerned about. Here, we obtained different results for each country. The young people surveyed in Germany are most concerned about personal crises (e.g., illness) and wars, those in Hungary are most concerned about bullying and violence in schools, and those in the Czech Republic are most concerned about wars and the climate crisis. The differences may be influenced by country-specific factors and, in addition to the news, by crises discussed in personal conversations (e.g., with family, friends, at school) and personal experiences. The results are summarized below by country.

Germany: Seven respondents cited personal crises (e.g., illness, trauma, loss) and wars and armed conflicts (e.g., Russia-Ukraine, Middle East) as their primary concerns. The second most concerning topic was mental health issues (e.g., depression, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, ADHD), with six responses. The third most concerning crisis was the climate crisis (e.g., drought, record temperatures, heat waves, floods, severe storms, forest fires, melting polar ice). The least mentioned topics were natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, hurricanes, pandemics) and cruelty to animals, both mentioned in one response each, while pandemics received no responses at all.

Hungary: The young people surveyed were most concerned about bullying at school (10 respondents) and acts of violence (9 respondents). Also significant were the proportions of those concerned about cruelty to animals, mental health issues, and environmental issues (8 respondents in each case). The Hungarian young people surveyed were least concerned about wars (6 responses) and the economic crisis (4 respondents).

Czech Republic: Young people in the Czech Republic were most concerned about wars and armed conflicts (18 respondents), closely followed by concerns about the climate crisis (16 respondents). Political instability and polarization were also causes for concern among a significant proportion of respondents (12 respondents). The Czech youth surveyed were least concerned about bullying at school (6 respondents) and natural disasters (4 respondents).

## 5. Results of a questionnaire survey conducted among young people

Kaman et al. (2025) examined how global crises increasingly affect the mental health of children and adolescents, noting that longitudinal research on this topic remains limited. The aim of their population-based longitudinal study was to investigate trajectories of youth mental health during periods of global crisis. The authors report that mental health among children and adolescents declined substantially at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, showed gradual improvement in subsequent years, but remained worse in autumn 2024 compared to pre-pandemic levels. At the same time, worries about war, economic instability, and the climate crisis increased. Risk factors such as low parental education and parental mental health problems were associated with poorer mental health outcomes, whereas personal, familial, and social resources demonstrated a protective effect.

### 5.1 Emotional and psychological responses

Emotions and emotional responses play a key role in the strategies behind platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Social media apps capitalize on the fact that people are

generally driven by emotions. When something triggers an emotional reaction, whether positive or negative, we are more easily influenced to make decisions that may not be in our best interest. At the same time, emotional content can significantly increase user engagement (Nigratschka 2025).

Digital consumption and the constant stream of negative news can lead to what researchers describe as “chronic mental overload”. As a result, parts of the audience are turning away from the news due to symptoms of overload, experiencing so-called “news fatigue” and, in more extreme cases, “news burnout”, a state of total exhaustion caused by overly intense news consumption. Younger people, who frequently use social media, report feeling mentally drained and burned out by their media usage. Many describe feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, and emotionally empty (Kramp and Weichert 2022).

On social media, young people are often unintentionally exposed to violent or disturbing content. This kind of exposure can lead to anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues, especially if the content is not properly processed or addressed. They can trigger viewers feeling disturbed and unsettled. Crisis-related content on social media, when combined with extensive media use, can amplify emotional responses, for example, by increasing irritability and mood swings due to sleep deprivation. It may also contribute to emotional exhaustion, particularly as a result of late-night scrolling and prolonged exposure to emotionally intense or distressing material.

Adolescents already experiencing psychological strain are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of social media. For example, increased social comparison or strong emotional reactions to online feedback can intensify existing issues such as low self-esteem or social withdrawal. Unreflective or excessive use of social media may therefore contribute to a further decline in psychological well-being (Arand 2025).

The “SINUS-Jugendstudie” (Calmbach et al. 2024:170) shows that adolescents use a variety of coping strategies, for example in response to political crises. It was



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observed that some adolescents cope through avoidance or suppression, particularly boys. A central motive is self-protection against emotional overload, reported more frequently by adolescents with higher levels of education. Occasionally, a fatalistic attitude emerges, such as the belief that political problems cannot be changed anyway. At the same time, some adolescents use the allowance and expression of emotions as a coping strategy, for example through crying or self-soothing, to process negative feelings and regain a sense of control.

Although reports of negative emotional reactions are more common, it is important to note that crisis-related content does not always elicit the same emotions, and responses depend on personal and social resources. According to Peter (2023: 28), adolescents display a diverse spectrum of emotional responses to socio-ecological crises, like the climate crisis. These can include negative feelings such as fear, anger, sadness, or frustration, as well as positive emotions like hope and a sense of belonging. The intensity and type of these emotional reactions are influenced by individual factors, including their understanding of the crisis, personal attitudes, perceived social support, and their emotional skills.

According to the “SINUS-Jugendstudie” (Calmbach et al. 2024: 158), political or social crises evoke strong emotional reactions in many young people, which can cause proactive actions. They often feel unsettled, worried, or overwhelmed, which frequently sparks a desire to channel this emotional unrest into concrete actions. These emotional impulses manifest not only as empathy or solidarity with those affected but also as a need to “do something” rather than remain passive. This emotional engagement often serves as the starting point for further responses.

Peter (2023: 28) points out that empirical evidence for the widespread occurrence of emotional reactions to socio-ecological crises exists primarily with regard to so-called “climate anxiety,” that is, concerns and fears related to the climate crisis and its consequences.

The SINUS youth survey “Climate Anxiety” (BARMER 2024/2025) highlights that climate anxiety is widespread among adolescents and should not be underestimated.

However, it emphasizes that, for the vast majority, this anxiety does not constitute a mental disorder but is a natural reaction to a real threat. The survey also points out that this response can have positive effects. At best, it does not lead to paralysis but instead motivates young people to engage with the threat of climate change and take action to counter it.

During our MENRE research, we also assessed the psychological effects of consuming crisis content on social media on young people. In all three countries, young people feel most sad when they encounter such content. Below, we present the relevant part of our research broken down by country.

#### Germany

According to the results of the MENRE survey, most young people reported emotional reactions to the question "How does crisis-related content on social media affect you personally?" The most frequently chosen answer was "It makes me sad" (10 responses), followed by "It makes me feel overwhelmed" (8 responses) and "It makes me feel disappointed" (7 responses).

#### Hungary:

The Hungarian young people surveyed feel most sad when they see crisis-related content on social media (8 responses), followed by anxiety and concern (6 responses). Feelings of disappointment and disillusionment with political institutions and democratic processes are also common, but so is a sense of being well-informed (both 6 responses).

Czech Republic: Similar to the other two countries, the majority of young people surveyed in the Czech Republic feel sad when encountering crisis-related content (13 respondents), but feelings of being overwhelmed are also common (11 respondents).

## 5.2 Cognitive effects

Crisis-related content on social media can have cognitive effects and influence information processing. For example, exposure to diverse personal narratives can enhance understanding and awareness of mental health issues or social challenges.



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It may also challenge existing beliefs and encourage more nuanced thinking about one's own experiences or those of others.

Perceiving crises as ever-present may alter how individuals process information and assess risks. Adolescents may develop a distorted worldview, where danger feels immediate and inescapable, even if they are not directly affected. This can lead to rumination, difficulty concentrating, or trouble distinguishing between real and perceived threats, potentially reinforcing negative thinking patterns.

Crisis-related content on social media, when coupled with extensive media use, can intensify cognitive impacts such as diminished concentration, reduced attention span, and impaired memory, particularly within academic or learning environments. These effects are often compounded by sleep deprivation, which further hinders decision-making and problem-solving abilities. Cognitive fatigue and disrupted circadian rhythms may ultimately contribute to lower academic performance.

Building on the emotional responses highlighted in the “SINUS-Jugendstudie” (2024: 158) above, cognitive effects become apparent: many adolescents reflect on their role in society and the significance of global events. They critically engage with social issues, question power structures, and actively seek information about topics like climate change or social justice. This mental engagement can foster also a sense of responsibility and self-efficacy, even when their impact feels small.

There are rational reasons for consuming crisis content, which can also have cognitive benefits for recipients if they approach the issue from a non-emotional perspective. In the MENRE survey, respondents in all three countries emphasized the importance of being well-informed when consuming social media content related to crises. The highest proportion was among young people in the Czech Republic (17 respondents), while the proportion was lower among young people in Germany and Hungary, but still amounted to one-third. The largest proportion of young people surveyed in the Czech Republic and Hungary specifically view social media content related to crises in order to be well-informed about events taking place in the world (10 respondents in Hungary, 21 respondents in the Czech Republic). This latter

motivation proved to be much lower among respondents in Germany (5 respondents).

### 5.3 Behavioural changes

The exposure to crisis-related content can also trigger behavioural changes. Triggered fears can lead to avoidance behaviours, such as withdrawing from news consumption altogether (called as “news fatigue”) or obsessively seeking updates (called as “doomscrolling”).

Crisis-related content on social media, when combined with intensive media use, can prompt behavioural changes among youth. These include irregular sleep patterns, such as staying up late or waking during the night to check notifications and updates. Many adolescents report avoidance of responsibilities, including schoolwork or daily routines, due to fatigue or ongoing distraction. Compulsive checking and habitual scrolling, often continuing even when tired or already in bed, reflect a strong desire to remain informed, which may further disrupt healthy routines.

Normalization of interpersonal conflict and the promotion of sharing personal or social disputes online can lead adolescents to increasingly air private conflicts publicly via social media rather than resolving them in a private, face-to-face setting. Through this, they transition from passive consumers to active participants in how conflicts and crises are navigated digitally.

According to the “SINUS-Jugendstudie” (Calmbach et al., 2024: 158), fears about climate change, discrimination, or inflation often translate into observable actions. Adolescents show commitment through behaviours like biking, recycling, buying second-hand, sharing posts, or participating in discussions and demonstrations. Regarding discrimination, many intervene directly or inform adults. Crisis-related content on social media can foster connection and support, encouraging help-seeking, self-care, and proactive engagement.

The results of the MENRE survey show that crisis-related content rarely motivates young people to take action. Only 1 participant among young people in Germany

responded that crisis content seen on social media motivates them to take action or participate. Among Hungarian respondents, the proportion of those motivated to take action by crises seen on social media was slightly higher, but still very low (3 respondents). The proportion of young people in the Czech Republic who felt motivated was similar to that in Hungary (7 respondents).

Among the young people who completed the survey, there is no evidence that viewing crisis-related content encourages positive engagement or proactive behavior. These results may suggest that although crisis-related content has an emotional impact on young people, this concern does not lead to active engagement or participation. This has important implications for pedagogical and media education practice: professionals need to recognize that mere knowledge of crisis-related information does not automatically lead to action or activism. Instead, supportive frameworks such as reflection, dialogue, and contextualization are needed to promote an action-oriented approach.

#### 5.4 Social impacts

Socially, fears related to crisis content on social media may drive withdrawal from peer interactions or increase online engagement over in-person connections. Crisis-related content on social media, when coupled with extensive media use, can foster social consequences such as withdrawal from offline relationships, particularly as nighttime engagement with social media displaces face-to-face interactions. It may also disrupt established family or peer routines, such as avoiding shared meals or meaningful conversations, and lead to an increased dependence on digital validation, which can gradually erode the value of real-life social support systems.

According to the “SINUS-Jugendstudie” (2024: 158), social effects can also emerge through their actions, young people influence their surroundings, they spark conversations, raise awareness of issues, and motivate peers to get involved. Their engagement contributes to making social problems more visible and strengthens a shared sense of responsibility. Conversely, fear and concern can also mobilize solidarity, as previously discussed, prompting young people to engage in activism or

participate in online awareness campaigns. However, such engagement is not always sustainable and may, in some cases, intensify feelings of social division or contribute to emotional burnout. Sharing crisis-related content can contribute to the formation of peer-based support networks and online communities. They foster a sense of belonging and collective identity, which can empower marginalized voices and strengthen social bonds.

According to the results of the MENRE questionnaire survey, young people in all three countries were less likely to maintain personal relationships (e.g., with friends and family members) and to seek help from others in dealing with the effects of crisis-related social media content. Thus, they primarily tried to use individual techniques to mitigate the negative mental effects caused by crises, even though several youth support professionals in our questionnaire survey believed that social relationships, connecting with others, and a sense of shared destiny with others can be very effective coping mechanisms.

### 5.5. Coping strategies

In the MENRE survey, we also asked young people how they calm themselves down and improve their mood when they feel stressed, anxious, or overwhelmed by content related to crises appearing on social media (e.g., war, climate change, or inflation). The most common answers varied from country to country, but what they had in common was that listening to music was the first or second most common answer in all three countries. So it can be said that music is an effective tool for reducing anxiety for many young people. Young people in Germany primarily watch movies or TV series, those in Hungary listen to music, and those in the Czech Republic mostly go on trips to nature. Below, we present the relevant part of our research broken down by country.

Germany: The most common response was "I watch movies, TV shows, or series" (4 responses). The second most common response was "I listen to music" (3 responses). The answers "I take care of myself (e.g., rest, eat well)", "I talk to

someone or ask for help" and "I try to find something funny (e.g., memes or videos)" were selected by 2 respondents each.

The most common coping strategy among young people in Hungary was listening to music (9 respondents), followed by self-care (e.g., paying attention to proper nutrition and rest) and positive thinking (7 respondents). Other common coping strategies included exercise and sports, spending time with animals, and spending time in nature (6 respondents each). The least common coping strategies were asking others for help (2 respondents), prayer and meditation (1 respondent), and looking for funny things (e.g., funny videos and memes). Similar to respondents in Germany, spending time with family and friends was a coping strategy used by a minimal number of young people in Hungary (4 respondents).

Czech Republic: The largest proportion of Czech young people surveyed indicated spending time in nature (16 respondents), listening to music (15 respondents), and spending time with family members/friends (14 respondents) as coping strategies. The least popular coping strategies were spending time with animals (4 respondents) and prayer/meditation (1 respondent).

Based on the responses, it can be said that young people in all three countries prefer distraction. They primarily use distraction mechanisms, such as watching (multiple) videos or listening to music. This suggests that many adolescents regulate their emotions by temporarily distancing themselves from the content that triggers stress or sadness, rather than directly confronting or processing it. Based on these results, it can be concluded that young people do not automatically turn to support networks (e.g., friends, family, or professionals) when they feel overwhelmed. In the survey, only one respondent indicated "spending time with friends or family" as a coping mechanism for stress, anxiety, or overload caused by crisis-related content on social media. Many young people rely on short-term coping strategies that provide immediate stress relief but do not necessarily contribute to long-term resilience. This highlights the need for media literacy, emotional regulation training, and supportive spaces where crisis-related content can be discussed and contextualized.



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## 5.6. Young people's vision of the future

In our MENRE research, we also asked how young people see their own future. We received different answers to this question in each country. German and Czech young people tended to be more pessimistic, while Hungarian young people were more optimistic. Broken down by country, we obtained the following results: Among German respondents, the most common feelings about the future were uncertainty, confusion, and helplessness (5-5 responses), as well as a sense that things are going in the wrong direction (5 responses). Interestingly, 4 respondents indicated that they do not concern themselves with the future. The vast majority of respondents in Hungary are optimistic about the future, despite the crises often seen in social media. Most (9 respondents) selected the answer option “I feel hopeful that things will get better.” A significant proportion of Czech respondents felt pessimistic or uncertain about their personal future due to the crises.

## 6. Youth Workers' Perceptions of Crisis Content on Social Media and Its Impact on Young People

The topic of the MENRE project was considered highly important by the youth workers, as digital spaces occupy a significant part of young people's lifeworlds and now take over many functions, such as identity formation, that were previously fulfilled by family or parents.

### 6.1. The general mental state of young people

Teachers and youth workers surveyed in all three countries believe that the mental state of young people has deteriorated in recent years. Depression, frustration, lack of concentration, and inattention are common among young people. They are less able to pay attention in school situations, are more restless than previous generations, and are less persistent in completing tasks. Some attribute this to the lockdowns during Covid, while others cited habituation to rapid stimuli and constant digital presence as the reasons. Some believe that today's adolescents have limited social relationships and, as a result, their social skills are less developed, contributing

to increased social isolation. Many adolescents are also afraid of participating in real-life situations. Interviewees in Germany and the Czech Republic mentioned that young people feel they have to constantly check their phones, even at times when it serves no purpose and when being consciously present would actually be beneficial. They are characterized by so-called doomscrolling. Children and teenagers are becoming increasingly insecure, depressed, and conflicted, with limited self-regulation skills and little imagination when it comes to coping with difficult situations. Respondents in the Czech Republic also highlighted emotional instability.

## 6.2. The impact of crisis content seen on social media on the mental health of young people

Educators and youth workers interviewed in all three countries have observed that the influence of social media is growing stronger and has become the strongest point of reference for many adolescents, significantly affecting their mental well-being. Social media bombards young people with intense and condensed content, including crisis-related topics that have a negative impact on their mental health. Interviewees in the Czech Republic and Hungary emphasized the role of algorithms, which often prioritize content involving conflicts, tragedies, or political tensions because such posts elicit strong emotional reactions. Respondents in Germany and the Czech Republic pointed out that many young people do not question what they see on social media, so they believe things that are not true. In all three countries, interviewees found that crisis content primarily triggers anxiety, concern about the future, and feelings of uncertainty, and that young people feel overwhelmed by this information and experience a frustrating sense of helplessness. All of this has a strong impact on their emotional and mental well-being. The Hungarian interviewees also mentioned postponing starting a family among the effects, and they also experience a kind of constant, inexplicable restlessness among young people. Since social media is so prominent in young people's lives, its effects must be taken into account for all young people. However, this effect can vary from person to person and does not have the same negative impact on everyone. Respondents in Germany



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emphasized that the psychosocial impact of consuming crisis-related content depends heavily on the personality structure of each adolescent, as well as on the behavioral patterns learned from the family environment. Interviewees in the Czech Republic mentioned that young people who are already struggling with anxiety, loneliness, trauma, or academic pressure seem to be particularly vulnerable to emotional overload.

### 6.3. Coping strategies among young people

Young people often feel overwhelmed because they are not yet able to cope with certain issues. They do not have the answers or appropriate coping strategies, as they do not yet have the necessary knowledge or the mental "frameworks" or structures that are characteristic of middle-aged adults. Respondents in Germany reported self-harm and drug use. At the same time, there are also good examples of young people discussing these issues at home and receiving support from their parents in interpreting the content. In all three countries, interviewees reported that young people rarely talk to them about crisis content they see on social media. Most of them keep these feelings to themselves and remain isolated with their emotions. The majority of adolescents do not discuss these topics with their families either, leaving them without protection and emotional support when confronted with such content. Interviewees in the Czech Republic and Hungary mentioned that young people themselves sometimes try to limit their consumption of such content, take a break from online activities, and find something else to do.

### 6.4. Recommendations from teachers and youth workers

The experts interviewed in all three countries made similar recommendations. One of these is to develop media literacy so that young people can decide for themselves whether the crisis content they see is real or false information. Understanding how algorithms work is also part of media literacy, as influencing them can limit the appearance of crisis content. Youth workers and teachers in all countries also recommended consciously limiting consumption of this type of content, even trying a "digital detox" where young people do not consume any social media content at all.



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Social coping strategies were also included in the recommendations in all countries: talking to others about the issue and seeking help from professionals. Conversations with trusted adults, such as school social workers, youth workers, teachers, or family members, would also be very important. Respondents in Hungary also emphasized learning individual anxiety-reducing techniques (e.g., relaxation, mindfulness) and introducing offline activities that get people away from screens, such as walking, sports, or shared activities such as crafts with others. Respondents in the Czech Republic also emphasized teaching emotion regulation strategies.

## 6.5. Positive effects of social media

In all three countries, the teachers and youth workers interviewed agreed that, in addition to its negative effects, social media also has many positive effects, helping to combat the negative effects of consuming crisis content. Social media can provide quick access to information in crisis situations (e.g., about the condition of friends and family members). Respondents in Germany emphasized that social media can facilitate social interaction, help people learn about different points of view, and motivate action (e.g., organizing protests, charity initiatives, and fundraising campaigns). Respondents in Hungary and the Czech Republic emphasized connecting with people who share similar values and organizing supportive communities. Respondents in Hungary also emphasized that social media can help people relax during times of crisis by sharing entertaining content (such as funny memes and videos), while also providing strategies for coping with crises.

## 6.6. Key findings from the interviews

Below is a summary of the key findings from the interviews, broken down by country:

### 6.6.1. Germany

Young people are constantly exposed to crisis-related content, which causes them anxiety and concern and has a strong impact on their emotional well-being. There is a high level of uncertainty about the future, and many often appear confused or inattentive. When adolescents are constantly confronted with crisis-related content on



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social media, it often makes them feel helpless, which in turn can reinforce pessimistic views about the future.

The topic of the MENRE project was considered highly important by the youth workers, as digital spaces occupy a significant part of young people's lifeworlds and now take over many functions, such as identity formation, that were previously fulfilled by family or parents. One youth worker described it as follows:

*„A very important topic. It is alarming how digital media continue to develop. When I think back to my own youth, we used to go outside and spend time with friends and family. Today, many young people live in their own digital bubble, with very little exchange among each other.”*

Regarding the changing psychosocial development of young people over time, the interviewed youth workers agreed that adolescents today have fewer social contacts and, consequently, fewer social skills. One youth social worker noted that, in her experience, many young people hardly spend any time outdoors and have very limited face-to-face interaction. This contributes to growing social isolation. With regard to their mental health, she noticed that many adolescents seem afraid of participating in real-world situations. They feel the need to check their phones constantly, even in moments where it serves no purpose and where mindful presence would actually be beneficial. According to another interviewee, the influence of social media on the psychosocial development of young people has increased significantly over time. The influence of social media continues to grow and has become the strongest point of reference for many adolescents, significantly shaping their mental well-being. She perceives children and teenagers as increasingly insecure, depressed, and burdened by conflicts, showing limited self-regulation and little imagination when it comes to coping with difficult situations.

Another youth worker noted that young people watch a lot of nonsensical videos, some of which fall under crisis-related content. He observed that the main issue is that they are not yet able to reflect on what they watch. They also become desensitized quickly, and their empathy as a social competence is lacking.



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*„Young people are actually online far too much, and I think that watching all this stuff – violent videos or content showing young people wanting to harm themselves – definitely affects their psyche. They are often not accompanied or guided. The young people I work with do not have parents who would ask: What are you watching? Why are you watching this? They watch a lot of nonsense from others, and I feel that this also diminishes their empathy. They become desensitized.”*

Regarding the connection between young people’s consumption of crisis-related content on social media and their social and emotional well-being, the interviewed youth workers reported that many adolescents are continuously exposed to such content, which can trigger fear and worry and significantly affect their emotional state. There is a high level of uncertainty about the future, and many young people often appear distracted or absent.

Another interviewee explained that social media simplifies opinion formation by offering quick answers to complex questions, which can create a temporary sense of reassurance. At the same time, adolescents become increasingly aware of the complexity and plurality of the world. Endless scrolling through the “For You” page was described as a troubling everyday phenomenon.

One youth worker emphasized that, in her view, the psychosocial impact of consuming crisis-related content strongly depends on the personality structure of each adolescent. Many do not question what they see on social media or rarely discuss it with others. Their susceptibility to being influenced also varies from person to person. In addition, they carry learned behavioral patterns from their family environment.

The interview guide also asked youth workers about their experiences with the types of crisis-related content young people consume on social media and whether adolescents have ever shared or discussed such content with them. One youth worker listed several types of crisis-related content that young people consume, including war, suicidality, self-harm, substance abuse, allegedly political topics, crimes committed by foreigners, all forms of racism, ableism, antisemitism, and



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sexism, women as targets, sexual assault fantasies, violent fantasies, and climate-related disasters. The interviews indicate that youth workers think young people rarely discuss such content with others, leaving them to deal with it on their own.

Some youth workers reported that young people have talked to them about crisis-related content. For example, one said that they had conversations about the Ukraine war or the pension crisis, as well as regional issues, such as the “Fabian” case. Sometimes young people also tell her about disturbing videos they have seen on TikTok. However, young people rarely discuss the crisis-related content they encounter. Most keep it to themselves and remain isolated with their feelings. According to the youth worker, the majority of adolescents do not discuss these topics with their families, which means they lack protection and emotional support by dealing with these content.

The question “What social or emotional problems do you observe in adolescents in relation to crisis-related content on social media?” was answered consistently by the youth workers. They reported that young people often appear depressed, frustrated, and helpless, frequently feeling overwhelmed because they do not know how to cope with certain content. They lack answers, as they do not yet have the necessary knowledge. Many experience fear about the future, fear of other people, fear of rejection, fear of illness, fear of not being recognized, and fear of deportation. One youth worker stated: “I see that they are constantly confronted with such content, which often triggers feelings of helplessness. This, in turn, reinforces pessimistic views of the future.”

In the interviews, youth workers were explicitly asked which coping strategies they would recommend to adolescents experiencing stress or anxiety as a result of crisis-related content on social media. The responses were largely consistent. Key recommendations included the of media literacy, engagement in reflective personal discussions, and the critical evaluation of information sources.

One youth worker emphasized the necessity of a multifaceted approach that combines the strengthening of media literacy, facilitated personal conversations, and

participation in creative activities. Recommended measures included intentional digital detoxes, scheduled breaks, and, where appropriate, a temporary shift to analog news consumption to moderate the speed of information intake and promote conscious engagement with content. Equally important were discussions with trusted adults, such as school social workers, youth workers, or family members. Additionally, the interviewee highlighted the importance of cultivating awareness of misinformation and fake news.

An additional recommendation was to seek allies or supportive peers in order to recognize that one is not alone in dealing with distressing thoughts or problems.

Regarding explicit strategies to interrupt or better manage exposure to consistently negative content, they responded that questioning and critically reflecting on what one sees is a very effective strategy. However, many young people assume that the content they encounter is real. According to them, social media does not always present information accurately, and it contains a significant amount of misinformation, including AI-generated fake videos. The development of these technologies is happening so quickly that it is difficult to keep pace. They expressed concern that professionals are often no longer able to equip young people with appropriate strategies or protect them adequately, due to a lack of the necessary knowledge. Additionally, strategies such as limiting content on devices, discussing the content, deleting apps, and setting regulated usage times were also mentioned.

At the conclusion of the interviews, youth workers highlighted several positive effects of crisis-related content on social media. These included facilitating social interaction, rapid access to information, exposure to diverse perspectives, and motivating participation in demonstrations or charitable initiatives. They also noted that social media can feature constructive content, such as crowdfunding campaigns that encourage social responsibility. Such initiatives can foster young people's civic engagement and prosocial behavior. Additionally, crises can inspire creative challenges that address feelings of helplessness while promoting motivation and

societal participation. However, one youth worker emphasized that these positive effects only arise if the viewed content is actively reflected upon.

### 6.6.2. Hungary

Current situation: Never before have so many young people struggled with mental health issues, and this trend has intensified since the Covid pandemic, as several respondents emphasized. One reason for this is that communication has largely shifted to social media. Another reason may be that young people are more sensitive and open to social issues, better at representing their own interests, and better at articulating their needs. Young people whose personalities are still developing find it difficult to cope with the negative content that floods them. Children today are often more restless, find it harder to concentrate, and are less persistent in completing tasks. They are often clumsier in fine motor activities. At the same time, they have a very strong attachment to the online world: they are often mentally present there, even when they should be doing something else. Their behavior and developmental dynamics have been most significantly shaped by their exposure to rapid stimuli and constant digital presence.

Overall, the psychosocial development of young people has deteriorated, but there are individual differences. Some respond to crisis-related content with action, others are afraid, and still others deflect, deny, and try to ignore it. They block such content. They tend to leave the solution and handling of the situation to others.

All interviewees agreed that there is a connection between the consumption of crisis-related content on social media and the social and emotional well-being of young people. Global political conflicts and climate anxiety also determine the well-being of young people. Content about crises often floods students in an uncontrolled manner, causing them anxiety. They are much more burdened in this respect, receiving much more information about crises through social media than, for example, their parents or grandparents. Young people are not prepared to process news about global crises and do not have sufficient tools (either emotional or interpretative) for psychological processing. Many young people encounter crisis content at a very young age, often



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without any filtering. This can cause them to feel uncertainty, anxiety, or an exaggerated sense of doom. They are overwhelmed: they find it harder to relax, they are more impatient, and they switch between emotional states more quickly. The crisis content they see on social media places an additional emotional burden on them in an already stimulus-rich environment.

Our interviewees mentioned almost the same crises that, in their experience, young people see on social media. These include: war, environmental disasters, natural disasters, and political incidents (protests, demonstrations). Climate change, economic instability, crises related to livelihoods and housing, identity crises, political radicalization, and political tensions also appear. They also see short videos related to epidemics, accidents, and various "dramatic" news stories. According to our interviewees, it is rare for them to discuss these topics with their teachers, but it does happen from time to time. This is especially true during periods of significant crises (such as the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war).

Our interviewees encountered various social/emotional problems among young people in connection with crisis content seen on social media. Most of our interviewees mentioned anxiety. One of the triggers for this is the constant feeling of uncertainty caused by crises, which leads to anxiety, especially due to the perceived uncertainty of the future. Postponing starting a family is also common due to the perceived danger of the world and the uncertainty of the future. According to one interviewee's experience, the idea of "zero extinction" is also emerging among young people. Hidden aggression also occurs. It is also characteristic that young people find it difficult to "switch off" because social media is a non-stop presence in their lives, constantly bombarding them with content. A feeling of helplessness also arises when young people feel that they have no influence on events. This can easily lead to demotivation in learning and planning for the future. Constant negative content and comparing one's own life with others can lead to self-esteem issues and even depression. One interviewee has observed that young people are inexplicably tense, restless, and uncertain. In their opinion, the disturbing events seen on social media may contribute to this constant restlessness. They are more easily upset, more

sensitive to conflict, and sometimes find it more difficult to adjust from one situation to another.

According to our interviewees, young people are most concerned about the effects of climate change. News reports on this topic influence not only their mood, but also their goals, decisions, and even their general attitude towards life. Concerns about livelihood and housing also arise due to the uncertain future.

The teachers and youth workers we interviewed suggested several coping strategies. One of them recommended individual anxiety relief, developing emotional awareness and self-knowledge, and using relaxation techniques. Several mentioned the need for real, offline experiences, personal conversations with peers, building social relationships, and joining supportive communities (e.g., sports, arts, hobbies, religious communities). The more offline experiences they have, the easier it is for them to let go of the anxiety that the online world often imposes on them. One interviewee reported that being close to other people, connecting with others, and "real life" always calms young people down. At the same time, if the situation is serious, young people need to seek professional help. One of our interviewees suggested that young people should step out of their comfort zone to experience how they can handle unexpected situations and thereby increase their self-confidence. Some emphasized the role of political action and the importance of public engagement: finding others with similar interests and acting together. In their experience, joint action improves mental health and reduces isolation. Several of our interviewees mentioned that young people should limit their exposure to crisis content on social media. It is important for them to be aware of how the media works and the role of algorithms in recommending such content. In other words, media literacy is also necessary to cope with the situation.

The experts we interviewed were less able to mention strategies for preventing lasting negative effects. They mentioned strongly limiting crisis content, emphasizing that factual content is less problematic, but biased content is undesirable. It can also be effective to "teach" the algorithm to recommend positive content to young people.

However, this also requires media awareness. Some respondents recommended keeping an emotion diary, practicing autogenic training and mindfulness exercises, playing sports, and engaging in open personal communication. According to the experience of one of our interviewees, a short walk, a little crafting, a personal conversation, or any simple, everyday activity can also be effective. It is also important to introduce offline habits that take you away from the screen, such as playing games together, having dinner together, or doing a little exercise. Anything that brings young people back to the present and breaks them out of the social media spiral.

In the interview, we also asked about the positive effects of social media. According to our interviewees, these could be: direct communication with acquaintances, friends, and family members. A sense of community with others, obtaining practical and useful information. Creating community cohesion, strengthening solidarity, and forming supportive communities. Opportunities to connect with others who share similar values or are experiencing similar difficulties. Some mentioned that social media democratizes the expression of opinions, as young people can also make their voices heard and share their thoughts and initiatives. It can also provide reassurance in crisis situations, as they can check on their friends and family members at any time to see if everyone is okay. It gives them the feeling that they are not alone and that there is someone with whom they can share their feelings. Social media can also help young people laugh through funny videos, memes, or short playful content. Social media also provides useful ideas and tips on how to help others and get involved in charitable initiatives. Social media can provide useful information in uncertain situations. Some people pointed out that there is social media content specifically dedicated to dealing with crises, presenting positive examples and strategies.

### 6.6.3. Czech Republic

Youth workers play a crucial role in supporting young people in navigating crisis-related content on social media. Their insights offer a professional, practice-based



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perspective on how digital crises affect adolescents emotionally, cognitively, behaviourally, and socially. The findings below are based on questionnaires and semi-structured interviews conducted with eight youth workers, including social workers, educators, and NGO practitioners from various youth settings in the Czech Republic.

Youth workers consistently observe rising levels of stress, insecurity, and emotional instability among adolescents. Many describe young people as “overwhelmed,” “highly sensitive,” or “easily discouraged,” particularly when exposed to dramatic or emotionally charged crisis narratives.

Several youth workers reported that repeated exposure to war, violence, climate disasters, or financial instability amplifies existing psychological difficulties. Young people who are already dealing with anxiety, loneliness, trauma, or academic pressure appear especially vulnerable to emotional overload.

“They already feel stressed in their personal lives — crisis content online just adds another layer they don’t know how to process.” — Youth worker (interview)

These observations align strongly with both the youth survey results and the desk research on rising mental-health challenges among Czech adolescents.

Youth workers confirm that young people encounter a constant stream of negative or crisis-related posts, particularly on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. They note that algorithmic feeds often push content involving conflict, tragedy, or political tension because such posts trigger strong emotional engagement.

Professionals emphasised that topics such as war, climate change, violence, economic uncertainty, and mental-health struggles dominate the feeds of adolescents they work with. These themes closely mirror those identified in the youth survey.

“Every day they see something about war or some disaster — even if they don’t search for it, the apps show it to them.” — Youth worker (interview)

This persistent exposure contributes to increased worry, helplessness, or pessimism among young people.



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Youth workers frequently describe problematic digital habits — especially doomscrolling, compulsive checking, and reliance on social media for constant updates. They observe that crisis content often triggers cycles of obsessive consumption followed by emotional exhaustion.

Many adolescents lack the critical skills to differentiate between reliable information and sensationalised or manipulative posts. Youth workers warn that misinformation and emotional exaggeration are especially problematic in global-crisis content.

“They scroll until late at night, watching one negative video after another. It exhausts them but they can’t stop.” — Youth worker (interview)

These behaviours reflect patterns also seen in the youth survey, where many respondents reported daily exposure of 15–60 minutes specifically to crisis-related posts.

Youth workers described a mix of coping behaviours used by adolescents. Common youth strategies observed:

- Taking breaks from social media
- Talking to friends or trusted adults
- Distracting themselves through offline activities
- Muting crisis-related topics or temporarily avoiding platforms
- Trying to verify information before believing or sharing it

Youth workers consider these strategies helpful but insufficient on their own, especially when young people rely mainly on avoidance — which provides short-term relief but does not build long-term resilience. Recommended strategies by youth workers:

- Teaching digital literacy and fact-checking skills
- Providing peer-support spaces to discuss distressing content



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- Strengthening routines for healthy digital habits (screen limits, night-time boundaries)

- Helping young people identify trusted information sources

- Offering emotional-regulation strategies (breathing, grounding, journaling)

These professional recommendations complement the survey findings and indicate areas where youth programmes and schools can intervene. Despite their concerns, youth workers also acknowledge positive aspects of social media for young people:

- Access to educational resources and crisis information

- Opportunities for solidarity, activism, and community engagement

- Spaces for creativity, identity exploration, and mutual support

- Possibility to share mental-health experiences and find peer understanding

Some youth workers noted that crisis content can empower young people to become informed, socially aware, and more reflective about global events — provided they have support and tools to manage the emotional burden.

Youth workers unanimously agree that crisis-related content has become a significant factor shaping the emotional world, behaviours, and worldview of adolescents. They describe young people as both vulnerable and capable of resilience — depending on the support systems available to them. Their insights confirm the central findings of both the desk research and the youth survey:

- Crisis content is pervasive

- Emotional impact is substantial

- Digital habits influence vulnerability

- Supportive relationships and digital literacy are protective

- Long-term resilience requires intentional guidance

Youth workers underline the need for structured educational interventions that combine media literacy, mental-health awareness, peer support, and safe spaces for

processing digital content — all of which align with the objectives of the MENRE project.

## 7. Best practice educational offerings

The best-practice educational offerings presented here are derived from the broader discourse surrounding crisis-related content on social media. From this discourse, three types of educational offerings were identified as best practices, which also align with the recommendations provided by youth workers during the interviews conducted for this report.

### 7.1. Strengthening resilience to support young people in coping with crisis content presented on social media.

These educational offerings align particularly well with the goals of the MENRE project. There are useful initiatives in all three areas in all three countries. In Germany, the JFF – Jugend Film Fernsehen e. V. initiative in Munich stands out in terms of resilience development, while in Hungary, resilience development tends to appear in various EU-supported projects and in school lessons when the teacher considers the topic important and discusses it with young people. At the same time, young people can also seek personal advice from youth workers and mental health professionals, and educational institutions organize drama programs for young people, which also develop resilience. In the Czech Republic, resilience development appears primarily as part of campaigns conducted by state organizations and non-governmental organizations, along with other objectives.

### 7.2. Strengthening media literacy in the context of disinformation

There are also initiatives in all three countries to develop media awareness among young people. In Germany, initiatives on this topic are being launched by both government and civil society organizations, primarily through workshops where young people can learn the basics of media literacy. The country has also joined the Safer Internet Program initiated by the European Commission, and media literacy classes are held as part of this program. In Hungary, there are tons of media literacy

classes for young people, mostly run by civil organizations as part of projects funded by the European Union, but they can also learn about it as part of an elective subject in school. The state media also operates a media awareness studio, but media awareness is also developed through campaigns, and there are websites and social media pages on this topic. TikTok videos are also available when an influencer considers it important to discuss different aspects of media awareness in their videos. In the Czech Republic, media literacy development is also prominent among the topics of various campaigns, for example as part of the People in Need campaign.

### 7.3. Creative approaches for engaging with crisis-related content

Among the various creative approaches, there are initiatives in Germany and the Czech Republic that serve to increase civic engagement and express community solidarity. These can also be social media platforms such as TikTok. The RISE educational project uses creative methods to develop media literacy among young people in Germany. Similar projects also exist in Hungary, with a strong emphasis on gamification, for example in the form of "fake news Tinder," escape rooms, or fake news generators created by the HAHA Association. State-run media awareness studios also offer opportunities to perform creative tasks. Media awareness books, teaching materials, and websites are also available. Various school programs, such as student council days, also offer opportunities for media literacy activities, including the presentation of methods for dealing with crisis content, with the involvement of experts in the field. Books and online teaching materials are also available to teachers. In the Czech Republic, schools, government organizations (such as ministries and education departments), civil society organizations, and youth organizations also organize creative programs—primarily campaigns—to develop young people's media literacy in relation to crisis content and to address the mental health issues caused by such content. There are also workshops, educational materials, and curricula on the subject. As part of the "To chce odvahu" campaign, for example, structured discussions are initiated, a local "help map" of school, municipal, and online services is created, fact-checking exercises are carried out, and micro-campaigns are launched to support students.

Below is a breakdown of educational initiatives by country:

Germany:

The JFF – Jugend Film Fernsehen e. V. from München has been dedicated to media-related issues, both theoretically and practically, since 1949. Its interdisciplinary research team examines current media phenomena as well as the complex processes through which children and adolescents engage with media. The practice department develops innovative projects that encourage participants to work creatively with media and to learn how to use them confidently and autonomously.

In 2023, the JFF offered a five-day course “Emphasis on fostering resilience” focusing on children and adolescents aged 10 to 19. The training is practice-oriented and enables educational professionals in child and youth services to develop and expand their media education competencies through various online and offline formats. A central component of the course is the development and implementation of a media education practice project within participants’ own work environments. This includes reflecting on the media-pedagogical conditions of their respective institutions. Target group of the course were educational professionals in child and youth services in Bavaria who work with school-aged children and adolescents.

For adolescents, assessing the credibility of crisis related content is becoming increasingly difficult, even if they often feel confident in their ability to judge it. It is therefore essential that young people learn how to identify disinformation and distinguish editorial content from opinion-based posts. It is also helpful for them to understand that many posts are intentionally designed to attract clicks, trigger emotions and are often carefully staged. Building on this discourse, media education initiatives have developed offerings focused specifically on identifying and critically assessing disinformation.

In the field of fake news and disinformation, the online research identified a wide range of educational offerings. These are provided by both governmental and civil society actors. In addition, numerous materials have been developed to raise

awareness of misinformation and to equip both professionals and young people with the skills needed to critically assess information and navigate the “information jungle.”

Germany also participates in “Safer Internet Day”, an awareness initiative launched in 1999 as part of the European Commission’s “Safer Internet Programme”. As part of the activities coordinated by Klicksafe, numerous annual events and educational programmes are offered that focus on disinformation and digital literacy.

A concrete example of an educational offer in the field of fake news and disinformation is provided by the Servicestelle Kinder- und Jugendschutz of fjp>media, the association of young media creators in Saxony-Anhalt. The project “Fake News - Tracking Down False Information” includes a three-hour workshop that can be conducted both online and in person. It equips young people with methods and tools that support a critical approach to media content. Participants learn about different forms and causes of disinformation and, based on their own experiences and examples, develop and discuss possible strategies for dealing with it. In a hands-on section, they discover how easily content can be manipulated by producing their own “fake news”, thereby understanding the urgent need for strong information literacy. The workshop focuses on disinformation and media manipulation, the political dimensions of fake news, and the use of digital and analogue tools.

Social media platforms provide diverse opportunities for young people to articulate emotions and engage in interpersonal exchange. During periods of crisis, expressions of solidarity are particularly visible across these channels. Platforms such as TikTok enable users to respond to and creatively reinterpret the content of others, offering a productive avenue for demonstrating empathy and communal support. When children and adolescents can express solidarity, take positions, and participate actively in online discourse, they experience a form of self-efficacy that may be less accessible in their offline environments.

Building on this, the desk research identified RISE – “Youth Perspectives Against Extremism” (JFF) as a promising initiative that could be adapted to address crisis-related content. RISE is a media education project developed by the JFF (Jugend



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Film Fernsehen e. V.) that supports young people in producing their own media artefacts (e.g., films, videos) and in critically reflecting on extremist or socio-political content. Although the project does not directly address crisis-related content on social media, its structure and pedagogical materials render it suitable for adaptation. The accompanying resources provide educators and youth workers with methodological guidance for facilitating discussions and fostering critical thinking about radical or sensitive content online.

Hungary:

In Hungary, the improving of media awareness is not a compulsory part of the core curriculum in schools. However, it is offered as an optional subject within the framework of the subject "Motion Picture and Media Culture." The topic also appears in the subjects "Hungarian language and literature" and "visual culture." There are also secondary schools with a media focus, where the improving of media awareness is also emphasized.

Teachers can raise awareness among young people about the appropriate use of social media in various crisis situations and develop a critical attitude towards social media content within the framework of school lessons. Knowledge transfer can take place within the framework of subjects related to various crisis situations (e.g., in history class in relation to war), but also in a separate subject focusing exclusively on media awareness. Knowledge transfer can also take place during school lessons and/or after-school activities with the involvement of youth workers. Both teachers and youth workers can use gamification methods for effective knowledge transfer, complemented by the benefits offered by artificial intelligence.

Example: teachers' work can be supported by lesson plans that include media awareness activities broken down into individual lessons. Such lesson plans can be found on several Hungarian websites (e.g., [buvosvolgy.hu](http://buvosvolgy.hu)) and have also been published in books, such as Gergő Fegyverneki's *Digi dili*. The analysis of media content related to the topic to be covered (e.g., films) can also be part of the lesson plan. Self-awareness exercises can also be included in activities led by teachers or

youth workers. During these sessions, young people share their own positive and negative experiences, reactions, coping strategies, and best practices related to crisis situations they have seen on social media.

Project-based methods are also possible: in this case, students are required to carry out a pre-defined project during practical sessions led by teachers or youth workers.

An example of project methods can be found in Gergő Fegyverneki's book *Digi dili*. Examples include shooting a short film, designing a board game or flash mob, or creating posters and photos. (Fegyverneki 2023). These could focus on crisis situations appearing in social media and their psychological effects. The book "Media Detective – Let's Debunk Fake News!" published by the HAHA Association (Kenyeres 2018) also contains ideas for teachers on the topic of media awareness.

School events, such as professional days and student council days (Fegyverneki 2023), can also incorporate the impact of crisis situations on social media, around which teachers, youth workers, or other professionals can organize various activities for students.

Another example is the interactive media awareness lectures organized by the HAHA Association in disadvantaged communities as part of the "Media Detective Road Show." During the "Media Detective for Young People" EU-project, teaching materials were developed in English, Hungarian, Romanian, and Slovak, which are available on the [mediadetektiv.hu](http://mediadetektiv.hu) website.

Raise awareness among young people about the risks of using social media in crisis situations through playful activities (e.g., escape rooms, quizzes, board games, role-playing games). Teach them in a playful way to recognize the differences between reliable and unreliable sources, the emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and social effects of crisis content on social media, and familiarize them with ways to prevent negative effects and mitigate those that have already occurred. Another important goal of playful activities may be to raise awareness of positive coping strategies. Knowledge can be acquired through personal discovery in a playful way, which contributes to deeper memorization of information. Playful forms include the use of

artificial intelligence-based platforms, virtual reality, and various simulation games. The use of these new and attractive technologies for educational purposes generates greater commitment and enthusiasm among young people.

A specific example is the escape room created by the HAHA Association, which is based on the theme of fake news. Young people must recognize fake news and other types of false information in order to obtain the information needed to find the combination of numbers required to escape the room. Gergő Fegyverneki's book *Digi dili* also contains specific suggestions for teachers on how to address various topics in a playful way. (Fegyverneki 2023).

Launching social media campaigns on topics related to specific crisis situations, involving experts and young people. The aim is to provide accurate, scientifically sound, useful and helpful content in place of the inaccurate, misleading and false information that sometimes appears on social media during crisis situations. This could be a page on environmental protection and climate change that continuously refutes false information on the subject, where possible in a way that meets the needs of young people (e.g. in short videos), in an easily understandable, youthful style, with useful links and other information to help provide accurate information and reassure people in crisis situations.

Specific examples: In Hungary, several websites and social media pages are dedicated to promoting conscious and critical attitudes towards social media. These include [urbanlegends.hu](http://urbanlegends.hu), [alhirvadasz.hu](http://alhirvadasz.hu), and the Facebook page *Médiamanipuláció* (Media Manipulation). The HAHA Association's "Médiadetektív" website also features educational videos, fake news quizzes, and a fake news database at [mediadetektiv.hu](http://mediadetektiv.hu).

Organization of free counseling sessions for young people in crisis situations, with the involvement of youth workers and mental health professionals. During these sessions, the focus is on providing individual, personal, and tailored assistance to mitigate the negative effects of crisis situations.

Books designed to develop awareness and critical thinking among teachers and students regarding the information spreading in the digital world.

A specific example is Gergő Fegyverneki's book *Digi dili*, which contains practical information, methodological guidelines, and detailed lesson plans for developing media awareness among young people and protecting them from online dangers. The book "Média Detektív – Buktassuk le az álhíreket!" (Media Detective – Let's Debunk Fake News!) published by the HAHA Association (Kenyeres 2018) also contains ideas for teachers on the topic of media awareness.

Several websites offer specific teaching materials and lesson plans for teachers to develop media awareness among students. Such websites include [buvosvolgy.hu](http://buvosvolgy.hu), [ideaalapitvany.hu](http://ideaalapitvany.hu), and [alhirvadasz.hu](http://alhirvadasz.hu). The HAHA Association's "Media Detective" website also offers lesson plans, educational videos, quizzes, and a fake news database at [mediadetektiv.hu](http://mediadetektiv.hu).

During dramatization, students can act out different scenes related to the use of social media in crises. This can be supplemented with digital storytelling techniques, where digital tools are also used to illustrate the topic. They can act out scenes, make short films or even comics about them. This solution can also be combined with the project method. (Fegyverneki 2023).

The most significant teaching studio and teaching media workshop in Hungary is the Búvösvölgy Media Literacy Center, which operates as a national network with a presence in several large cities and the capital.

The Televele Media Education Workshop Association focuses on media education for young children. It helps parents and educators develop their media literacy through classes, workshops, and publications.

National media studios, such as the Hungarian state media, organize studio and editorial visits, and some local television stations also offer this opportunity (e.g., Debrecen Television). These professionally guided studio and editorial office visits

provide an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of how the media works and to develop a critical sense of media content.

Czech Republic:

Best practices in the Czech Republic combine critical media literacy, emotional resilience building, civic engagement, and digital well-being. They leverage partnerships between schools, NGOs, government bodies, and youth organizations to create holistic programs that address not only the cognitive but also the emotional and social dimensions of crisis content on social media.

People in Need (PIN), through its Youth and Education Department, runs educational programs focused on global crises, media literacy, social justice, and youth dialogue, with workshops that combine factual knowledge with discussion about emotional impact. Their youth forums encourage active citizenship and critical media engagement. Since 2001 they implement educational programme “One World in Schools” (Jeden svět na školách) that has been contributing to educate responsible young people, who are getting their bearings in today’s world and approach information in an open and critical manner (People in Need 2023).

Czech Ministry of Education supports curricula development integrating media literacy and social-emotional learning into formal education. Teacher training modules include responding to youth distress linked to digital media and crisis content.

A group of experts, led by the National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic (NPI CR) in cooperation with the Partnership for Education 2030+, has created a definition of “digital well-being.” By doing so, it responds to the increasing need for support for the mental health of young people in the digital era. The first questions and answers will be published by NPI CR on its website, [digitalizace.rvp.cz](https://digitalizace.rvp.cz), by August 2025. This will be followed by an action plan for schools and institutions working with youth (Brdička et al. 2025).

National Campaign “To chce odvahu”: In September–October 2025, the Czech nationwide campaign “To chce odvahu” (literally: “It takes courage”) was launched by

Nadační fond Flaminia and the NGO Nevypust' duši, with the public support of the Presidential couple. The campaign encourages especially young people to speak openly about mental health and to seek help early. Its key message responds to the finding that around 70% of teenagers fear asking for help due to fear of rejection, framing help-seeking as a sign of strength rather than weakness (Nadační fond Flaminia/Nevypust' duši 2025).

The campaign used a high-reach, youth-oriented media mix (social media creators, national earned media, and on-site events linked to World Mental Health Day on 10 October). According to an official press update, the project website recorded ~3.7 million visits by ~2.65 million unique users within the first weeks, while social media posts reached approximately 1.8 million accounts (Nadační fond Flaminia/Nevypust' duši 2025).

Relevance for MENRE: “To chce odvahu” offers a current Czech best-practice example of destigmatizing, help-seeking-oriented communication suitable for youth work and schools. The campaign’s simple call to action (talk about it; ask for help) and its credible institutional partnerships can be used in workshops to model supportive peer responses, guide discussions about barriers to help-seeking, and connect students to verified resources and crisis lines. Campaign assets also provide relatable prompts for classroom reflection and role-plays (e.g., how to support a friend who is struggling).

Suggested implementation ideas for educators and youth workers: (1) Use selected campaign clips and articles to initiate a structured conversation about help-seeking barriers and myths; (2) Co-create a local ‘Help Map’ of school, municipal and online services; (3) Run a peer-support micro-campaign where students craft short, kindness-focused messages echoing the campaign’s tone; (4) Integrate a short fact-checking exercise on mental-health misinformation circulating on social media, paired with emotion-regulation strategies practiced in class. (Nadační fond Flaminia/Nevypust' duši 2025; People in Need 2023)

Other campaigns: Building of emotional resilience and well-being of young people is mostly covered by Czech NGOs working with youth through campaigns and various initiatives. The most popular initiatives are:

Campaign and project 'Můj Mindset' (My Mindset) (Můj Mindset 2024): Started in 2016 and focuses on medical and health secondary schools. It focused on destigmatisation of mental health among secondary school pupils within the health sector. NGO project with support among others of the Ministry of Health and National Institute of Mental Health.

Campaign 'Nevypust' duši' (Do not let go of the soul): Started in summer 2015 as an initiative of two students and became a NGO later. It promotes topics of mental health in the society, special focus on young people and their mental health struggle linked to studies. The initiative inspired by the UK and supported by the National Institute for Mental Health.

Project and app 'Nepanikař' (Do not panic) (Nepanikař 2025): A mobile app that helps users for free and provides first quick psychological help. They offer online counselling and therapy. They also run crisis intervention courses and workshops for schools and businesses

## 8. Conclusion

### 8.1. Key findings of the desk research

In all three countries, the mental health of young people has deteriorated in recent times, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic. According to previous research, young people in the three countries are burdened by broadly similar crises, primarily war, the climate crisis, and livelihood issues. A significant proportion of young people learn about global crises from social media, which is therefore an important source of crisis content in all three countries. During our desk research, we identified three types of crisis that are present in young people's minds and which they fear: personal crises, social crises, and global crises.



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Personal crises are present among young people in all three countries, and they also encounter them on social media. In Germany, traumatic experiences and mental health issues are prominent, while in Hungary, the fear of losing social status, the fear of being left out, anxieties, and various addictions are prominent.

Among social crises, economic crises (livelihood and housing problems, as well as inflation and rising prices) play a prominent role among young people in all three countries. The migration crisis is also present in social media in all three countries. Of the three countries, the topic of emigration is most prominent among young people in Hungary. According to research, fear of war is prominent among young people in Hungary and Germany, which is also frequently mentioned in social media, especially in relation to the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Among global crises, topics related to the climate crisis and natural disasters are present among young people in all three countries. Each of these topics is also prominent in social media and affects the mental health of young people.

## 8.2. Key findings of the field research

The results of the field research confirmed and supplemented the results of the desk research. The teachers and youth workers interviewed in all three countries believe that the mental health of young people has deteriorated in recent years. Depression, frustration, lack of concentration, and inattention are common among young people. They are less able to pay attention in school situations, are more restless than previous generations, and are less persistent in completing tasks. Some attribute this to the lockdowns during Covid, while others cited the habit of rapid stimuli and constant digital presence as the reasons.

Educators and youth workers interviewed in all three countries have observed that the influence of social media is growing stronger, becoming the strongest reference point for many adolescents and significantly affecting their mental well-being. Social media bombards young people with intense and condensed content, including crisis-related topics that have a negative impact on their mental health. These news items, including fake news, can have a significant negative impact on young people's



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mental health. The school system does not prepare young people to counter these effects and to distinguish between false and reliable information. There is therefore a great need for initiatives of this kind, for the development of good pedagogical practices, and for the involvement of teachers and youth workers. Teachers and youth workers play an important role in interpreting crisis content and thus reducing negative mental effects.

The use of social media is characteristic of the young people surveyed in all three countries, mostly for 1-2 hours a day. Among young people in Germany and Hungary, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are the most widely used social media platforms, while among young people in the Czech Republic, Instagram is the most widely used. The least used social media platform in all three countries was X. In the three countries surveyed, young people typically consume crisis content for 10-30 minutes a day, with young people in Germany spending the most time consuming such content. Young people surveyed in all three countries most often encounter crisis content related to personal crises, wars, and mental health on social media.

Young people surveyed in the Czech Republic and Hungary primarily consume crisis-related content on social media in order to stay well-informed. Among young people in Germany, this reason was only in second place; they mainly view posts on this topic because of the frequent appearance of crisis content in their news feed. The third most common reason among young people in Germany and Hungary was emotional involvement.

The young people surveyed in Germany were most concerned about personal crises (e.g., illness) and wars, those in Hungary were most concerned about bullying and violence in schools, and those in the Czech Republic were most concerned about wars and the climate crisis. The differences may be influenced by country-specific factors and, in addition to the news, by crises discussed in personal conversations (e.g., with family, friends, at school) and personal experiences.

During the research, we assessed the psychological, cognitive, behavioral, and social effects of crisis content seen on social media. The psychological effect most



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commonly triggered by crisis content seen on social media in all three countries was sadness among the young people surveyed. Teachers and youth workers surveyed in all three countries found that crisis content primarily caused anxiety, concern about the future, and a feeling of uncertainty among young people, who also feel overwhelmed by this information and experience a frustrating sense of helplessness. Among the cognitive effects, a feeling of being well-informed dominated when consuming crisis content. In terms of behavioral change, it is characteristic in all three countries that crisis-related content rarely motivates young people to take action. Among the young people who completed the survey, there is no evidence that viewing crisis-related content encourages positive engagement or proactive behavior. When examining social influences, we found that young people in all three countries were less likely to cultivate personal relationships (e.g., with friends and family members) or seek help from others in dealing with the effects of crisis-related social media content. Therefore, they primarily tried to use individual techniques to mitigate the negative mental effects caused by crises.

The most common coping strategies for dealing with the negative mental effects caused by crisis content differed from country to country. Young people in Germany primarily watch movies or TV series, those in Hungary listen to music, and those in the Czech Republic mostly go on trips to nature. What the responses have in common is that in all three countries, listening to music proved to be the first or second most frequently used strategy. Music is therefore an effective tool for reducing anxiety for many young people. Young people in all three countries prefer to distract themselves, for example by watching (more) videos or listening to music.

The youth workers and educators interviewed in all three countries made similar recommendations. One of these is to develop media literacy so that young people can decide for themselves whether the crisis content they see is real or fake. Part of media literacy is understanding how algorithms work, which can be used to limit the appearance of crisis content. All countries also recommended consciously limiting the consumption of such content, even trying a "digital detox." The recommendations in

all countries also included social coping strategies: talking to others about the issue and seeking help from professionals.

### 8.3 Critical Reflections on the Report

#### Critical reflection of the desk research

Current research on the psychological effects of crisis-related content on social media has primarily focused on short-term mental and emotional outcomes in adolescents. Long-term effects, such as the development of various coping skills, resilience, and the formation of a stable worldview, remain insufficiently investigated due to the lack of longitudinal studies. Furthermore, numerous studies have identified associations between social media use, exposure to crisis-related content, and psychological distress, although establishing causal relationships remains challenging. It is conceivable that adolescents who are already experiencing psychological strain are more likely to engage with social media, and that the content alone does not fully account for the observed distress, particularly given the difficulty of distinguishing crisis-related content from other material on social media.

Interventions commonly proposed in the literature, such as implementing stricter limits on media use or developing individualized content-management strategies, tend to emphasize personal responsibility. However, these approaches often overlook structural and societal factors that influence media use and mental health. Effective strategies should therefore also consider systemic factors, including the enhancement and dissemination of media literacy programs and the expansion of institutional support services. The combination of individual-level and structural interventions is essential to mitigate the potentially adverse effects of crisis-related content on social media and to promote the long-term psychological well-being of adolescents.

#### Critical reflection of the field research

The surveys and interviews provide meaningful exploratory insights into how young people experience crisis-related content on social media. However, several



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methodological limitations, most notably the small sample size, the reliance on self-reported data, and the limited diversity of perspectives, require cautious interpretation. The survey included only 53 young participants, and 17 interviews were conducted with youth workers from the three countries. While these data offer valuable indications, the small sample limits the generalizability of the findings, which should therefore be viewed as exploratory rather than representative of the broader youth population.

Furthermore, the information collected on social media usage and exposure to crisis-related content is based entirely on self-reporting. Adolescents often under- or overestimate their screen time, and without objective usage data, the accuracy of these estimates remains uncertain. Social desirability bias may also have shaped the way participants described their coping strategies.

The interview data should be interpreted with similar caution. Since the interviews were conducted exclusively with youth workers and teachers, the insights represent professional interpretations of young people's experiences rather than the youths' own accounts. Although these perspectives provide valuable contextual understanding, they are filtered through adults' perceptions. Interviews with adolescents themselves could have complemented, nuanced, or challenged these viewpoints.



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