

# BeWell@Digital - Supporting Young People's Mental Health in Western Balkans with E-solutions

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**Abstract.** BeWell@Digital is a project aimed at improving the status of Mental health of youth from the Western Balkans by using Digital health solutions, mobile tools, capacity building and sustainable non-formal education and peer support services for the personal and professional development of young people. This submission contains a presentation of the methodology created for the project, aimed at increasing the awareness and creating sustainable support for mental health issues of young people in WB countries, while addressing the gaps left behind by the pandemic.

**Keywords.** Mental health, Wellbeing tracking, Digital health

## 1. Introduction

BeWell@Digital is a project aimed at improving the status of Mental health of youth from Western Balkans (WB: from Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania) by empowering young people to enhance their skills in digital educational routine and career development, creation of supportive peer-to-peer counselling Mental health services and creation of new capacity building and employment opportunities for youth in the digital working arena, all enhanced by innovative non-formal education experiences, new mobile tools and digital solutions, and open dialogue at local and national level that will reflect on the broader EU area. The project is set to improve Digital health through Wellbeing tracking technologies and practical, hands-on, as well as individual approach to Mental health support.

In the digital era, most of the world is connected to the internet, but the dependence of technologies, together with the pandemic, changes in the routine and increase of uncertainty, is leading young people to develop more symptoms of anxiety, depression and interruption of sleep patterns, even triggering cyberbullying and distortion of body image – all resulting in worsening Mental health [1,2,3,4,5].

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## 2. Methods

Having in mind the complexity of such process, as well as current standards and best practices at EU level, with clear initiatives and guidelines at national levels, we decided to apply step-wised approach of ‘attracting audience and provision of massive participation’, ‘learning from others and making adopted to national contexts and diversities’ (through peer review processes and benchmarking), and final implementation, evaluation and development of sustainable grounds for non-formal education and peer support to career and personal development of young people [6].

All these steps are planned to be implemented in 3 dimensions by simultaneous and coherent actions:

- (I) raising awareness, promotion of well-beingness and new competencies in digital age; active dialogue and participation at national and regional levels;
- (II) quality assurance of institutional support, development of high expertise in peer support and counselling;
- (III) development and implementation of non-formal educational programs.

## 3. Results

For the period of project duration (2 years), the following results will be achieved:

Technological results: (i) Enhanced ICT support in non-formal learning/training related to development of mixed skills in digital era (learning/training platform with supporting training and learning materials; mobile app for evaluation of achieved impacts lifestyle and measurement of innovative well-being index); (ii) Provided technical support for functioning of WB network for youth support and counselling service (web portal with live chat support).

Economical results: (i) Reduced costs in health funds through enhanced healthy lifestyles of young population and young workforce at national levels (raised awareness about health and Mental health issues while using Digital health services and Wellbeing tracking technologies; organized capacity building activities, established advisory support and counselling service at new WB network for youth support).

Social results: (i) Improved non-formal educational system at national levels in WB related to mixed-skills development in digital era; (ii) Significant contribution to internationalization and visibility of WB youth organisations; (iii) Significant contribution to creation of a healthier young population in WB; (iv) Young people in WB equipped with mixed skills as needed for employment in the digital arena.

Policy level results: (i) Significant contribution to better connections of WB youth with national authorities, decision makers and business sector (e.g. data exchange, harmonized practices, etc.).

## 4. Discussion

The COVID-19 global health emergency and its economic and social impacts have disrupted nearly all aspects of life for all groups in society. For young people, especially vulnerable youth, the crisis poses considerable risks in the fields of education (including Digital (health) literacy), employment, Mental health and disposable income.

BeWell@Digital, supported by EACEA, will systematically address the gaps left behind by the pandemic, and focus on advancing Wellbeing tracking through digital support. The methodology was specifically selected to cater to the needs of the youth and to bring about the envisioned results. We believe that the WB region is especially vulnerable to Mental health issues and wellbeing deficits, due to the stigma of the topic and lack of quality services, thus our counselling and supportive services hold crucial value for the development of the region [3,4].

## 5. Conclusions

BeWell@Digital will deliver an awareness campaign on Mental health, wellbeing issues and mixed skills in the digital era, pilot a Western Balkans network for youth support and digital (peer) counselling service centres with new youth employment opportunities, develop digital tools for youth (learning platform, information portal with live chat support, mobile app for integration of lifestyle data for monitoring wellbeing index), and conduct capacity building opportunities for youth (Green Camp, training for youth advisors, etc.) - it is expected to reach about 10.000 youth in Western Balkans altogether.

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