Art Well

TRANSNATIONAL REPORT

Comparative analysis of youth in Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Ukraine

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ART WELL

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Comparative analysis of youth in Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Ukraine

Youth in Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Ukraine face common European challenges — shrinking demographic shares, balancing education and work, mental health pressures amplified by social media — but the severity and context vary.

Austria and Czechia show strong educational outcomes and relatively smooth school-to-work transitions, though Austria must address inequalities linked to migrant youth.

Hungary struggles with higher early school-leaving and lower youth employment, alongside emigration pressures.

Ukraine carries the heaviest burdens: demographic collapse, mass displacement, disrupted education, and significant mental health strain.

Across the region, the digital sphere is central to youth identity and participation, offering opportunities for learning, activism, and expression, while also heightening vulnerabilities.

Demographic situation of youth

The demographic weight of young people is steadily declining across Central and Eastern Europe. In December 2024, those aged 15–24 accounted for *10.5% of the population in Hungary*, *10.4% in Austria*, and *10.2% in Czechia*, all slightly below the EU-27 average of 10.7%.

In *Ukraine*, demographic disruptions have been far sharper. Before the full-scale war, youth represented nearly a quarter of the population (24.3% in early 2022), but by 2024 their number fell to *7.65 million*, or just under 11% of the resident population.

Urbanisation shapes the distribution of youth in all four countries: Budapest and Vienna attract a disproportionate share of students and young workers, Prague and Brno concentrate Czech youth, and in Ukraine, large-scale displacement has shifted many young people westward or abroad.

Migration and mobility

Austria has the longest tradition of immigration and the most diverse youth population: around *one in four young people* has a migration background, with the share exceeding 50% in Vienna schools.

Czechia's youth profile has changed dramatically since 2022, when over one million Ukrainians entered the country under temporary protection. This influx transformed classrooms and communities, making integration support an urgent policy issue.

In *Hungary*, youth mobility is shaped more by emigration than immigration. Around 11% of young Hungarians in 2020 expressed plans to live abroad, with better living standards and career opportunities as the main drivers.

Ukraine faces the most dramatic mobility pressures: surveys show that only 58% of young people wish to remain in the country, while a quarter actively plan to emigrate. Among displaced youth abroad, willingness to return dropped from 66% in 2023 to just 32% in 2024, signaling a long-term demographic challenge.

Education and attainment

Austria and Czechia show comparatively strong educational performance.

In Austria, *88% of 20–24-year-olds complete upper secondary education*, above the EU average of 84%.

Czechia has one of the EU's lowest early school-leaver rates, just 6.4% in 2023.

Hungary's picture is more concerning: 11.6% of youth left education early in 2023, with higher risks among rural, Roma, and disabled students.

Ukraine's education system, under reform since 2018, has been deeply disrupted by war. By 2024, nearly a quarter of Ukrainian pupils studied exclusively online, while 400,000 schoolchildren lived abroad and combined host-country schooling with Ukrainian distance learning. Higher education has also suffered: 187,801 students enrolled in 2024, down from 267,000 the previous year, as institutions relocated or shifted to digital formats.

Employment and labor market participation

Labour market outcomes vary across the region. Austria performs best, with a youth unemployment rate of just 5.9% in 2024, far below the EU average of 15%. *Czechia* also maintains low levels, around 8.3% in 2023. Hungary's youth unemployment stood at *12.8% in 2023*, near the EU average, and youth employment rates remain structurally below EU peers.

Ukraine has faced volatility: by mid-2023 youth unemployment was reported at 15.1%, the lowest since the war began, yet many young people work outside their field of study or in informal jobs. Interestingly, surveys show that 73% of Ukrainian youth aspire to self-employment or entrepreneurship, reflecting both necessity and a strong orientation toward autonomy.

Health and mental health

Mental health has become a pressing issue across all four countries. Adolescents often link anxiety, low mood, and sleep issues to academic pressure and online comparison.

In Austria, about one-third of adolescents show signs of problematic smartphone use, correlated with higher rates of anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances.

Up to *20% of children and adolescents* in Czechia experience some form of mental illness, though the country still lacks comprehensive data, prevention programs, and systemic support structures. Significantly, half of first symptoms emerge before age 14, and up to 75% before age 24. Early help is often not sought due to factors like stigma.

In Hungary, national studies point to particularly high risks among disadvantaged groups, with dropout and social exclusion closely linked to mental health vulnerability.

Ukraine presents the most severe case: conflict exposure has driven up anxiety, depression, and trauma symptoms among adolescents. Surveys conducted in 2023–2024 reveal that nearly half of Ukrainian teenagers experience stress or mental health difficulties linked to insecurity, displacement, and disrupted education.

Media consumption and social media use

Digital media forms an integral part of youth life in all four countries, though usage patterns differ.

In Czechia, 99% of 16–29-year-olds use social networks, the highest penetration in the EU compared to the 88% average.

In Austria, platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok dominate daily routines, with most adolescents using at least three of them daily.

Hungary shows slightly lower overall penetration but still very high engagement: 72% of the total population used social media in 2024, with Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok leading among youth.

Ukraine's media landscape is unique in wartime: Telegram is used by around 90% of young adults, both as a news source and a coordination tool for volunteering and activism. While this facilitates resilience, it also exposes young Ukrainians to misinformation and online risks.

CHAPTER 1
In-depth focus group discussion in 4 countries

Austria

In Austria three focus group interviews were conducted in July 2025.

The first two sessions took place on 22 July, from 09:00–11:00 and 11:00–13:00, and the third session was held on 24 July, from 09:00–11:00. Each session lasted two hours.

The first and second groups included 10 participants each, while the third group consisted of 5 participants, resulting in a total of 25 young people.

The participants were between 15 and 21 years old. The young people involved in the focus groups reflected several common vulnerabilities. These included young people with disabilities or special educational needs (SPF, learning disabilities); socially disadvantaged youth with unstable family backgrounds or limited socioeconomic support; youth with emotional or mental health challenges, such as anxiety or low frustration tolerance; and early school leavers or at-risk NEET youth (Not in Education, Employment, or Training).

These characteristics illustrate the diverse challenges faced by the participants and underline the relevance of providing targeted support.

Czechia

In the Czech Republic, three focus groups were organised in June 2025, each lasting between 90 minutes and 2 hours.

In total, 20 young people took part (six in Group 1, eight in Group 2, and six in Group 3). The participants were aged 18 to early 30s, with most between 19–25.

The discussions revealed a variety of vulnerabilities: economic hardship (inability to afford therapy, workshops, or basic living costs), mental health struggles (chronic stress, anxiety, burnout), and cultural dislocation experienced by migrant and multicultural youth.

Additionally, several participants identified as LGBTQ+ or neurodivergent, reporting experiences of exclusion even in progressive spaces. Social anxiety and trauma histories were also common, acting as barriers to participation and trust.

Hungary

The focus groups in Hungary were conducted on 27 May 2025 in Budapest, with three sessions held at different times during the day.

A total of 21 young people participated (5 in the first group, 10 in the second, and 6 in the third).

Participants were aged between under 20 and 35 years old, with the largest group being those between 20–25.

Several vulnerabilities emerged: many were international students or migrants living away from their families, often in precarious housing conditions. Emotional strain was common, with participants sharing experiences of stress, therapy attendance, and active efforts to improve their mental health.

While poverty was not explicitly mentioned, economic limitations were implied through references to affordable hobbies, shared housing, and reliance on free NGO activities.

Ukraine

In Ukraine, three focus groups were held between 27 May and 19 June 2025.

The first meeting gathered 7 participants, the second 5, and the third 6, with a total of 18 young people involved.

Each session lasted around 1.5 hours. All participants were 16–18 years old, mostly high school students and attendees of a youth centre.

The vulnerabilities reported were closely linked to the ongoing war and its consequences: some young people's fathers were serving on the battlefield or recovering from injuries, placing additional household responsibilities on them.

Others faced economic precarity, working part-time to support their families, while also struggling with limited personal space at home and rural isolation. The stress of preparing for exams and uncertainty about the future further contributed to their vulnerability.

CHAPTER 2

A comparative portrait of youth' concerns in Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Ukraine

Across Austria, Hungary, Czechia, and Ukraine, young people move through overlapping worlds, home and school, city streets and screens, where pressures to perform, belong, and remain visible are constant. The backdrop changes from place to place: in Austria the cost of living and a dense, always-on digital culture; in Hungary an ambient political polarisation and the complexities of transnational life; in Czechia a sharp scepticism toward institutions and a felt "visibility culture"; in Ukraine the unignorable proximity of war and traditional norms. Yet in all four contexts, youth describe similar interior weather: chronic stress, sleep loss, fragile belonging, and a reliance on creativity and friendship to make life livable.

CHAPTER 2.1.
Outer forces shaping youth experience

In Austria, conversations circle back to inflation, commute stress, and the time squeeze that follows. Young people describe a daily choreography in which school, travel, and digital life crowd out rest and art, even as art remains a refuge.

A line-half joke, half truth-captures the tempo: “I always get stressed when the pressure kicks in,” a metaphor for the relentless rush to be on time.

Several link global turbulence to a thinning of attention for culture — “war or political turmoil might make it harder for people to focus on art or culture” — and yet they insist hard times do not erase creativity: artistic expression, they argue, “can thrive even in difficult times.”

Hungarian youth place their lives inside a wide, transnational frame: migration and mobility, polarised politics, and value gaps with older generations. They talk about negotiating hybrid identities and searching for communities organised around shared purpose and openness rather than rigid labels.

“My parents tolerate my choices but they do not fully accept them,” one says, naming the friction of generational change. Others are “on the hunt for like-minded people,” a phrase that repeats across cities and life stages.

Czech participants are frank about what drains them: slow or unfeeling institutions, a sense that public talk about mental health rarely translates into help, and a culture of productivity that never switches off. “They talk about mental health in theory, but don’t help in practice,” one notes. The result is a pervasive fatigue that feels structural, not individual — “All of us are anxious. It’s part of being young now.”

Ukrainian youth describe the weight of traditional gender scripts (“a woman’s ultimate goal should be to marry well”) coexisting with a powerful countercurrent of self-reliance (“I want to be successful independently”). Every decision — school, work, love — happens in the shadow of displacement and danger. Politics is not a distant conversation; it is the air they breathe, shaping whether they can plan next month, let alone next year.

CHAPTER 2.2.
Everyday pressures, from time to sleep

Across all four sites, daily life feels overclocked. Austrian youth confess that the day often begins on a screen — "I watch stories in bed" — and ends the same way: "I stay up until one o'clock – just like that." They name emotional spillover from late-night scrolling into next-day mood and attention. The commute itself is an emotional plotline: fear of lateness, crowded transport, the small frictions that add up.

Hungarian participants describe the strain of transitions — starting or finishing university, switching cities or jobs — and the psychic tax of not fitting neatly into one community or identity. "I don't really have a community. I have different friends from different aspects of my life," one explains, capturing a modern patchwork of belonging that is rich but exhausting.

Czech youth, meanwhile, talk about chronic anxiety as the baseline, not the exception: "Even when I'm resting, I feel guilty for not doing more." They describe emotional masking — "You learn how to mask it so people don't worry or judge you" — and a cognitive fog shaped by constant multi-tasking: "I'm always switching tabs, scrolling, checking stuff — I can't just sit and focus anymore."

In Ukraine, exam pressure blends with crowded living arrangements and interrupted routines. Home is sometimes a sanctuary, sometimes a stressor. Youth describe sharing small spaces with extended family and craving a room that is "really just mine." The horizon is narrowed by uncertainty: even minor disruptions feel like threats because the larger world is unstable.

CHAPTER 2.3.
Social connections and group belonging

For young people in Austria, Hungary, Czechia, and Ukraine, community and belonging are central aspects of their lives, but they are experienced in complex and sometimes fragile ways. Across all four contexts, youth describe communities as both sources of safety and recognition and as sites of exclusion, pressure, and stigma.

In Austria, focus group participants spoke vividly about the importance of peer groups and online communities. Belonging to a friend group or a digital chat offered emotional security and daily companionship. Yet these spaces were not always safe: exclusion from a group chat, gossip, or toxic dynamics could feel like outright rejection — "You don't belong" — with a deep impact on self-worth. Trust was described as the foundation of meaningful relationships: teasing and playful conflicts were only possible when trust was strong. At the same time, many Austrian youth expressed a clear preference for in-person friendships over purely digital ones, seeing physical presence as reducing miscommunication and increasing depth.

For Czech youth, belonging carried a particular ambivalence. On the one hand, peer-led communities — especially queer, neurodivergent, or creative groups — were described as spaces of relief, recognition, and shared language. On the other hand, they also came with unspoken rules and performance pressure. As one participant said: "Even in queer spaces, it feels like there's a right way to be."

Social media intensified this visibility culture: if you posted, you risked exposure; if you stayed silent, you risked invisibility. Community was therefore both empowering and exhausting. The ideal, as many described, would be low-pressure, non-hierarchical spaces where participation did not depend on performance, money, or emotional energy.

In Hungary, community was often linked to transnational identities and value-driven circles. Many young people spoke of living abroad or in diaspora contexts, balancing ties to their homeland with the need to build new communities elsewhere. Family and cultural expectations sometimes clashed with their own values, creating a feeling of being "in between." Still, young Hungarians actively sought inclusive and purpose-driven communities, whether through NGOs, art collectives, or informal friend groups. Community was seen less as a fixed membership and more as a fluid, chosen space — a way to create belonging in environments where traditional structures felt rigid or exclusionary.

In Ukraine, belonging was most strongly anchored in family ties and close friendships, particularly under the strains of war. Parents were described as guides and mentors, offering both care and expectations, while friends and classmates provided mutual support and daily companionship.

At the same time, moments of exclusion — being ignored, interrupted, or left out of social plans — were deeply painful, reinforcing feelings of being unsafe or "out of place."

Communities such as churches, hobby groups, or online networks helped some young people sustain a sense of normalcy and connection, especially when displacement or insecurity disrupted everyday life. Yet, war also meant that some communities became fragmented, with friends or family abroad, leaving young people to navigate belonging across borders and screens.

Comparatively, the four countries reveal both shared generational dynamics and specific national patterns. Austrian and Czech youth emphasized the pressures of digital communities, where belonging was constantly negotiated through memes, messages, and visibility. Hungarian youth highlighted the role of migration, cultural identity, and value-driven groups in shaping their sense of belonging. Ukrainian youth, living under extraordinary political and social strain, leaned more strongly on intimate, family-based connections, while also turning to digital spaces as substitutes for fractured local networks.

Across contexts, anxieties around belonging centered on exclusion, judgment, and unspoken expectations. Being removed from a chat group, silenced in political or cultural discussions, or feeling "not enough" for either side of one's identity emerged as recurring themes. Yet, equally present was a longing for communities where one could feel safe, authentic, and included — spaces that allow for both expression and vulnerability without fear of ridicule or rejection.

Ultimately, young people in all four countries see belonging as both essential and precarious. Communities offer stability, laughter, and recognition, but they also expose youth to the risk of exclusion, pressure, and stigma. The balance between these two experiences shapes not only how youth feel about themselves but also how they navigate broader challenges — whether digital visibility in Austria and Czechia, transnational identity in Hungary, or war-related displacement in Ukraine.

CHAPTER 2.4.
Internalised expectations and stigma

Across the countries, young people describe a near-constant self-monitoring to fit into the shifting codes of their groups, whether online or offline. Belonging often comes with unspoken rules, and failing to meet them risks exclusion or stigma.

In Hungary, language and identity frequently operate as subtle gates of belonging. Students recall how university communications were issued "exclusively in Hungarian," or how cultural events relied on a language that was close to, but not exactly, their own. These experiences produced a kind of intimate alienation, where even small differences in language could mark someone as "not enough." The result is a form of internalised stigma: authenticity begins to feel risky, as though revealing one's true self might invite rejection rather than acceptance.

Czech youth made visible what they called the "visibility economy." Here, the rules are paradoxical: "If you're not posting, it's like you disappear. But if you're too visible, you're vulnerable." Every post becomes a calculation of risk, subject to scrutiny and rapid spread. One participant admitted: "I deleted a post because I wasn't sure how it would land with the group."

Even progressive communities, where openness and inclusivity are celebrated, can reinforce stigma. Mental health is a case in point: "Saying you're anxious is okay. But actually acting anxious makes people uncomfortable."

In Austria, the dynamics of group chats revealed the fine line between belonging and rejection. Humor was central: jokes and memes could strengthen bonds when trust was high, but quickly turned into mockery when trust was thin. Being ignored, ghosted, or removed from a group chat was not experienced as trivial, but as a form of public judgment. Youth were acutely aware of this fragile boundary, noting that the same message could feel playful in one context and deeply wounding in another.

In Ukraine, the pressure often came not from digital performance but from traditional gender expectations. Success was pre-scripted: men were expected to achieve through career and income, women through marriage. A teacher even told one girl that her future depended on "marrying well." Yet young women especially resisted this framing, asserting agency with statements such as "I want to earn my own living" and refusing to equate their worth with marital status. Here, stigma was challenged not only by critique but by lived acts of defiance.

Taken together, these accounts show that young people are internalising expectations not through explicit rules, but through subtle signals, cultural codes, and digital dynamics. Whether it is the quiet alienation of language in Hungary, the double bind of visibility in Czechia, the emotional physics of group chats in Austria, or the weight of tradition in Ukraine, the result is similar: a daily negotiation of identity under the gaze of others.

CHAPTER 2.5.
Social media: connective tissue, pressure chamber

If communities define the rules of belonging, then social media is the arena where those rules are most intensely played out. Across the four countries, platforms operate as both prosthetic and parasite — tools that extend social life while also draining mental energy.

In Austria, young people openly described using social media "up to ten hours a day." They turned to platforms not just for communication but also for inspiration, learning, and self-expression. Some posted their own drawings, gaming clips, or music, while others consumed content passively as stress relief: "I mostly use social media just to pass the time". Yet many reported that moments of relief quickly shifted into exhaustion, leaving them "mentally drained" after long scrolling sessions.

For Hungarian youth, social media functioned as a bridge — connecting diasporic communities, maintaining ties with family, and offering spaces of recognition. Instagram was often described as a place of belonging: "I feel like I belong to this community as well," said one girl who created content online. Yet these same platforms were also sites of conflict, where miscommunication, exclusion, or political tensions flared. Digital absence could feel like social absence, as failing to appear online meant being overlooked or forgotten in group dynamics.

In Czechia, social media was the most explicit "pressure chamber." Visibility itself was treated as a form of currency.

At the same time, every act of posting carried the risk of ridicule or misinterpretation: "You mess up once and it spreads so fast. Everyone knows." Likes, comments, and shares were not neutral but signals of belonging, or rejection, within peer groups. Even friendships could feel performed: "Sometimes I wonder if we're friends or just tagging each other."

In Ukraine, the war deeply shaped digital habits. TikTok was used for humor and distraction, Telegram for information, Facebook and Instagram for maintaining contact with friends abroad. Reported usage ranged from 7 to 12 hours per day, often threaded through school or work. Yet not all accounts were negative: several young people spoke of boundaries and resilience, crediting late exposure or parental limits for healthier relationships with platforms. As one explained, having less access earlier in life helped them avoid the compulsive overuse others described.

Across all four contexts, social media compresses communication into reactions, GIFs, and short clips. These affordances make it easy to "check in" with a friend, but they also heighten the risk of misreading emotions or intentions. Quick reactions, while efficient, sometimes reduced friendships to performances of engagement rather than genuine intimacy. As one Czech youth reflected: "You can be visible and still feel completely alone."

CHAPTER 2.6.
Mental health: meanings, needs, and how the arts help

When young people across Austria, Hungary, Czechia, and Ukraine speak about mental health, they rarely reach for clinical terminology. Instead, they describe a language of balance, energy, safety, and functionality — a deeply experiential understanding rooted in daily life rather than medical frameworks.

In Austria, participants often spoke about emotional overload: the accumulation of school stress, digital noise, and group dynamics that left them feeling saturated. Coping came through embodied practices — drawing, rapping, or dancing — as ways to "switch off" or "let everything out."

As one put it simply: "I draw when it becomes too much." These activities were not framed as hobbies but as necessary regulators, moments when the nervous system could reset. Importantly, Austrian youth emphasized that creative coping is not passive: perseverance and self-motivation were also part of their narrative. "Nobody forces you to make art," one insisted, highlighting their view of art as both discipline and relief.

Hungarian youth described mental health as "inner peace," the energy to complete everyday tasks without exhaustion, and the freedom to exist in spaces without judgment. Their accounts underscored the need for consistency, peer support, and low-threshold environments — settings where presence mattered more than performance.

Arts fitted this perfectly. A participant captured this ethos: "I don't have to talk — I can just make something and it says enough." Informal creative practices such as crocheting, embroidery, or music were seen as quiet tools of regulation, accessible when formal support was either absent or unaffordable.

In Czechia, mental health was framed as a collective and chronic strain. "Even when I'm not actively anxious, I'm still tired from holding it together," one youth explained. Rather than isolated crises, they described a baseline of fatigue and overstimulation, intensified by the "visibility economy" of social media. Focus itself was considered a scarce resource.

Crafts and artistic practices were praised for allowing presence again: "It's one of the few times I feel present." Crucially, Czech youth called for spaces where creation does not require performance: "You can just sit and make stuff. No one expects you to talk if you don't want to." Such remarks reflect a hunger for low-pressure, emotionally safe environments, where art enables grounding without the demand to disclose or justify.

Ukrainian participants, living under the shadow of war, defined mental health in strikingly practical terms: “inner harmony,” self-respect, and stress-resistance. Here, well-being was not only emotional balance but also a survival toolkit. The barriers were acute — crowded homes, time scarcity, social expectations, and constant anxiety. Yet creativity appeared as a vital medicine: writing poems or rap lyrics, listening to music while walking, staring at the sky, or practicing breathing techniques. One young person summed up the power of switching modes: “I can just switch off... and then I’m in another world.” For them, art was not ancillary but essential — a way to maintain dignity and continuity amid disruption.

Taken together, these accounts show that across very different contexts, art provides what formal systems often cannot: accessible, embodied tools of regulation. Whether through sketching during social overwhelm, crocheting to ease loneliness, crafting to regain presence, or music to drown out the noise of war, artistic practices function as low-cost, low-threshold mental health supports.

CHAPTER 2.7.
Trust, conflict, and the micro-politics of care

Across countries, young people reveal that group belonging is negotiated not just through inclusion but through how groups handle conflict, teasing, or vulnerability.

In Austria, trust emerged as the condition that transforms conflict into play. As one explained, “We insult each other for fun … because we know that it’s fun.” Without trust, teasing was violence; with it, it became bonding. Young people admired groups that were “conflict-capable” — able to argue without breaking apart — and several described practices of care, such as checking in with excluded peers: “I talk to them so they don’t feel alone..” These micro-acts of solidarity reveal an ethic of care operating beneath the surface of everyday interactions.

In Hungary and Czechia, the conversation shifted toward the economics of access and the coldness of institutions. Formal supports like therapy, workshops, or even transport to events were described as costly or inaccessible. Youth therefore carved alternatives: peer-led circles, volunteer projects, grassroots art nights, and values-driven clubs. While not necessarily anti-institutional, these were responses to institutions that felt too slow, rigid, or emotionally distant. The implicit critique is that care structures often fail to meet the affective needs of young people, leaving them to build micro-infrastructures of their own.

Ukrainian youth revealed the paradox of intimacy under pressure. Family was described simultaneously as anchor and burden: a source of guidance and care, but also of expectation and surveillance. Homes, often crowded with extended family due to displacement or economic need, limited privacy and personal space. The desire for “a room that is really just mine” was not seen as trivial but as crucial for mental stability. Boundaries — literal doors that close — were framed as interventions in mental health, illustrating how architecture and intimacy are deeply linked.

Across all four contexts, the politics of care are played out in small gestures: who is included in the chat, who gets checked on after exclusion, who can afford the bus fare to therapy, who has a room with a door that locks. These micro-politics of trust and care shape whether young people experience groups as supportive or precarious.

CHAPTER 2.8.
Convergences and divergences

From these accounts, three strong convergences emerge.

First, time-poverty and attention scarcity define youth life across the region. Days begin with notifications and end with blue light; overstimulation and exhaustion are universal conditions.

Second, belonging is not given but negotiated. Youth seek spaces that align with their values, but entry often carries costs — money, language, codes of conduct, or implicit performance. This makes inclusion fragile and exclusion acute.

Third, art is not a luxury but a regulatory practice. Drawing to "turn off my head," crocheting to manage loneliness, music to move feelings through the body — these are the therapies young people can actually access, even when formal systems are absent or unaffordable.

The divergences reflect context.

In Austria, the risk lies in over-connection: dense digital networks, group chats, and constant visibility create exhaustion and miscommunication. In Hungary, mobility and identity politics — language, diaspora, generational divides — make belonging a puzzle to be solved anew in each phase of life.

In Czechia, institutional disappointment deepens the sense that mental health is a collective condition; the "visibility economy" intensifies self-surveillance and emotional fatigue. In Ukraine, the double bind of war and tradition sets the terms: autonomy is urgently desired, but gender roles and danger still exert pressure. Here, mental health is redefined as "inner harmony" and resilience, a practice of dignity in hostile conditions.

CHAPTER 3

Comparative perspectives on youth, art, and artistic expression in Austria, Hungary, Czechia, and Ukraine

CHAPTER 3.1.
What youth mean by “art”

Across Austria, Hungary, Czechia, and Ukraine, art emerges not as a narrow, elite category but as a deeply personal, process-driven practice. Young people resist textbook definitions and instead speak of art as expression, release, coping, identity work, and connection.

While the cultural, political, and economic contexts differ — from Austria’s dense digital worlds to Ukraine’s war-shaped realities — art consistently appears as a language of survival, belonging, and meaning-making.

CHAPTER 3.2.
Fluid definitions of art

Across Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Ukraine, young people describe art not as a fixed or elite category, but as a flexible, deeply personal way of making meaning in their lives. Rather than limiting art to painting, theatre, or music, they speak of it as a process of expression, relief, identity work, and even humor.

In Austria, youth consistently framed art as a language of perspective: “Art is when someone shows their own perspective on the world”. For them, art was less about aesthetic standards and more about impact — what it communicates or makes others feel. The forms they included stretched well beyond traditional categories: graffiti, programming, gaming, even playful acts like combining unusual food orders (“Triple Whopper mit Spicy Chicken Nuggets”) were named as artistic when they reflected creativity or uniqueness. Humor itself was often described as a kind of performance art, particularly in the way friends teased or provoked each other in social groups. For others, drawing, rapping, or writing poems were ways to externalize what could not be spoken aloud.

In Hungary, participants highlighted the emotional and mental space art creates, often more than the final outcome. Art was described as an everyday practice embedded in their lives: crochet, embroidery, yoga, digital media, or music were all listed alongside painting and dance.

One Hungarian participant explained that art is what allows them to “do everyday tasks without it taking all of my energy,” showing how creative practices are connected to balance and self-care. Importantly, they emphasized art’s informality: it did not have to be a public product or polished performance.

A crocheted scarf, a song sung privately, or a piece of digital content made for fun could all be art because they created calm, focus, or joy.

Czech youth took this inclusivity further by rejecting elitist or institutional definitions outright. One participant explained: “I didn’t study art. I just make things. That should count too.” This statement reflects a generational pushback against the idea that only trained artists produce “real” art. Instead, Czech young people validated informal and everyday creativity — tattooing, journaling, styling outfits, decorating a room, or even arranging digital desktop screens — as meaningful art forms when done with intention. For them, art was not always public or visible; often it was a private practice, a way to explore identity or manage feelings without needing recognition. Another participant framed it this way: “It’s not about making something good — it’s about putting what’s in you somewhere else.”

CHAPTER 3.3.
Art as emotional expression and coping

Across Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Ukraine, young people describe art foremost as a language of emotions — a tool to process what is overwhelming, to slow down overstimulation, and to reclaim a sense of agency when life feels unstable. In each context, art is not primarily defined by technical mastery but by its capacity to hold feelings.

In Austria, art was described as a way of translating emotions into shared symbols. One youth said, "When you send a friend a song, it can say more than a conversation". Sending music, writing poems, or painting graffiti on city walls were all framed as forms of silent communication that cut through the noise of everyday life. Several mentioned drawing during moments of stress or overstimulation in group settings, a way of retreating without leaving. Even unexpected encounters, like a powerful quote painted on a wall, could become an emotional anchor: "Sometimes a quote I see on the street hits me so hard that I forget I'm there" For Austrian youth, art is not always about creating — it can also be about being moved by what others leave behind.

In Hungary, art practices often emerged in solitary, tactile forms that offered a meditative rhythm. Crochet, embroidery, or beadwork were described as calming activities, occupying the hands while freeing the mind from spirals of anxiety.

Several participants spoke about how repetitive crafts gave structure in moments of transition — moving to a new city, or adjusting to living alone.

Music and movement were equally central: playing guitar or flute, singing, or dancing were not framed as performances but as ways of reconnecting with self and culture. Yoga and walking were also mentioned as embodied practices that blurred the line between art and emotional regulation, grounding participants in moments of stress.

In Czechia, young people spoke candidly about how art had functioned as survival. Tattooing, journaling, photography, collage, and fashion styling were common references, but what stood out was the raw honesty with which art was linked to coping. One participant said: "Tattooing replaced self-harm — it gave meaning to the pain." Others described the grief of having lost touch with once-loved practices: "I used to write every day. Now I can't start." Here, art appears not only as expression but as a fragile lifeline — something that, when lost, leaves a gap in emotional survival strategies.

The Czech interviews also highlight the private nature of many practices. Sketches were hidden or destroyed after completion: "Sometimes I tear it up after. It's not for anyone else." Art was often framed as intimate identity work, a way of allowing a hidden self to briefly exist without fear of exposure.

In Ukraine, definitions of art were strikingly subjective and often rooted in emotional resonance: “Art is what we consider as art.” The focus was less on form and more on whether it moved the creator or the audience. Youth there included a wide range of activities such as art — playing guitar, singing, drawing, dance, crafts, and even gastronomy. One participant said explicitly: “It can even be culinary because it is also an art.”

In a context marked by war and instability, Ukrainian youth emphasized art as a means of survival, self-respect, and grounding. Writing poems or songs, designing tattoos, or even cooking were described as ways to stay connected to themselves and create meaning in disrupted times.

Across all four countries, this openness reflects a shared resistance to narrow, elitist definitions.

Art is not the preserve of galleries, conservatories, or professionals — it is everywhere, in daily routines, hobbies, and social interactions. From Austrian programming and graffiti, to Hungarian crochet and yoga, to Czech DIY tattoos and room styling, to Ukrainian cooking and music, young people see art as a fluid, democratic language of identity and emotion.

This perspective underscores a broader cultural shift: for youth, art is less a finished product to be judged than a process of making inner states visible, coping with stress, connecting with others, and experimenting with selfhood. The value lies not in permanence or recognition but in the freedom of creation itself.

In Ukraine, where war and instability form the backdrop, artistic expression carried a double weight: as a coping mechanism and as a reclaiming of agency. Youth described shifting from reality into “an imaginary world” through drawing, singing, or writing poems. Culinary arts and crafts were also mentioned, with participants insisting that even cooking could be art when it embodied creativity and care. Tattoo design and piercings were especially prominent, reflecting how bodily expression becomes a site of resistance against traditional gender roles and prescriptive norms. For many, creativity was about grounding the self in circumstances where autonomy felt otherwise out of reach.

Taken together, these accounts underscore the intimate ways in which art is woven into daily life. Some practices are deeply private — doodles in a notebook, crochet in the evening, lyrics saved in a phone — while others thrive in public: graffiti, music shared with friends, poems performed aloud. Across all four contexts, the emotional register is consistent: art is where young people slow down, calm the mind, feel better, or get out of the head.

Crucially, art is not tied to professional ambition for most. It is less about producing a polished product and more about building resilience, identity, and self-understanding. In Austria, it is graffiti and music as everyday languages; in Hungary, crafts and movement as quiet anchors; in Czechia, tattooing and journaling as survival strategies; in Ukraine, drawing, song, and design as tools to withstand instability. Whether solitary or social, visible or hidden, art is not a luxury for these young people — it is a psychological necessity.

CHAPTER 3.4.
Social differences: vulnerability, exclusion, and access

While young people across Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Ukraine describe art as open, inclusive, and emotionally vital, their actual ability to practice it is strongly shaped by economic conditions, social stigma, and cultural context.

Austria & Hungary
For youth with limited resources, art often had to be improvised with what was at hand. Austrian participants explained that free or low-cost forms — journaling, sketching, graffiti, or digital creation on a phone — were accessible when music lessons, instruments, or materials were not. As one put it bluntly, "When you have to work a lot, you don't have free time". Hungarian youth echoed this, turning to solitary, low-cost crafts such as crochet, embroidery, or beadwork, which also provided calm during moments of transition like moving to a new city. These activities reveal how art adapts to socioeconomic constraints, but also how resilience and creativity flourish within them.

Czechia
Young people were especially explicit about the elitism they perceived in formal art spaces. Gallery openings, workshops, and classes were seen as inaccessible due to cost or social codes. "I don't even check those events — I assume I can't afford them," one participant admitted. Instead, they leaned on DIY practices — stick-and-poke tattoos, thrift fashion, journaling, collage, or mobile music apps—as forms of self-expression outside institutional frameworks.

Yet exclusion was not only financial; it was also emotional. Youth reported that showing their creations could feel like "exposure."

As one said, "If someone saw my sketches, it'd be like reading my thoughts." Thus, even low-cost practices are often kept private, underscoring the need for safe spaces where vulnerability is not punished.

Ukraine
War has intensified inequalities in access to art. Displacement, crowded living conditions, and financial strain mean many rely on simple, accessible forms such as singing, dance, or crafts. These activities require little material investment but provide vital outlets for stress and uncertainty. Those in more stable or urban environments, however, often had access to broader artistic practices, from theatre and design to culinary or digital arts. Tattooing and piercings, mentioned repeatedly, also suggest that for youth under pressure, the body itself becomes a canvas for self-expression and control. The wartime context thus sharpens the contrast between art as survival (accessible, low-resource practices) and art as development (resource-intensive forms).

CHAPTER 3.5.
Art vs. creativity: process and product

Across Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Ukraine, young people distinguish between creativity as an ongoing process of imagining and experimenting, and art as a visible, often judged outcome. This duality — safe process vs. exposed product — runs through many of their reflections.

Austria
Austrian participants stressed that while creativity may be playful or spontaneous, art requires discipline, perseverance, and personal motivation: "You have to stick with it yourself. No one is forcing you to make art". The notion of discipline reveals a respect for craft, yet participants still rejected elitism: programming, rap, graffiti, or gaming clips could be as much "art" as painting or music, if commitment and expression were there.

Hungary
Hungarian youth tended to describe creativity as a skill for "thinking out of the box" — a broad ability that could appear in daily problem-solving, crafts, or movement. Art, however, was linked more directly to expression of the inner world. One participant described art as "a tool to express an inner world, even if we just want to create something beautiful or follow the flow," whereas creativity was seen as a transferable capacity that might not always result in something expressive. This framing suggests that Hungarians view creativity as a mental faculty, and art as its emotional manifestation.

Czechia
For Czech participants art was linked to public visibility and judgment: "Art feels like something you have to be good at. Something people look at.". The exposure of art — its public nature — was intimidating, while creativity carried no such pressure. For many, this distinction mapped directly onto feelings of vulnerability: creativity was freedom, art was risk.

Ukraine
Ukrainian youth articulated the process /product distinction most explicitly: "Creativity is the process... art is a result." They described creativity as an open-ended act — thinking, trying, playing — while art became the polished or emotionally infused outcome. One explained: "If the author contributes something (like their own soul) to the final result, then it's art." For them, creativity was everywhere, but art was when the process produced something resonant, meaningful, and communicable.

Taken together, these accounts underline a careful balancing act. Creativity is claimed as universal, everyday, and safe — something that belongs to everyone. Art, however, is approached with more caution: it is valued for its depth and impact, but also recognised as an act of exposure that carries the weight of judgment. The distinction reflects how young people navigate between private forms of self-expression and the risks of making their inner worlds public.

CHAPTER 3.6.
Barriers: money, judgment, and vulnerability

Although art appears across the four countries as an everyday language of self-expression, young people also describe powerful obstacles that limit their engagement. These barriers are not only economic but also social and emotional, and they often determine whether creativity becomes a source of relief or an inaccessible luxury.

Economic and material barriers
In Austria and Hungary, young people repeatedly stressed that art requires time and resources they do not always have. Even when materials are inexpensive, the pressure of jobs, school, or family responsibilities cuts into the hours they could spend drawing, making music, or experimenting. Hungarian youth echoed this, describing how daily survival routines leave little energy for art — even if they have strong interest. Czech participants highlighted another layer: art spaces and workshops are often perceived as elitist and financially inaccessible. This assumption itself becomes a barrier, creating self-exclusion before any opportunity arises.

In Ukraine, economic barriers are compounded by war. Some young people noted that instruments, spaces, or even safe places to gather no longer exist, forcing them to fall back on simple, low-cost activities like singing, dancing, or sketching with whatever materials are at hand.

Social and cultural barriers
Across all four contexts, ridicule and judgment play a heavy role. An Austrian recalled being mocked for singing in public, while Hungarian participants described environments where showing emotion through art was interpreted as weakness or immaturity. In Ukraine, traditional gender expectations add another constraint: young women who pursue music, dance, or visual art may face pressure to treat these as "hobbies" until marriage, rather than valid pursuits in themselves. For boys, conversely, art is sometimes dismissed as insufficiently masculine.

Czech youth described art spaces as intimidating rather than welcoming. Some feared being measured against others with formal training: "I wouldn't join an art workshop...everyone already knows what they're doing." This sense of "not being good enough" often keeps them from even trying.

Barriers specific to vulnerable groups
Queer, migrant, and neurodivergent youth spoke about a subtler but equally damaging barrier: exclusion within supposedly inclusive art spaces. Migrant youth in Hungary and Austria described linguistic barriers: workshops or advertisements offered only in the dominant language were a quiet signal that these spaces were not meant for them.

Time and emotional safety as hidden barriers

Even when costs are low and materials available, youth describe the lack of a "safe headspace" to create. Emotional exhaustion, academic pressure, or unstable living conditions often consume the energy that art requires. A Ukrainian girl described wanting to write but being unable to focus in a cramped, shared home. In Austria, some youth spoke of living environments where personal privacy was nearly impossible: "Privacy isn't really a thing with us. Everyone gossips about everyone." In such contexts, the barrier is not money but the absence of safety to explore without fear of interruption or ridicule.

Taken together, these accounts reveal that barriers to art are both external and internal. Money and time limit access to materials or workshops, while stigma, ridicule, and social codes make exposure frightening. Vulnerable youth carry the heaviest weight, facing exclusion even in settings that claim inclusivity. For many, the solution has been to retreat to low-cost, DIY practices — crocheting, journaling, thrift fashion, graffiti, or free digital apps — that provide creative release without the risks of public exposure. Yet the stories also underline a demand: young people want spaces that are not only affordable but also emotionally safe, where their art can exist without being judged, commodified, or ridiculed.

CHAPTER 3.7.
Therapeutic and transformative potential

Across Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Ukraine, young people consistently describe art as more than leisure or self-expression: it is a therapeutic tool and, at times, a life-saving practice. What emerges is a shared recognition of art's capacity to soothe, regulate, and transform inner states, even when external conditions are chaotic.

Austria

For Austrian youth, art was frequently mentioned as a "quiet strategy to navigate chaos." Drawing in sketchbooks during overwhelming group settings, writing poems, or simply listening to music created an inner refuge when external spaces felt unsafe. One young person put it simply: "I just draw, then I'm in my head, in my own world". Others described using rap lyrics, humor, or graffiti not only to process feelings but also to reclaim control in stressful environments.

Hungary

Hungarian participants framed art as both therapy and grounding. Crafts such as crocheting, embroidery, and beadwork were described as deeply calming — meditative acts that occupied the hands while easing the mind. Music and movement practices, dancing, yoga, or simply walking with headphones, were tied to present-moment awareness, helping to interrupt spirals of overthinking or anxiety. For some, the therapeutic value lay in its accessibility: small, repeatable actions like threading beads or strumming a guitar could reliably bring balance, no matter the external stress.

Art was also described as a way of "leaving a trace": murals or group projects created not just relief but also a visible, lasting symbol of belonging and contribution.

Czechia

Czech youth spoke about art in stark terms, directly linking it to survival. For others, drawing or crafts were described as the only time their "brain slows down," offering respite from the constant hum of anxiety and self-surveillance. The transformative power of art was not only in the act itself but in the possibility of reclaiming it after burnout: "When I start drawing again, it feels like I'm getting a part of me back." Here, art becomes both therapy and identity restoration — a way to recover pieces of the self that stress or trauma had silenced.

Ukraine

For Ukrainian youth, art's therapeutic role is heightened by the backdrop of war. Creative engagement was described as a way to "switch from reality to an imaginary world," offering a mental escape from instability. Music was especially central — listening, singing, or playing instruments was consistently cited as a means of calming down, finding inner balance, and reconnecting with selfhood in disorienting times. Beyond relief, Ukrainian participants also spoke of art as self-love and dignity: "loving yourself, feeling yourself" through creative acts was not indulgence but survival, a declaration of agency against the external chaos of war and traditional expectations.

From therapy to transformation

What unites these voices is the recognition that art is not only palliative but also transformative. The Czech youth who turned pain into tattoos, the Hungarian who left a mural behind, the Austrian who rapped feelings into lyrics, and the Ukrainian who found self-respect in music — all illustrate that art creates agency. Making something tangible gives control, pride, and meaning in contexts where many feel powerless. It allows young people to reclaim time, space, and pieces of themselves, while also projecting those inner transformations outward — into murals, graffiti, performances, or digital creations that assert presence and belonging.

CHAPTER 3.8.
Motivations, art forms, and workshop aspirations

When young people across Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Ukraine talk about the art forms they wish to practice, their answers move between private coping and public ambition. Some aspire to professional careers or economic success in the arts, while others long simply for safe, informal spaces where creativity can be practiced without judgment. What connects them is a desire for self-expression, growth, and inclusion — art as both inner tool and outer bridge.

Austria
Many Austrian youth expressed excitement about learning new skills such as rap, beatboxing, graffiti, calligraphy, digital art, painting, and singing. Playing musical instruments, especially the guitar, was a recurring aspiration. Some spoke of developing these skills for personal emotional expression, using art as a way to process complex feelings or to share inner thoughts in ways words could not. Others envisioned taking creativity further: performing on stage, producing music, or creating visual works that resonate with wider audiences. A more pragmatic motivation also emerged: several youth mentioned the dream of combining creativity with financial success, such as selling paintings for "high prices" or turning digital work into a career. This blend of personal meaning and aspirational goals shows Austrian youth view art as a bridge between expression, recognition, and opportunity.

Hungary
Hungarian participants were strongly motivated by collective and therapeutic practices. They imagined group mural projects that would leave visible, lasting traces in public spaces — symbols of presence and belonging. Workshops combining movement, rhythm, and expression — such as yoga-dance fusions or lyric-based workshops — were seen as particularly appealing. Traditional crafts like crocheting, embroidery, and beadwork were valued for their calming effect and accessibility, but youth also wanted to experiment with collaborative formats that connect art to emotional well-being. One recurring theme was the desire for spaces where art and self-care were explicitly linked: workshops where painting or writing could serve as both creative practice and emotional release.

Czechia
Czech youth often stressed the need for informal, low-barrier creative spaces. They envisioned clay modelling, collage, journaling, and DIY music workshops — activities that do not require prior training or expensive materials. Several suggested peer-led collectives, particularly for queer or neurodivergent youth, where the emphasis would be on process and inclusion rather than technical skill. As one participant put it, the ideal art space would be "a place where nobody asks what school you went to."

Czech aspirations also reflected a desire to reclaim lost practices: some spoke with regret about abandoning creative routines like daily journaling or writing due to stress, and hoped for environments that might help them return to those habits. Overall, the Czech vision for art spaces is deeply tied to accessibility, emotional safety, and grassroots creativity.

Ukraine

Ukrainian youth offered a particularly wide spectrum of artistic interests. Traditional and performative forms were strong: ballet, drumming, theatre, and body painting were all mentioned, alongside visual arts like drawing and design. More tactile or experimental practices such as clay modelling and culinary workshops also attracted interest. Tattoo design and piercings stood out as popular forms of merging identity, creativity, and social statement.

Music remained central, whether through modern instruments like guitar or traditional ones like the trembita (a long wooden horn). The motivations here are diverse: art as distraction from stress, art as preservation of tradition, and art as a way of asserting individuality in a context marked by both war and traditional expectations.

Shared aspirations

Across the four countries, the common thread is a desire for inclusive, low-barrier spaces where youth can experiment with a wide range of forms — be it graffiti, crochet, journaling, rap, or body painting — without fear of failure or exclusion. While some dream of professional success or economic recognition, the dominant motivation remains personal: art as emotional regulation, self-discovery, and safe belonging. One Czech youth captured this paradox perfectly: “When I paint or draw, I’m not fixing anything, but I’m feeling it.”

CHAPTER 3.9.
Conclusion: what we learn from the four country portraits

Looking across Austria, Czechia, Hungary and Ukraine, a shared picture emerges of a generation navigating complexity with resilience, creativity, and a desire for authenticity. While contexts differ — from Austria's saturated digital landscape, to Hungary's struggles with belonging and mobility, to Czechia's disillusionment with institutions, to Ukraine's war-shaped realities — youth across borders articulate strikingly similar needs and coping strategies.

1. Mental health as everyday balance, not diagnosis

Young people rarely spoke in clinical language. Instead, they described mental health as "inner peace," "inner harmony," or simply having enough energy to get through daily tasks. Across contexts, stress, anxiety, and fatigue are normalised as constant companions, often tied to school pressure, economic strain, or political instability. Yet they also show strong self-awareness, linking well-being to peer trust, safe environments, and small personal practices like drawing, crocheting, listening to music, or walking.

2. Social media as a double-edged space

All reports converge on social media as both connective tissue and pressure chamber. It is where youth maintain friendships, express themselves, and explore identities, but also where comparison, conflict, and exclusion intensify.

In Austria, constant scrolling leaves youth "mentally drained." In Hungary and Czechia, visibility itself is a risk — yet too much exposure makes one vulnerable. In Ukraine, platforms double as lifelines during war, but also feed anxiety. Young people know these risks and often show critical awareness, but they lack structures that help them set boundaries.

3. Belonging is negotiated, not given

Community was described as both sanctuary and stressor. Austrian youth measured group quality by trust and conflict resilience; Hungarians sought values-based "tribes" across fragmented identities; Czechs often feared exclusion even in "inclusive" spaces; Ukrainians valued family but also struggled with their expectations. The message is clear: belonging is fragile, but deeply necessary. When youth feel excluded, misunderstood, or judged, the impact on mental health is profound.

4. Art as survival, expression, and growth

Perhaps the strongest convergence is the role of art. Whether crochet in Hungary, graffiti in Austria, journaling in Czechia, or drumming in Ukraine, art was consistently described as an emotional language and coping tool. It helps "switch off," "slow down," and "let everything out."

It replaces destructive coping (as one Czech youth said, “Tattooing replaced self-harm”), and creates small islands of presence in overstimulated lives.

Importantly, youth reject elitist definitions: they validate DIY, informal, and everyday creativity — tattoos, fashion, memes, programming, cooking — alongside traditional art. Workshops and spaces they wish for are inclusive, low-barrier, and emotionally safe, where art is as much about connection and grounding as about skill or performance.

5. Inequalities and barriers are real

Economic and social status shape access. Youth from lower-income families in Austria and Hungary emphasised low-cost activities; Czechs saw formal art spaces as “elitist” and inaccessible; Ukrainians under war conditions described relying on simple, resource-light forms.

Vulnerable groups — migrants, queer youth, neurodivergent youth — often feel excluded even in supposedly “inclusive” art or community spaces.

Stigma and ridicule remain major barriers: being mocked for singing, judged for sketching, or silenced for speaking another language shows that safe, supportive spaces are still the exception rather than the rule.

6. Agency and aspiration are alive

Despite barriers, young people are not passive. They carve their own spaces — peer-led collectives, online groups, art nights, DIY practices. Their aspirations balance modest and ambitious goals: from simply “having a room that is really just mine” (Ukraine) to “selling paintings for high prices” (Austria). They want opportunities not just to consume but to create, not just to belong but to shape the environments around them.

CHAPTER 3.10.
Messages to take home

Youth mental health is a structural issue: stress, overstimulation, and precarity are everyday realities. Support must be low-threshold, regular, and empathetic — not distant, costly, or conditional.

Art is not a luxury but a necessity: it functions as coping, healing, and identity work. Policies and programs should recognise informal and DIY creativity as valid, not only institutional or professional art.

Digital life is inseparable from youth life: interventions must acknowledge the ambivalence of social media — supporting digital literacy, boundary-setting, and safe online communities.

Belonging is central: exclusion, whether through language, stigma, or group dynamics, undermines mental health, while inclusive, trust-based communities protect it.

Youth want agency: they ask for spaces they can co-create, where judgment is suspended and creativity, expression, and identity exploration are welcomed.

In short, what we learn is that youth across Austria, Hungary, Czechia, and Ukraine are not asking for perfection or even certainty — they are asking for space. Space to breathe, to create, to belong, to be heard. Space where art, community, and care are not extras but foundations. If policies, institutions, and programs can offer that, they will meet young people where they already are: navigating a complex world with resilience, creativity, and the quiet insistence on dignity.

Art Well

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