Mapping the reality of research on youth in South-East European countries

Dragan Mihajlović
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Abstract

This paper aims to map the reality of research on youth in South-East Europe by applying systematic approaches in searching, identifying, and coding studies that meet a set of inclusion criteria. A systematic search was applied in three academic databases, and additionally, two web-based libraries were searched for identifying relevant youth studies.

The results show an **uneven distribution of studies among countries** in focus, with most studies relating to Croatia and Serbia.

Studies are **unevenly distributed among domains** as well, with most studies coded for

- **health,**

- **education,**

- **empowerment and participation**

domains and **the least for gender, ICT, and housing**.

The results imply that **most of the research on youth in South-East Europe is produced by academic researchers based at universities** who utilise mostly quantitative research methods and publish their findings in academic journals, often less accessible to youth policy-makers and youth work practitioners.

There appears to be a gap between those researchers who produce various but specific knowledge on youth in **academic settings for academic audiences** and **youth policy-makers and practitioners** who are more concerned with general youth issues and cross-cutting domains.

This paper discusses possibilities of bridging this gap and makes a case for an Evidence Gap Map on youth in South-East Europe. Such a map would enable all stakeholders to access the available evidence and knowledge on youth easily, and thus make informed, evidence-based decisions, avoid bias in evidence selection, and direct future research, policy-making, and youth work in South-East Europe.

Introduction and aims of the study

The world is currently home to the largest generation of young people in human history (1.8 billion). Despite this, the international research and policy community has never sufficiently prioritised youth[1]. For children under 3, there exists a wealth of knowledge on infant growth, studies on the impacts of early adversity as well as a rich evidence base that underpins robust interventions for early life. However, there is no comparable body of knowledge for young people, particularly on 'what works' to intervene positively in young people's development. In addition, compared to other low and middle income regions around the world, South-East Europe has not been in the focus for youth research and policy interventions.

It is clear that there is a lack of organised, accessible, and relevant evidence for youth development in the region. The evidence that does exist has yet to be brought together, and the gaps that remain have not been sufficiently identified or explored. This study aims to understand the landscape of youth research in South-East Europe and to help orient the research community, youth policy makers, and youth practitioners towards closing the knowledge gap. Countries belonging to the geographical focus of this study of South-East Europe (SEE) are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo*[2], Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia. Specifically, this study will identify the volume, summarise trends, and provide recommendations for knowledge translation of the youth research in SEE. To achieve these aims, this study will use systematic approaches to identify the knowledge base, qualitatively code the included studies, and analyse the trends through descriptive statistics.

This report follows a structure of an adapted systematic approach to evidence mapping[3]. To conduct a systematic search of the youth research in SEE, it is necessary to clearly define methodology, the scope, set inclusion and exclusion criteria, search for relevant studies, assess the studies for inclusion, conduct data extraction and coding, and present the outcomes of analysis. Finally, in the concluding section a case is made for an Evidence Gap Map on Youth in SEE as a way to further systematise and translate knowledge on youth to funders of research, policy makers, and youth work practitioners.

Methodology

Systematic review methodologies are designed to identity and assess all existing evidence within a thematic domain. An evidence-based approach does not rely on single studies. In order to help policymakers making decisions about adopting new programmes it is useful to

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[1] Nature: International journal of science. (2018, February 21). Editorial: Adolescent research must grow up. Retrieved from https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-02185-w

[2] All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

[3] Adapted from Snilsveit, B., Vojtkova, M., Bhavsar, A., and M. Gaarder (2013) "Evidence Gap Maps: A Tool for Promoting Evidence-Informed Policy and Prioritising Future Research", World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper 6275.

pull together all existing evidence on programme effectiveness. This is done by utilising systematic approaches for evidence synthesis. Systematic approaches avoid potential bias, often encountered in traditional literature reviews. Since the production of a full systematic review that follows a highly formalised and transparent process can take as long as 2 years[4], this study will borrow from systematic review methodologies and adapt the systematic search approaches. Due to the limited timeframe, academic databases and additional sources for search will be preselected and then a systematic search within those sources will be conducted. Additionally, predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria will be applied both in the identification and selection of studies for analysis. Finally, studies included for analysis will be coded for bibliographical information, methodology, domains, countries, and relevance for youth policy and youth work. The coding will enable descriptive statistical analysis of within and across the coding outcomes of the identified sample of youth research in SEE. This study will not attempt to synthesise findings from the sample, as it would take much more time with a bigger research team, but will provide recommendations for future research synthesis agendas and for knowledge translation in a form of an Evidence Gap Map.

Inclusion criteria

Target population

The primary population of interest for this study is youth, persons between 13 and 30 years, as it is used both by the European Commission and Council of Europe. Having in mind that the youth population overlaps with other populations, this study will also consider populations such as adolescents, young people, young adult, teenager, young women, young men. Since youth studies can also cover other populations of those under 13 and over 30 years, only studies whose primary focus is youth will be included and those studies in which more than half of those sampled must be 'youth. Either more than 50% of the initial sample size must fall into this age range (when sample size distribution by age is given), or more than half of the expressed age range (e.g. 16–40 years old) must fall within it.

Thematic scope

The thematic scope of this project is **youth research**, **youth policy**, and **youth work**, often referred to as a 'triangle' by the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership. For this study, it will be useful to further map the evidence on to key domains of youth well-being to inform the wider research and policy community. Key domains can be derived from composite indices measuring the adolescent and youth development field, such as:

- Youth Well-being Index (YWI) 2014 & 2017 by International Youth Foundation[5];
- Youth Development Index (YDI) 2015 & 2017 by The Commonwealth[6];

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[4] Hartling, L. et al. (2015), "A taxonomy of rapid reviews links report types and methods to specific decision-making contexts", Journal of Clinical Epidemiology 68, pp 1451-62.
[5] www.youthindex.org
[6] www.youthdevelopmentindex.org

- Youth Progress Index (YPI) 2017 by European Youth Forum, Deloitte, International IDEA, OSCE & Social Progress Imperative[7].

Similar to the most well-known composite development index, the Human Development Index (HDI), all three indices aim to promote evidence-based policy-making, by providing a simplified snapshot of the state of youth development in a given country in the form of a singular index score. All three indices attempt to provide a multi-dimensional look at youth well-being that goes beyond traditional economic measures, reflecting aspects of life and society that impact the quality of life of young people beyond economic, and their prospects for the future. Youth indices are targeted at policy-makers, civil society, and young people themselves who wish to have a simple measure for progress on youth development in their country. Across the three indices, five broad outcome domains overlap in the definition of youth development.

They can be defined as:

- **Economic and financial wellbeing**
- **Education**
- **Empowerment and participation**
- **Health**
- **Protection, safety, and security**

These domains will frame the analysis and findings in the study. They are selected for their broad applicability in various contexts and countries, and given their usage in well-known youth indices listed above, will be easily recognisable and understood by policy audiences.

Additionally, the following three domains will be included in the conceptual frame for the study due to their emerging importance for youth:

- **Gender equality**, which is seen within the SDGs as both a stand-alone goal and a cross-cutting issue, without which other goals of development cannot be reached[8];
- **Housing**, including affordable housing, which is becoming of increasing importance as its estimated that 60% of all urban dwellers will be under the age of 18 by 2030[9];
- **ICT**, as young people are at the forefront of technological adoption, with 70% of the world's youth online[10].

Dimensions that will be examined in addition to the eight thematic domains include self-stated **sub-population focus** in studies, such as: girls, boys, drug/alcohol/tobacco youth users, LGBTQI youth, married youth, migrant youth, minority youth (race, ethnicity, religion), orphan youth, out of school youth, parent youth, poor youth, refugee youth, Roma youth, unemployed youth, violent youth (bullies, gang), abused youth, youth at university, youth in

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[7] www.youthforum.org/youth-progress-index

[8] High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. (2017). *2-17 HLPF Thematic Review of SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all girls and women*, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/14383SDG5format-revOD.pdf

[9] UN-Habitat. (2017). *Urban Themes: Youth*. https://unhabitat.org/urban-themes/youth/

[10] International Telecommunication Union (ITU). (2017) *ICT Facts and Figures 2017*. https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2017.pdf

high school, youth in institutions, youth with disabilities, youth with HIV/AIDS, youth with mental health issues, youth from humanitarian/conflict/disaster context.

Geographic focus

The geographic focus of this study is South-East Europe, consisting of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia. The multi-country or regional studies will be included in the analysis if the countries of South-East Europe comprise more than half of all countries included in the particular study.

Publication period

To be included, studies will need to be published in or after the year 2000.

Language restrictions

Search will be conducted in English only. However, studies published in English, as well as in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian will be included if they meet all inclusion criteria.

Study types

This project is interested in identifying and then analysing studies with youth focus relevant to the thematic scope. These will not be limited only to studies which produce evidence using methods that identify genuine causal relationships, as in other systematic approaches for evidence synthesis, such as systematic reviews, impact evaluations, randomised controlled trial, and quasi-experimental methods. Since the mapping should be done of 'realities/situation of youth research in SEE', which is much wider in focus, it would therefore include studies done on youth with different research methodologies, including primary studies, discussion papers, reports, and similar that meet other inclusion criteria.

Limitations

This study will collect and code studies on youth, and analyse the results of coding exercise. Unlike other systematic mapping approaches, it will not undertake a full systematic search to identify all studies that exist on youth in SEE, but rather use limited number of search sources and adjustable search strings, limiters, and filters to narrow the search. This study is not intended to be exhaustive, representative, nor should it assess the quality of evidence, but rather it will identify the possible volume of studies in the field, and within the sample conduct an analysis that will provide a snapshot of the state of youth research in SEE and give recommendations for future research synthesis avenues.

Search strategy

The strategy employed for search involved two types of sources: academic databases web-based libraries. Due to time limitation these sources were preselected and included EBSCOhost database, Scopus, as well as internal IRC/Library Search of Jacobs University

Bremen that has access to WorldCat and libraries worldwide. The access to the academic databases was delivered through Jacobs University Bremen and University of Bremen[11]. In addition, two known web-based libraries of youth related publications were included in the search: libraries at Youth Policy Labs[12] and the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership [13].
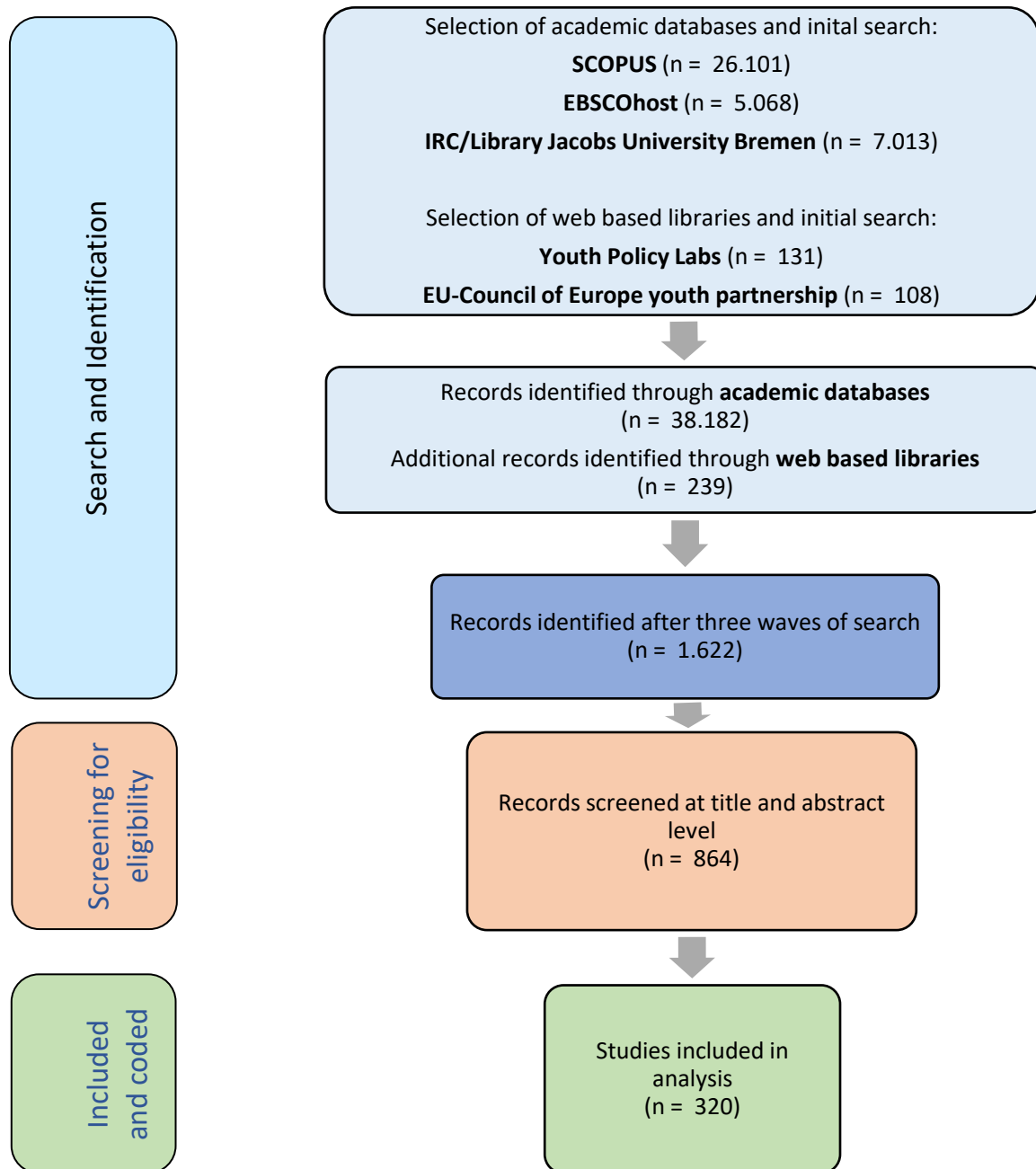
Boolean search phrase

1. The search syntax initially included all youth terms:
    ("adolescen*" OR "young people" OR "young adult" OR youth OR teenager OR "young women" OR "young men").
    In later stages of search, this search string was reduced to only:
    ("young people" OR "young adult" OR youth)
2. The country search string consisted of:
    AND ("South East Europe" OR "South-East Europe" OR "Southeast Europe" OR Balkan OR Albania OR Bosnia OR Bulgaria OR Greece OR Kosovo* OR Macedonia OR Montenegro OR Serbia OR Croatia OR Slovenia) AND
3. In addition to narrow down the search policy relevant string was included:
    AND (policy OR policies).

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[11] The author of this paper is affiliated with these universities and has access to academic databases through them.

[12] http://www.youthpolicy.org/library/

[13] https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/library

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram

The Boolean string was applied to all fields in the databases in the first search wave, but was using various available limiters and narrowing filters to reach more manageable number of references for review in second and third waves of search. The searched yielded 864 records that were screened for eligibility at title and abstract level, and 320 records were included for further analysis (the PRISMA diagram is presented in figure 1).

Due to high number of retrieved studies from Greece in the first screened database, when it amounted to a third of all studies, Greece was dropped from subsequent search string to minimise skewing of results. Additionally, some databases had restrictions on length of

search string and other filters and limiters, hence the search phrase string had to be adjusted to each database. Web based libraries, however, had very limited search capabilities, so usually only a specific country was searched for in the main search menu and all retrieved studies were then screened for inclusion.

Coding

The studies that met all incision criteria were then coded in Excel for bibliographical information, methodology, relevance for youth policy and youth work, domains, and countries. The detail list of coding categories included:

Code:	Field type and options:
ID number	Free text, ordinal number
Source/database	Free text
Title	Free text
Author/Publisher	Free text: last name, first name of first author only
Year or publication	drop down menu, data validation *2000-2019*
URL/DOI/ISSN	Free text
Type of publication	Free text
Funder	Free text
Research method	Drop down menu, data validation: *qualitative, quantitative, mixed*
Subject/topic/key words	Free text
Target population	Drop down menu, data validation: *adolescents 13-19, young adults 19-30, youth 13-30*
Sub-population	Free text
Relevant to	Drop down menu, data validation: *youth policy, youth work, both*
Domain	Drop down menu, data validation, multiple selection: *Education, Employment, Empowerment/Participation, Gender, Health, Housing, ICT, Protection*.
Country	Drop down menu, data validation, multiple selection: *Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, Other/not in focus*.

Once all studies were coded it was possible to analyse the date using descriptive statistics and crosstabing relevant coding categories.
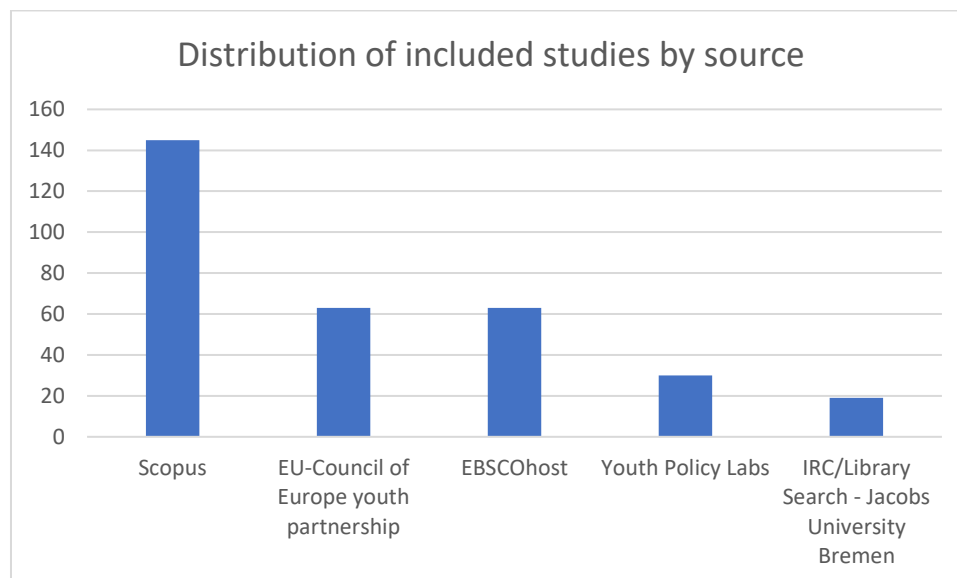
Figure 2: Excel screenshot of coded studies

	ID nu	Source/s	Title	Author/Publi	Year or pu	URL/DOI	Type of pub	Funder	Research met	Subject/Topic/key words	Target popula	Sub-populat	Sub-populat	Relevan	Domain 1	D
271	270	Youth Partne	Information sheet 'Participation of young people' Greece	Moschou, Angelik	2011	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Mixed	youth particpation	Youth (13-30)			Youth policy	Education	En
272	271	Youth Partne	Country Sheet in Youth Policy in Croatia	Moschou, Angelik	2012	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	Youth policy	Youth (13-30)			Youth policy	Empowerment/Participati	
273	272	Youth Partne	Information Template on Social Inclusion of Young Peopl	Youth Partnership	2014	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	Social inclusion	Youth (13-30)			Both	Protection	
274	273	Youth Partne	Questionnaire "Better understanding of Youth" - Greece	Youth Partnership	2009	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	youth research	Youth (13-30)			Both	Education	En
275	274	Youth Partne	Questionnaire "Information" Bulgaria	Youth Partnership	2009	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	Participation	Youth (13-30)			Youth policy	Empowerment/Participati	
276	275	Youth Partne	Strategic Framework for the Empowerment of Youth	Antoniou, Ilias	2018	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Ministry of Education	Qualitative	transition to adulthood, Entrepre	Youth (13-30)			Both	Education	En
277	276	Youth Partne	Reviews on youth policies and youth work in the countrie	Hoxha, Ilir	2011	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	youth policies, youth work, youth	Youth (13-30)			Both	Education	En
278	277	Youth Partne	Kosovo youth study: forward looking, grounded in traditi	Pasha, Auron	2012	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Book	Friedrich Ebert Stiftur	Mixed	Family and Social Life, Education	Youth (13-30)			Both	Education	En
279	278	Youth Partne	Country Sheet on Youth Work in Montenegro	Kontić, Vanja	2016	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	Youth work	Youth (13-30)			Youth work	Empowerment/Participati	
280	279	Youth Partne	Country Sheet in Youth Policy in Montenegro	Koprivica, Nenad	2017	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	Youth policy	Youth (13-30)			Youth work	Empowerment/Participati	
281	280	Youth Partne	Country Sheet on Youth Work in North Macedonia	Gajtanoski, Tomis	2018	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	Youth work	Youth (13-30)			Youth work	Empowerment/Participati	
282	281	Youth Partne	Country Sheet in Youth Policy in North Macedonia	Kirkovski, Aleksar	2017	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	Youth policy	Youth (13-30)			Youth work	Empowerment/Participati	
283	282	Youth Partne	Youth study Macedonia - 2013	Topuzovska Latko	2013	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Book	Friedrich Ebert Stiftur	Mixed	Family and Society, Education an	Youth (13-30)			Both	Education	En
284	283	Youth Partne	Country Sheet on Youth Work in Serbia	Perovic, Bojana	2018	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	Youth work	Youth (13-30)			Youth work	Empowerment/Participati	
285	284	Youth Partne	Country Sheet on Youth Work in Slovenia	Zupan, Barbara	2018	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	Youth work	Youth (13-30)			Youth work	Empowerment/Participati	
286	285	Youth Partne	Country Sheet in Youth Policy in Serbia	Perovic, Bojana	2016	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	Youth policy	Youth (13-30)			Youth work	Empowerment/Participati	
287	286	Youth Partne	Country Sheet in Youth Policy in Slovenia	Zupan, Barbara	2016	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	Youth policy	Youth (13-30)			Youth work	Empowerment/Participati	
288	287	Youth Partne	Information sheet: Better Knowledge of Youth - Serbia	Vlajkovic, Jana	2012	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	youth research	Youth (13-30)			Youth work	Empowerment/Participati	
289	288	Youth Partne	Information sheet: Better Knowledge of Youth - Slovenia	Zupan, Barbara	2012	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	youth research	Youth (13-30)			Youth work	Empowerment/Participati	
290	289	Youth Partne	Information sheet 'Youth and the World' Serbia	Vlajkovic, Jana	2012	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	youth research, education, youth	Youth (13-30)			Youth policy	Education	
291	290	Youth Partne	Information sheet 'Youth and the World' Slovenia	Zupan, Barbara	2012	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	youth research, education, youth	Youth (13-30)			Youth policy	Education	
292	291	Youth Partne	Reviews on youth policies and youth work in the countrie	Tamara, Nikolić	2011	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	youth policies, youth work, youth	Youth (13-30)			Both	Education	En
293	292	Youth Partne	Information Template on Social Inclusion of Young Peopl	Vlajkovic, Jana	2015	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	social exclusion, young people w	Youth (13-30)			Both	Education	En
294	293	Youth Partne	Young People in Serbia 2015: Situation, perceptions, beli	Tomanović, Smilj	2015	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Book	Friedrich Ebert Stiftur	Mixed	Family and Society, Education an	Youth (13-30)			Both	Education	En
295	294	Youth Partne	Information sheet 'Participation of young people' Sloveni	Zgonc, Andraž	2011	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Mixed	Youth particpation	Youth (13-30)			Youth policy	Education	
296	295	Youth Partne	Information sheet 'Volunteering of young people' Sloveni	Zgonc, Andraž	2011	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	Volunteering	Youth (13-30)			Youth work	Empowerment/Participati	
297	296	Youth Partne	Questionnaire "Information" Slovenia	Youth Partnership	2009	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Qualitative	Participation	Youth (13-30)			Youth policy	Empowerment/Participati	
298	297	Youth Partne	Study on Volunteering in the European Union: Country Re	Mathou, Cecile	2010	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Report	Youth Partnership	Mixed	Volunteering	Youth (13-30)			Both	Empowerment/Particip	Ed
299	298	Youth Partne	Slovenian Youth 2013: Living in times of disillusionment,	Flere, Sergej	2013	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Book	Friedrich Ebert Stiftur	Mixed	Family and Society, Education an	Youth (13-30)			Both	Education	En
300	299	Youth Partne	Youth 2010: The social profile of young people in Sloveni	Lavrič, Miran	2011	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Book	Ministry of Education	Mixed	Education and training, Employm	Youth (13-30)			Both	Education	En
301	300	IRC/Library S	Targeting youth employment policy in Bulgaria	O'Higgins, Niall	2001	https://jacobsunivers	Journal article		Qualitative	Bulgaria employment job labour	Young adults (19-3	Unemployed youth		Youth policy	Education	
302	301	IRC/Library S	Politička participacija mladih i politika prema mladima: F	Ilišin, Vlasta	2003	https://jacobsunivers	Journal article		Qualitative	political participation; youth pol	Young adults (19-30)			Youth policy	Empowerment/Participati	
303	302	IRC/Library S	Thematic study on policy measures concerning disadvant	Ule, Mirjana	2005	https://jacobsunivers	Book		Qualitative	Social policy	Youth (13-30)	Youth with disabilities		Both	Protection	
304	303	IRC/Library S	Constellations of Disadvantage and Policy Dilemmas in Yc	Kovacheva, Siyka	2006	https://jacobsunivers	Journal article		Qualitative	Transitions, School to Work	Youth (13-30)	Unemployed youth		Youth policy	Education	En
305	304	IRC/Library S	Forum Syd Balkan Project. Best practice. PRONI/FSBP edu	Spanja, Sanja	2008	https://jacobsunivers	Journal article		Qualitative	leadership, community youth wo	Youth (13-30)			Youth work	Empowerment/Particip	Ed
306	305	IRC/Library S	Youth in the Balkan region : lessons for youth policy	Kuhar, M.	2009	https://jacobsunivers	Book chapter		Qualitative	Balkan, youth policy	Youth (13-30)			Youth policy	Education	En
307	306	IRC/Library S	Inclusive education in Bulgaria and Bosnia and Herzegovir	Tsokova, Diana	2009	https://jacobsunivers	Journal article		Qualitative	inclusive education	Youth (13-30)	Youth with disabilities		Youth policy	Education	Pr
308	307	IRC/Library S	Youth Work in South East Europe: Youth Transitions and C	Crownover, John	2009	https://search.ebscoh	Journal article		Qualitative	Youth work, post conflict	Humanitarian/conflict/disaster			Youth work	Empowerment/Participati	
309	308	IRC/Library S	Youth unemployment, the brain drain and education pol	Hornstein Tomić,	2018	https://doi.org/10.11	Journal article		Qualitative	Youth unemployment, brain drai	Youth (13-30)	Unemployed youth		Youth policy	Education	En
310	309	IRC/Library S	Leadership and Developmental Community Youth Work,	Sundin, Ebba	2012	https://jacobsunivers	Book		Qualitative	Developmental Community Youtl	Youth (13-30)	Minority youth (race, ethnicity, re		Youth work	Education	En
311	310	IRC/Library S	Youth and public policy in Serbia	Azanjac, Tanja	2012	http://www.youthpo	Book	Open Society Founda	Mixed	Youth policy	Youth (13-30)			Both	Education	En
312	311	IRC/Library S	Changes in youth transitions to parenthood in Bulgaria: C	Kovacheva, Siyka	2012	https://jacobsunivers	Book chapter		Qualitative	transitions to parenthood	Young adults (19-3	Parent youth		Both	Protection	
313	312	IRC/Library S	Is There Anything Specific about Early School Leaving in Sc	Jugović, Ivana	2013	https://jacobsunivers	Journal article		Qualitative	early school leaving, risk factors, F	Adolescents (13-1!	Out of school yo	Roma youth	Both	Education	Pr
314	313	IRC/Library S	Policy effectiveness for employment of young people with	Shoraj, Dritan	2014	https://jacobsunivers	Journal article		Qualitative	employment, professional educat	Young adults (19-3	Unemployed youth		Youth policy	Education	En
315	314	IRC/Library S	Youth work and youth policy in Albania	Prifti, Manuela	2015	https://jacobsunivers	Journal article		Qualitative	Youth work	Youth (13-30)			Youth policy	Education	En
316	315	IRC/Library S	Youth policy in Serbia: conclusions of the Council of Euro	Potočnik, Dunja	2016	https://rm.coe.int/yc	Book	Council of Europe	Qualitative	Youth policy	Youth (13-30)			Youth policy	Education	En
317	316	IRC/Library S	Policy Discourse on Marginalised Youth in Albania: The Cc	Bino, Blerjana	2017	https://jacobsunivers	Journal article		Qualitative	Marginalised, integration, inclusi	Youth (13-30)	Minority youth (race, ethnicity, re		Youth policy	Education	En
318	317	IRC/Library S	Theories and concepts of youth work in South-East Europ	Pudar Draško, Ga	2017	https://jacobsunivers	Journal article		Qualitative	Youth work	Youth (13-30)			Both	Empowerment/Participati	
319	318	IRC/Library S	Taxonomy of Teaching Methods and Teaching Forms for Y	Milošević Zupanč	2018	https://jacobsunivers	Journal article		Qualitative	Non-Formal Education, Youth Cou	Youth (13-30)			Both	Education	En
320	319	Youth Partne	Leading entrepreneurial youth – Leadership and entrepre	Tsakarestou, Bett	2018	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Book chapter	Council of Europe	Mixed	entrepreneurial skills	Youth (13-30)			Youth policy	Education	En
321	320	Youth Partne	Social contexts of political (non-)participation among Slo	Kuhar, M.	2014	https://pjp-eu.coe.in	Book chapter	Council of Europe	Mixed	Social contexts, political particip	Youth (13-30)			Youth policy	Employment	En

Search | Coding | Validation | Pivot single | Pivot crosstabs | +

Findings

Evidence base by source

Sources for evidence base were discussed in the search strategy section, where it was explained that the sources were limited and preselected to speed up the search process. The distribution of included studies in shown in Figure 3. Majority of studies were found in Scopus academic database (145 studies), followed by EU-Council of Europe youth partnership web library and EBSCOhost academic database (63 studies each), then 30 studies at Youth Policy Labs web library and 19 studies through library search of Jacobs University Bremen. In summary, more than two thirds of all included records were retrieved from academic databases and it emphasises that most of research is produced in academic settings for academic audience. Moreover, access to academic journals and databases is usually not available to non-university based practitioners and policy makers, which limit the outreach and impact these studies may have. However, a third of studies were found at accessible web-based libraries specialised for youth. The studies available at web libraries are relevant for policy makers and practitioners, but are scientifically less rigorous in methodology.
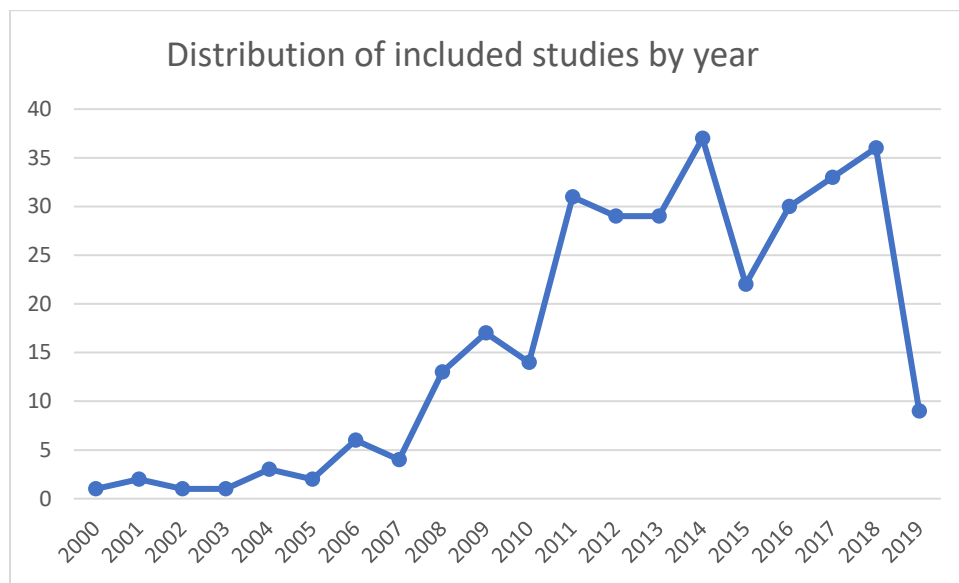
Figure 3: Distribution of included studies by source

Evidence base by year of publication

The search was limited to timeframe from 2000 to 2019 initially, and then only from 2005 onwards, and in this period most publications are very recent. Majority of studies were published and limited to the last decade. It implies that the youth research field has grown in significance and managed to attract higher interest from researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. It also may show that there are more funds available for research in recent time.
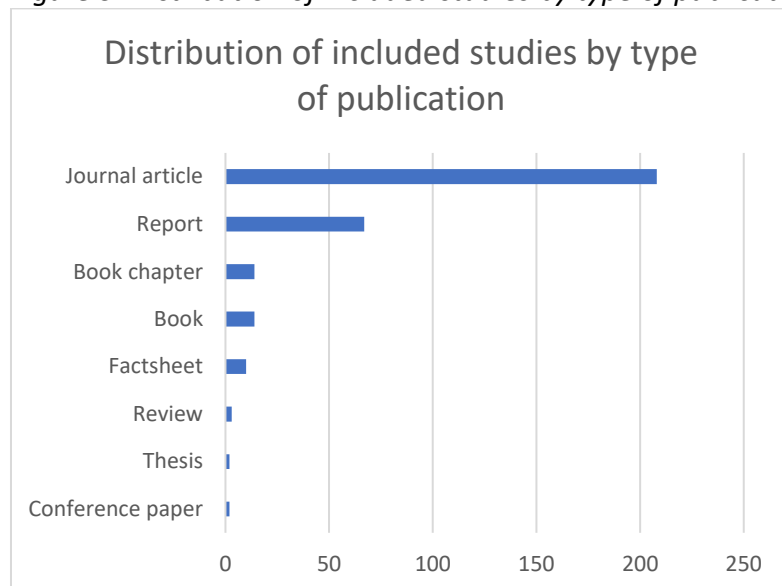
Figure 4: Distribution of included studies by year of publication

Evidence base by type of publication

More than two thirds of all included studies were found in academic journals, which echo the finding that also about two thirds of studies were retrieved from academic databases. It emphasises the fact that most of knowledge on youth is produced for academic audiences, and that there is lack of adequate use and translation of that knowledge in practice.
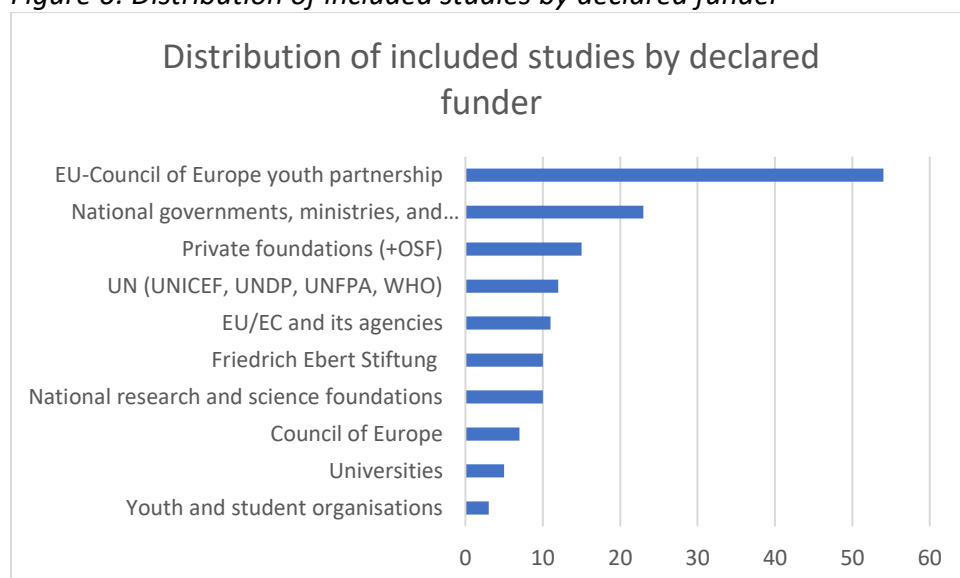
Figure 5: Distribution of included studies by type of publication

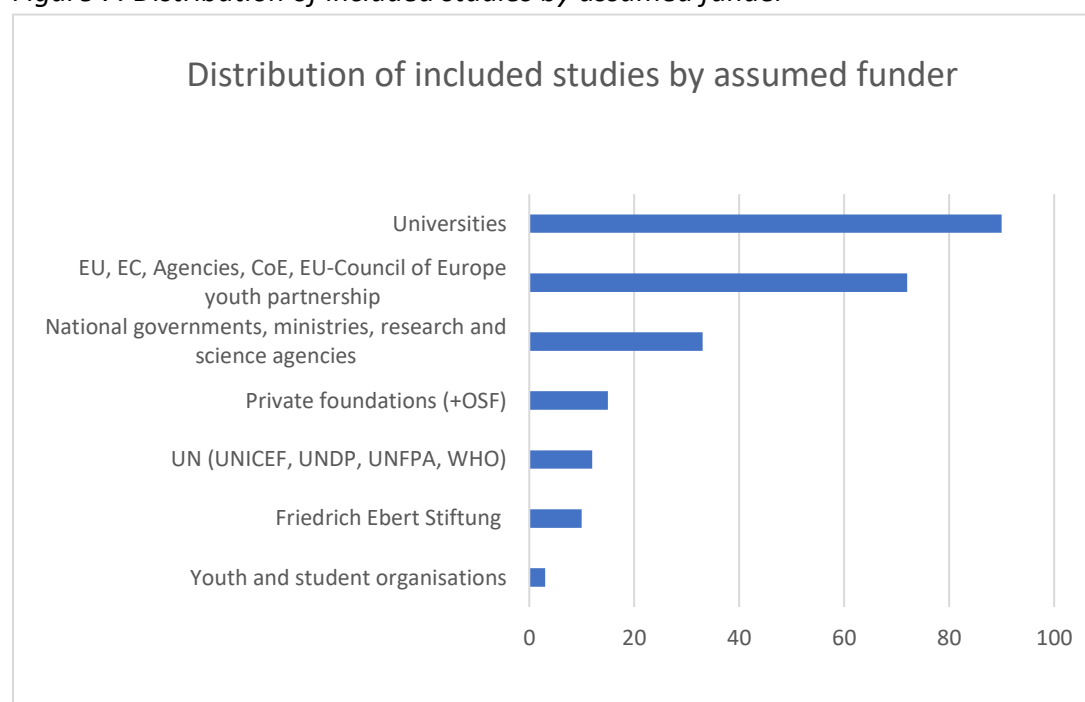## Evidence base by funder

Only a third of all analysed studies clearly declare who has funded the research, and by far most of them got funding from the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership. This is not a surprise as the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership web library was used as one of the main sources for identification of studies.

Figure 6: Distribution of included studies by declared funder

A high number of undeclared funders required a closer look and a second wave of coding of those studies. The following approach was taken: if authors of such studies are affiliated with universities, then it was assumed that the funding came from core academic activities of researches at those universities, and the studies were therefore coded as funded by universities. This assumption changed the distribution of funders of youth research and placed universities as the top funder. Other funders were regrouped to produce European institutions as second most significant funder, followed by national level governmental funders, private foundations, UN agencies, and interestingly a foundation of the German social-democratic party, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. However, this assumption may not be completely accurate as universities and research projects based at universities receive a mixed public funding from governments, European instructions, as well as from private sources, so the results in figure 6 should be taken with a dose of scepticism. Nevertheless, it highlights that apart from European and national level funders, there are no additional funders of youth research. This also may imply that funding is scarce and difficult to obtain, especially if coming from mixed sources.

Figure 7: Distribution of included studies by assumed funder

Evidence base by research method

When analysed by the type of research method, it is clear that most of included studies used quantitative research methodologies and are at the same time published in academic journals. Among those studies with qualitative and mixed methodologies, most of them are policy relevant and practitioners oriented studies available at specialised youth web libraries. This finding is reflective of type of evidence necessary for causal knowledge. Although qualitative studies are essential in exploring new research fields and answering relevant "how" and "why" questions, quantitative studies aim at making reliable inferences about counterfactuals by observing a large number of events under controlled conditions. Some examples include randomised controlled trails and quasi-experimental methods, where it is possible to draw causal inferences that an intervention in a social setting

produced an outcome that was not possible to occur without that intervention (counterfactual). However, evidence for policymaking is multifaceted and all stakeholders should be aware of place and relevance of each research piece with its distinctive methodology in a wider pool of evidence and critical of taking only positivist approach to knowledge creation.

Figure 8. Distribution of included studies by research method

Evidence base by subject/topic/keywords

Keywords were identified from all studies included in coding, and presented in a word cloud form as yet another way to visually present results. The most frequent keywords are, as expected, policy, youth, health, education, social, adolescents. It is interesting that on a second level of frequency are words such as: risk, alcohol, work, mental (health), violence, and smoking implying health and risk research focus.
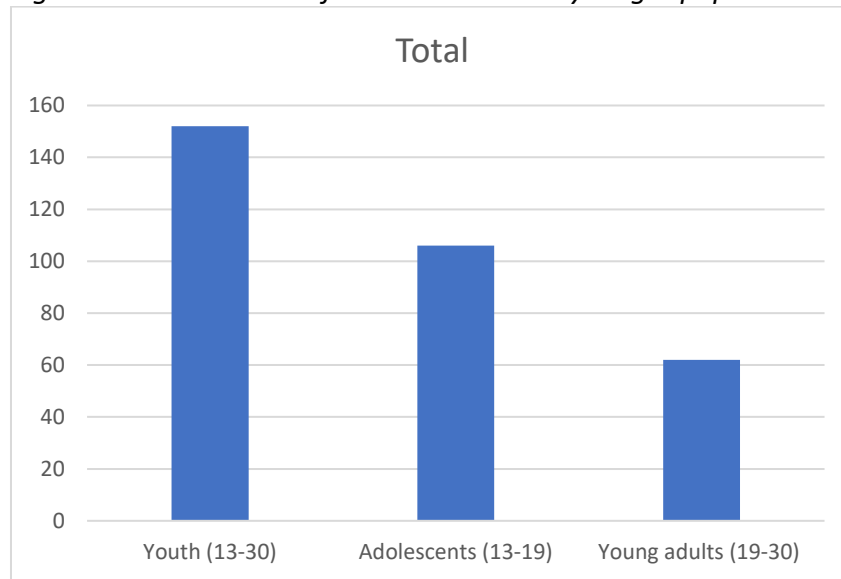
Figure 9. Word cloud of key words

Evidence base by target population

Half of the studies included in the analysis cover the entire youth group (aged 13-30), followed by adolescent group and the least number of studies exclusively focusing on young adults, as shown in figure 10. This may be explained by the lack of research focus and interest in the group of young adults, compared to adolescents and composite youth age group.
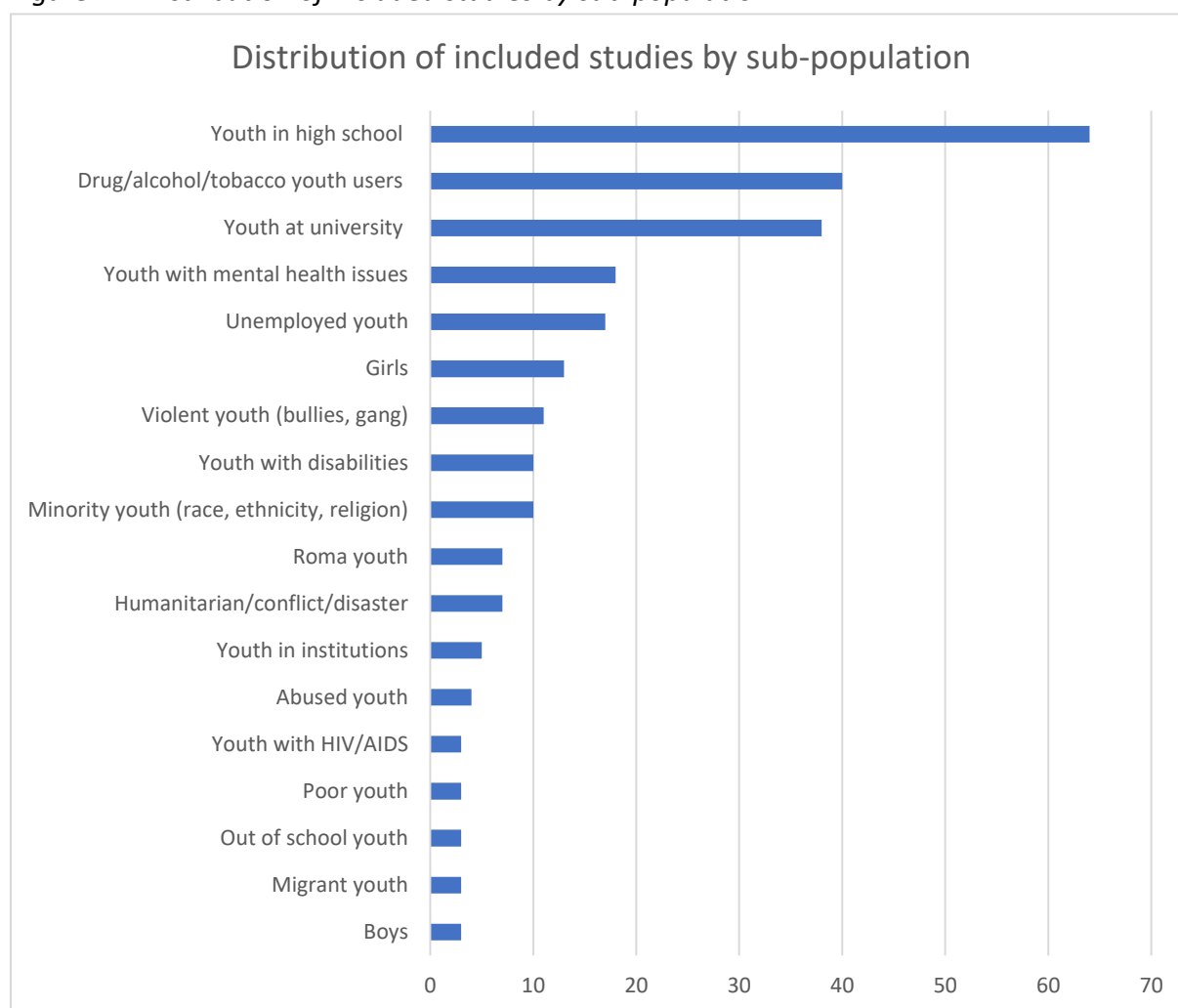
Figure 10. Distribution of included studies by target population

Evidence base by sub-population

A number of sub-population groups were identified during coding process. The studies most often focused on young people in education institutions (high schools and universities) - about one third of all studies. Second most common sub-group is young people who are users of drug, alcohol, or tobacco, followed by young people with mental health issues, and unemployed youth.
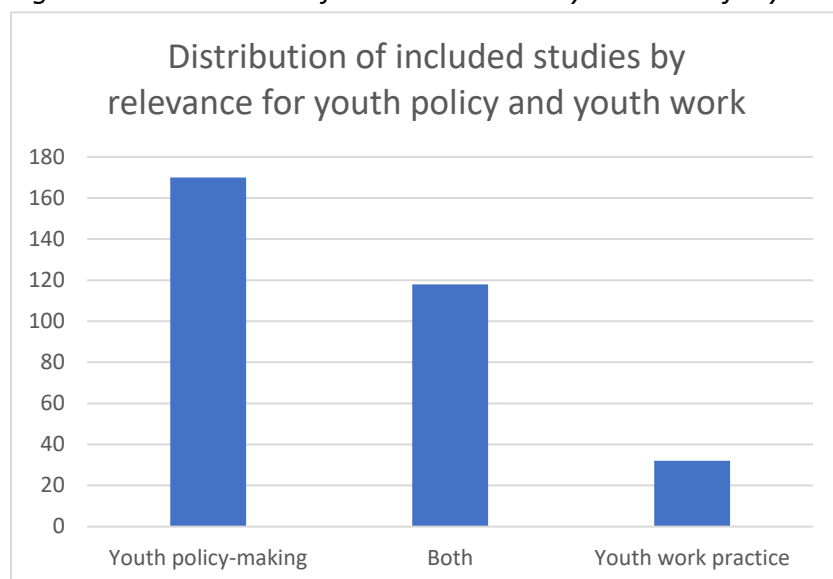
Figure 11. Distribution of included studies by sub-population

Distribution of included studies by sub-population

Sub-population	Value
Youth in high school	64
Drug/alcohol/tobacco youth users	40
Youth at university	38
Youth with mental health issues	18
Unemployed youth	17
Girls	13
Violent youth (bullies, gang)	11
Youth with disabilities	10
Minority youth (race, ethnicity, religion)	10
Roma youth	7
Humanitarian/conflict/disaster	7
Youth in institutions	5
Abused youth	4
Youth with HIV/AIDS	3
Poor youth	3
Out of school youth	3
Migrant youth	3
Boys	3

Evidence base by relevance to youth policy and youth work practice

Each study was coded for its relevance for youth policy-making, youth work, or both. More than half of all studies are relevant only for youth policy-making, while just 10% of the sampled studies are relevant only for youth work practice. About a third of studies have relevance for both youth policy and youth work. The results show that youth work practice is considerably less in focus of researchers than general youth issues which are more easily applicable for youth policy.
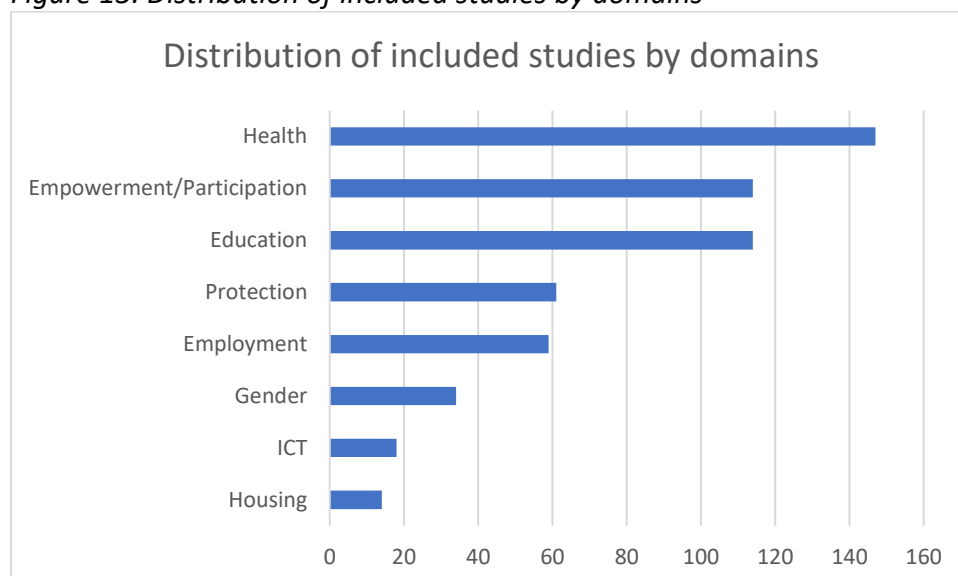
Figure 12. Distribution of included studies by relevance for youth policy and youth work

Distribution of included studies by
relevance for youth policy and youth work

Evidence base by domains

Studies were coded for belonging to eight domains. It was possible to code one study for several domains. Results show that studies are not equally distributed across domains. Most studies (about one quarter) are focused on health of young people, followed by equal number of studies on empowerment/participation and education domains (20%). There are considerably less studies in protection and employment domains (about 10%), just a few studies focusing on gender, and even less on ICT and housing. Having explained in thematic scope of this paper that gender, ICT, and housing are recently gaining in importance for youth is not yet reflected in research. It is interesting that there are so many studies related to empowerment and participation of young people. However, since the research framework included in the sample for analysis many policy relevant studies this result is not surprising.
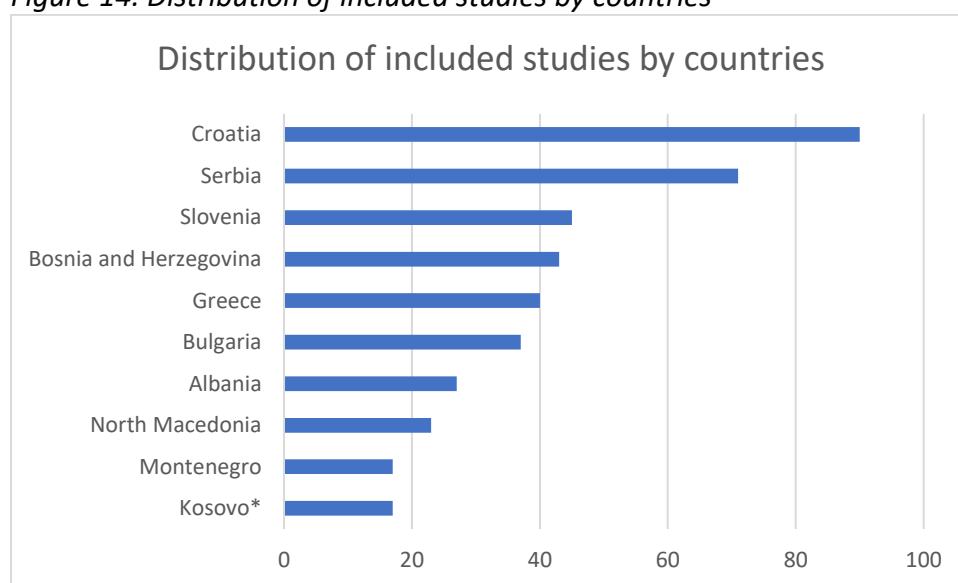
Figure 13. Distribution of included studies by domains

Distribution of included studies by domains

Evidence base by country

When broken down by countries the studies focus on, most of them cover Croatia followed by Serbia and then Slovenia as a country with third most studies. There are the least number of studies investigating youth in Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Albania. Countries with top three number of studies have either larger youth research and policy community and/or have more funding avalible for such research than countries with the least number of studies. It is important to note that after coding studies identified in the first academic database, there was about a third of all studies coming from Greece. In subsequent search waves Greece was excuded from the search string so that the overal results would not be skewed, but the screened studies that had a foucus on Greece were included and coded.
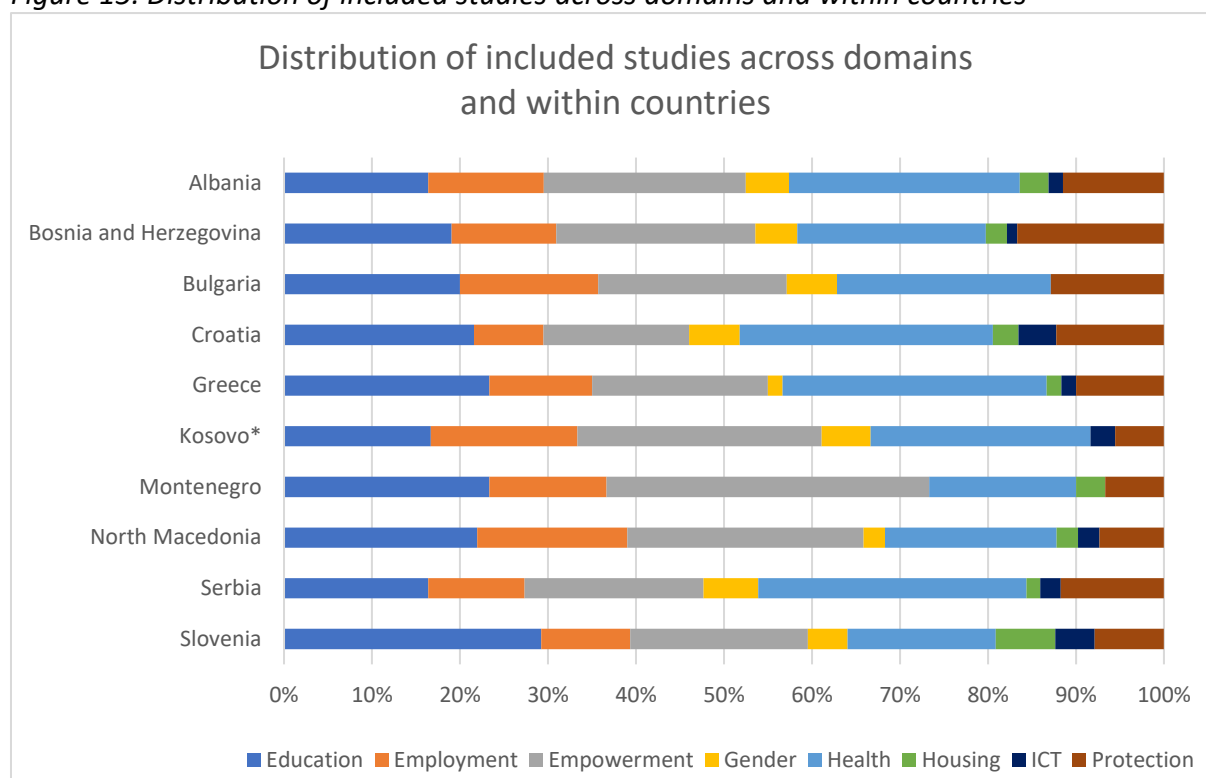
Figure 14. Distribution of included studies by countries

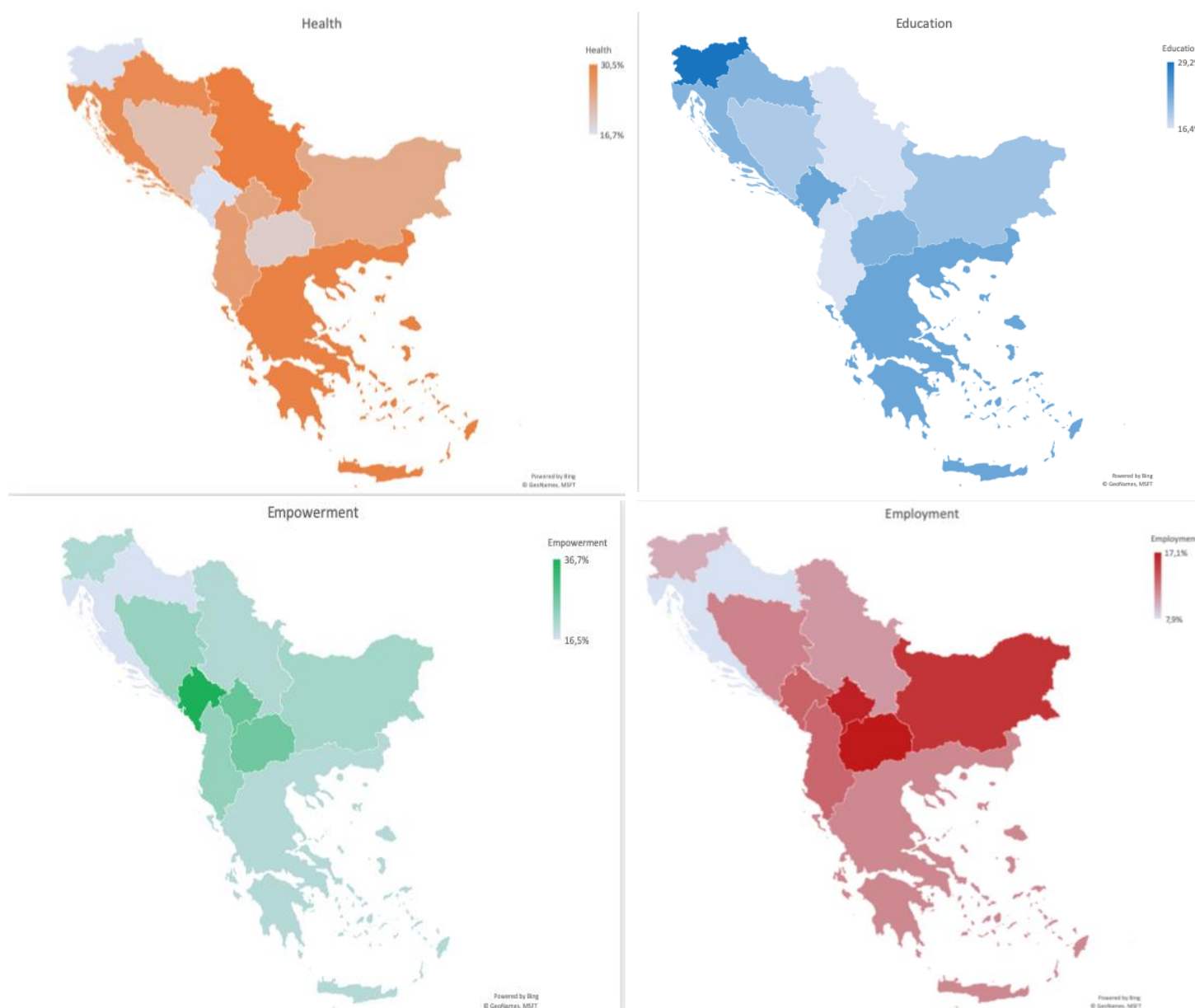### Evidence base across and within domains and countries

To better understand how coded studies are distributed *within* each country and *across* domains, a '100% stacked bar chart' is used in figure 13 below. In Albania, Bulgaria, and Serbia the three domains with most studies are health, empowerment, and education. In Croatia and Greece top three domains are health, but education came as second and empowerment as third domain with most studies. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, and North Macedonia top domain is empowerment/participation, and in Slovenia most studies are coded in the education domain. The results show that studies within countries have a different distribution than on the regional level. In particular, it is interesting that education and empowerment and participation is the most coded domain in some SEE countries, which emphasise the focus of youth research in education, rather than in health.

Figure 15. Distribution of included studies across domains and within countries

Distribution of included studies across domains and within countries

Results of coding can be analysed *within* four top domains and *across* countries through heat maps. This way of looking at data tells us in which countries *within* a particular domain we have the most coded studies compared relatively to other countries and will show a darker colour shade, as in figure 14 below. For example, this is not to say that Montenegro has the most coded studies in empowerment overall, but that compared to other domains in Montenegro there is 37% of studies coded in this domain, which is the highest percentage across all countries in focus. Within the health domain, the most studies relative to all studies within a respective country are coded in Serbia, Greece, and Croatia with about 30% of all studies in those countries. Similarly, education domain is relatively the most coded in Slovenia (30%), Greece, and Montenegro. Empowerment and participation is the most frequently coded in Montenegro (37%), Kosovo*, and North Macedonia. Employment domain is coded the most in North Macedonia (17%), Kosovo*, and Bulgaria.

Figure 16. Composite heat maps of health, education, empowerment, and employment domains across countries in South-East Europe.

Conclusions and recommendations

This paper has developed a systematic search approach to identify and code studies on youth research in South-East Europe relevant to youth policy making and youth work. There were 864 records screened at title and abstract level and 320 out of them met all inclusion criteria and were coded in detail. The data produced in such a way enables analysis and presentation of results in a number of ways discussed in the findings section of the report.

Overall, this study shows that the volume of research produced on youth in South-East Europe is large, however its relevance for and use by youth policy-makers and youth practitioners seems to be limited. A few countries in the region produced more research than the others, namely Croatia and Serbia, which can be explained by the youth research tradition in these countries. When analysed across domains, health related studies are the most frequent in the region, which is common trend worldwide. Health issues are often explored by researchers who are not exclusively focused on developing youth policy or youth work. These researchers tend to explore health related issues that have some significance for youth and could be used in both policy making and youth work if there were a better communication between academic and non-academic research communities and better use of knowledge translation. Another important tendency is that a vast majority of all research is to be found in academic journals, usually produced by university based researchers and with funding coming from core activities these researchers have at universities. Apart from them, there is a growing community of youth practitioners turned researchers or producers of knowledge on youth outside academic settings, that is mainly fuelled by European funders, such as EU-Council of Europe youth partnership. However, there seems be a disconnect between academic research produced on youth, published in journals which are often inaccessible to non-academic audiences and youth policy-makers and practitioners. The knowledge that is often of a higher quality remain locked behind paywalls of some academic journals.

This study shows that there is a need for a fully systematic approach in identifying and analysing all youth research in the region. That endeavour could be then presented in a form of an Evidence Gap Map (EGM), as a way to bridge the gap between different research communities, and systematise and translate the knowledge on youth in a compact and user-friendly format intended to inform youth policy-makers, funders of research, and youth practitioners. This paper could be considered as part of the scoping exercise necessary in the preparation of an EGM. Recently, there have been several of EGMs that have focused on different domains of adolescent health and wellbeing in low and middle income countries, including sexual and reproductive health, education, transferrable skills, agency, protection, participation, and financial and material wellbeing[14].

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[14]Adolescent interventions and outcomes in protection, participation and financial and material wellbeing (UNICEF). Completed December 2017. https://www.unicef-irc.org/evidence-gap-map/
Youth and transferrable skills (3ie). Completed September 2015. http://www.3ieimpact.org/evidence-hub/publications/evidence-gap-maps/youth-and-transferable-skills-evidence-gap-map
Primary and Secondary Education (3ie). Completed September 2015. http://gapmaps.3ieimpact.org/evidence-maps/primary-and-secondary-education-evidence-gap-map
Adolescent sexual and reproductive health (3ie). Completed December 2016. http://www.3ieimpact.org/evidence-hub/publications/evidence-gap-maps/adolescent-sexual-and-reproductive-health-evidence-gap

Advantage of Evidence Gap Maps are that they inform evidence-based policy-making by providing an overview of the evidence that exists on a particular topic or theme, to highlight gaps in the evidence base and show where evidence is more abundant[15]. Evidence Gap Maps then visually map out retrieved empirical evidence on a grid of outcomes and interventions. In many cases, EGMs also critically appraise and rate the quality of the evidence base. EGMs are focussed on impact effectiveness, and enable policy-makers and practitioners to explore findings and assess the quality of evidence quickly and efficiently. They also expose gaps in knowledge, and help to set future research agendas. All these arguments make a strong case for creating an Evidence Gap Map on youth in South-East Europe that would enable all stakeholders to easily access the knowledge, make an informed decision based on evidence, avoid bias, and direct future research, policy making, and youth work in the region.

Young people as agents of and advocates of development (ODI). Completed October 2016.
https://www.odi.org/ publications/10653-young- people-agents-and-advocates- development

[15] Snilsveit, B., Vojtkova, M., Bhavsar, A., and M. Gaarder. (2013). *Evidence Gap Maps: A Tool for Promoting Evidence-Informed Policy and Prioritising Future Research*, World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper 6275.

Citations

Bakrania, S., Ghimire, A., and Balvin, N. (2018). *Bridging the Gap to Understand Effective Interventions for Adolescent Well-being: An evidence gap map on protection, participation and financial and material well-being in low- and middle-income countries.* Florence, Italy: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.

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Snilsveit, B., Vojtkova, M., Bhavsar, A., and M. Gaarder. (2013). *Evidence Gap Maps: A Tool for Promoting Evidence-Informed Policy and Prioritising Future Research*, World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper 6275.

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ANNEX 1: Scopus database search results after second wave of search consisting of 849 records with applied filters and limiters

Scopus

Analyze search results

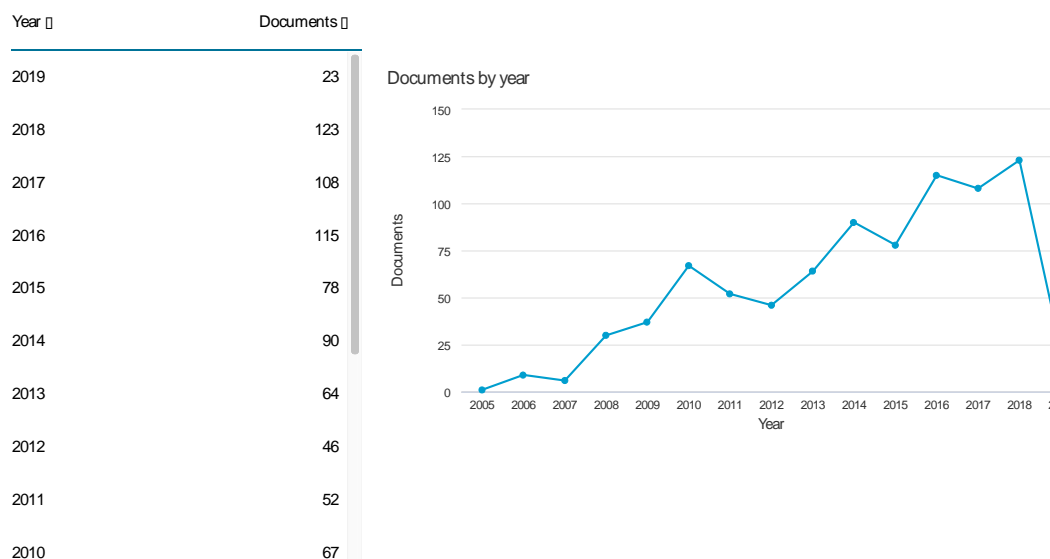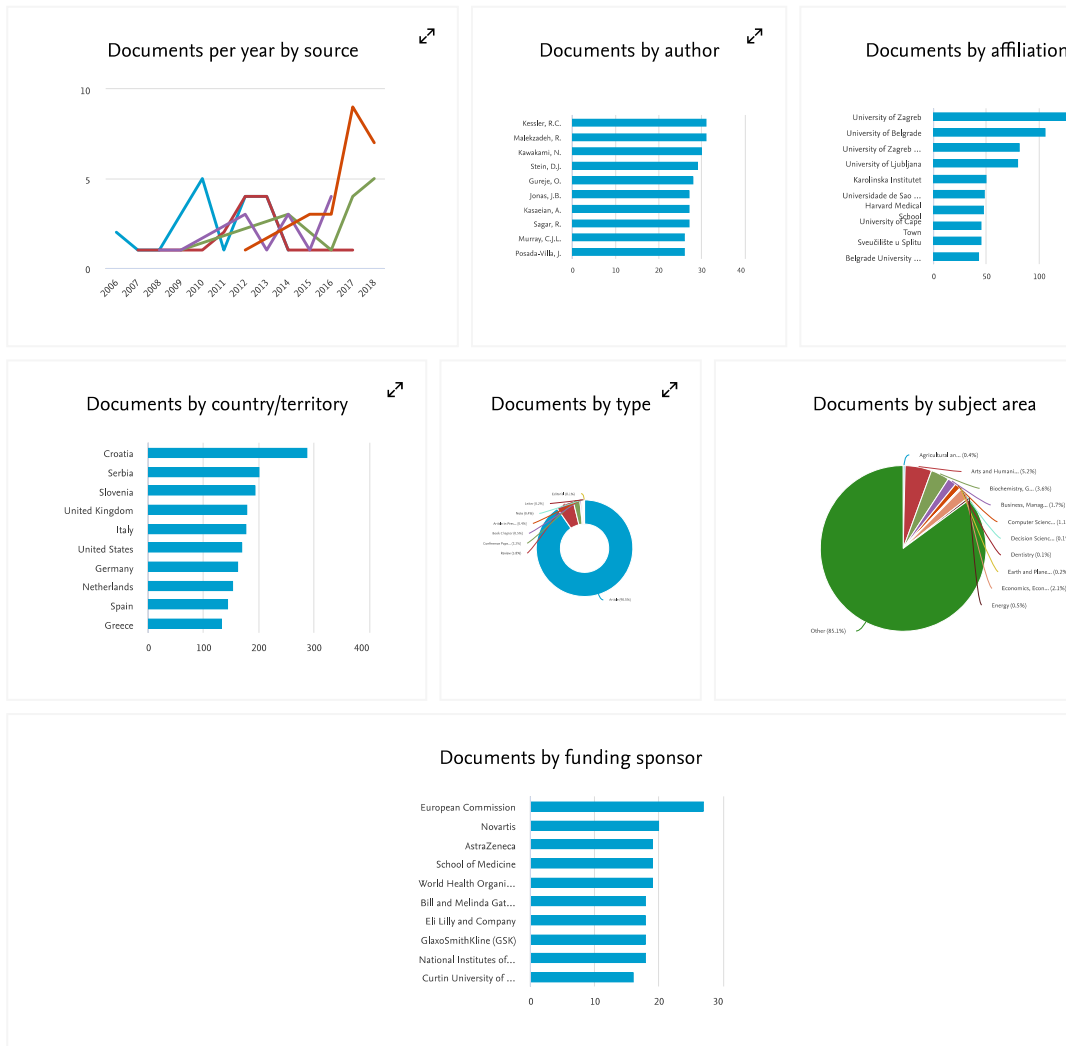 Back to results   → Export   Print   i

("young people" OR "young adult" OR "youth") AND ("South East Europe" OR "South-East Europe" OR "Southeast* Europe" OR "Balkan*" OR "Albania"
"Bosnia and Herzegovina" OR "Bosnia & Herzegovina" OR "BiH" OR "Bosnia" OR "Bulgaria" OR "Kosovo" OR "Macedonia" OR "North Macedonia" OR
"FYROM" OR "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" OR "Montenegro" OR "Serbia" OR "Croatia" OR "Slovenia") AND ("Policy" OR "Policies") AND
TO (PUBYEAR , 2019) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2018) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2017) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2016) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2
OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2014) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2013) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2012) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2011) OR LIMIT-··· View

849 document results

Select year range to analyze: 2005 ⌄ to 2019 ⌄

Year	Documents
2019	23
2018	123
2017	108
2016	115
2015	78
2014	90
2013	64
2012	46
2011	52
2010	67

Documents by year

Click on cards below to see additional data.

Documents per year by source

Documents by author

Kessler, R.C.
Malekzadeh, R.
Kawakami, N.
Stein, D.J.
Gureje, O.
Jonas, J.B.
Kasaeian, A.
Sagar, R.
Murray, C.J.L.
Posada-Villa, J.

Documents by affiliation

University of Zagreb
University of Belgrade
University of Zagreb ...
University of Ljubljana
Karolinska Institutet
Universidade de Sao ...
Harvard Medical School
University of Cape Town
Sveučilište u Splitu
Belgrade University ...

Documents by country/territory

Croatia
Serbia
Slovenia
United Kingdom
Italy
United States
Germany
Netherlands
Spain
Greece

Documents by type

Documents by subject area

Agricultural an... (0.4%)
Arts and Humani... (5.2%)
Biochemistry, G... (3.6%)
Business, Manag... (1.7%)
Computer Scienc... (1.1%)
Decision Scienc... (0.1%)
Dentistry (0.1%)
Earth and Plane... (0.2%)
Economics, Econ... (2.1%)
Energy (0.5%)
Other (85.1%)

Documents by funding sponsor

European Commission
Novartis
AstraZeneca
School of Medicine
World Health Organi...
Bill and Melinda Gat...
Eli Lilly and Company
GlaxoSmithKline (GSK)
National Institutes of...
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Annex 2: EBSCOhost search history of the final third wave of search with 140 screened records

EBSCOhost

Tuesday, June 04, 2019 11:13:04 AM

#	Query	Limiters/Expanders	Last Run Via	Results
S4	("adolescen*" OR "young people" OR "young adult" OR "youth" OR "teenager" OR "young women" OR "young men") AND ("South East Europe" OR "South-East Europe" OR "Southeast* Europe" OR "Balkan*" OR "Albania" OR "Bosnia and Herzegovina" OR "Bosnia & Herzegovina" OR "BiH" OR "Bosnia" OR "Bulgaria" OR "Kosovo" OR "Macedonia" OR "North Macedonia" OR "FYROM" OR "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" OR "Montenegro" OR "Serbia" OR "Croatia" OR "Slovenia") AND ("policy" OR "policies")	Limiters - Date of Publication: 20050101-20191231 Narrow by SubjectAge: - adolescence (13-17 yrs) Search modes - Boolean/Phrase	Interface - EBSCOhost Research Databases Search Screen - Advanced Search Database - SocINDEX with Full Text;GreenFILE;PsycINFO;PsycARTICLES;eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)	65
S3	("adolescen*"	Limiters - Date of	Interface - EBSCOhost Research Databases	75

	OR "young people" OR "young adult" OR "youth" OR "teenager" OR "young women" OR "young men") AND ("South East Europe" OR "South-East Europe" OR "Southeast* Europe" OR "Balkan*" OR "Albania" OR "Bosnia and Herzegovina" OR "Bosnia & Herzegovina" OR "BiH" OR "Bosnia" OR "Bulgaria" OR "Kosovo" OR "Macedonia" OR "North Macedonia" OR "FYROM" OR "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" OR "Montenegro" OR "Serbia" OR "Croatia" OR "Slovenia") AND ("policy" OR "policies")	Publication: 20050101-20191231 Narrow by SubjectAge: - young adulthood (18-29 yrs) Search modes - Boolean/Phrase	Search Screen - Advanced Search Database - SocINDEX with Full Text;GreenFILE;PsycINFO;PsycARTICLES;eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)	
S2	("adolescen*" OR "young people" OR "young adult" OR "youth" OR "teenager" OR "young women" OR "young men") AND (	Limiters - Date of Publication: 20050101-20191231 Search modes - Boolean/Phrase	Interface - EBSCOhost Research Databases Search Screen - Advanced Search Database - SocINDEX with Full Text;GreenFILE;PsycINFO;PsycARTICLES;eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)	265

28

"South East Europe" OR "South-East Europe" OR "Southeast* Europe" OR "Balkan*" OR "Albania" OR "Bosnia and Herzegovina" OR "Bosnia & Herzegovina" OR "BiH" OR "Bosnia" OR "Bulgaria" OR "Kosovo" OR "Macedonia" OR "North Macedonia" OR "FYROM" OR "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" OR "Montenegro" OR "Serbia" OR "Croatia" OR "Slovenia") AND ("policy" OR "policies")

S1	("adolescen*" OR "young people" OR "young adult" OR "youth" OR "teenager" OR "young women" OR "young men") AND ("South East Europe" OR "South-East Europe" OR "Southeast* Europe" OR "Balkan*" OR "Albania" OR	Limiters - Date of Publication: 20000101-20191231 Search modes - Boolean/Phrase	Interface - EBSCOhost Research Databases Search Screen - Advanced Search Database - SocINDEX with Full Text;GreenFILE;PsycINFO;PsycARTICLES;eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)	280

"Bosnia and Herzegovina" OR "Bosnia & Herzegovina" OR "BiH" OR "Bosnia" OR "Bulgaria" OR "Kosovo" OR "Macedonia" OR "North Macedonia" OR "FYROM" OR "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" OR "Montenegro" OR "Serbia" OR "Croatia" OR "Slovenia") AND ("policy" OR "policies")