MOTIVATE YOUTH

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Research: Uncovering the Barriers to Motivation Across Sectors

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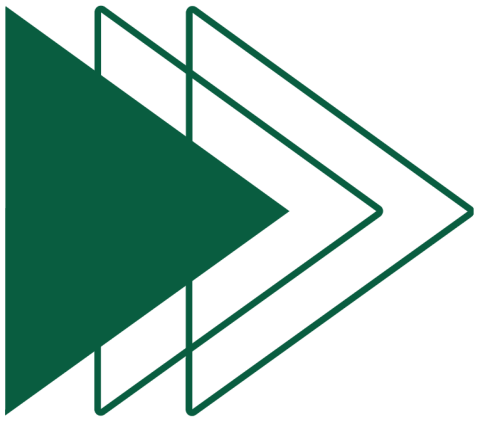
Chapter 1: Introduction



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Overview of the Erasmus+ "Motivate Youth" Project and Objectives

The "Motivate Youth" project, funded under the Erasmus+ Programme, is a cross-national initiative designed to empower young individuals throughout Europe to effectively address motivation challenges and confidently pursue their aspirations across various sectors, including education, work, volunteering, and sports. In today's fast-paced world, young people often struggle with maintaining motivation, setting meaningful goals, and staying engaged in personal and professional development. By leveraging technology, fostering peer support, utilizing structured non-formal education (NFE) methodologies, and implementing thorough evaluations, the project aims to develop a series of sustainable solutions that cultivate a culture of motivation and achievement among youth. The project sets out to be a forward-thinking initiative aimed at addressing the growing concern of youth demotivation across various fields.

The initiative is a collaborative effort among several organizations across Europe, including:

- FAJUB (Portugal)
- garagErasmus (Belgium)
- Istanbul University - Cerrahpasa (Turkiye)
- Zenith (Romania)
- United by Sports (Ukraine)
- EducPro (Spain)

As the project aims to address the varying levels of motivation across youth accordingly, it was clear from the beginning that we were required to understand more in detail what leads to such variations. For that, the first stage consisted of a research focused on the obstacles that hinder youth motivation across various sectors, specifically education, work, volunteering, and sports.

Once the survey and focus groups results provided a more in-depth perspective, the consortium was able to advance to the part of developing solutions, as each partner contributed to the process of creating strategies and tools to overcome these barriers. The final stages will be centered around the development of a free app tailored to enhance youth motivation in education, work, volunteering, and sports and a youth peer mentoring program.

In order to efficiently tackle this pervasive issue related to motivation among youth, the project has a series of objectives that gravitate around gaining a better understanding of the challenges and favor the development of sustainable solutions. The main objectives of "Motivate Youth" include:

- Develop a free mobile application to help young people keep track of their goals, stay motivated and connect with peers who share similar interests.
- Establish a peer mentoring program in which older young people guide younger ones in areas such as finding motivation, setting goals and overcoming obstacles.
- Evaluate the impact of the project's activities on young people's motivation and well-being, using qualitative and quantitative methods.

Therefore, the project is expected to lead to a series of relevant, tangible and sustainable results and outcomes, including: a comprehensive research report on the causes of youth demotivation, the fully functional Motivation Mobile App that enhances goal setting and motivation, a structured Peer Mentoring Program that will support youth development and a training of 24 youth workers on motivation strategies.

By integrating digital innovation, peer mentorship, and structured research, "Motivate Youth" aspires to create a meaningful and lasting impact on young people's motivation and well-being, fostering a generation of empowered, goal-driven individuals prepared for future challenges.

Importance of youth motivation in education, work, volunteering, and sports

As we consider motivation as the main force driving human action, it is essential to acknowledge the crucial role youth motivation plays in shaping their personal and professional futures. As we take a closer look at **education**, it can be easily observed how motivation is directly linked to academic achievement, persistence, and lifelong learning. When students feel motivated, they are more prone to engage in setting academic goals, participate actively in learning, and develop problem-solving skills. Research has shown that motivated students demonstrate higher levels of engagement and academic success, while those who lack motivation face challenges such as low attendance, a concerning decline in their performance, and an increased risk of dropping out (Fredricks et al., 2004). Schools and educators can enhance motivation through personalized learning, interactive teaching methods, and the use of digital tools that foster engagement (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

In addition, extracurricular activities such as sports, music, or various leadership programs can positively impact their level of motivation by helping students develop a sense of achievement and belonging (Eccles & Barber, 1999).

In the workplace, young professionals are required to have a certain level of motivation, as they transition from education to employment. When facing unclear career paths, job insecurity, and a lack of professional guidance, the varying levels of motivation turn the experience into a struggle. Studies indicate that workplaces that offer career development programs, mentorship opportunities, and recognition systems achieve a higher engagement and job satisfaction among young employees (Robinson et al., 2019). Not to mention, the increasing use of digital platforms and mobile applications to support skill-building, networking, and career growth provides young professionals with accessible tools that allows them to stay motivated in their fields (Dweck, 2006). Whenever employers prioritize fostering an environment that values employee contributions and career progression, the companies are more likely to retain young talent and also improve workplace morale (Towers Perrin, 2003).

When it comes to volunteering, there is also a significant connection with youth motivation, as it requires commitment, discipline, and a strong sense of purpose. Volunteering plays a crucial role in community engagement and personal development, yet it can be observed how participation rates among young people remain low due to barriers such as lack of time, awareness, and perceived impact (Wilson, 2012). Research suggests that when volunteering opportunities align with young people's interests and provide meaningful recognition, participation rates increase (Clary et al., 1998).

In the light of more recent events, the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed a clearer observation of the reasons and forms of involvement in volunteering initiatives, particularly the differences between formal and informal volunteering. While some formal structures were shutting down due to health restrictions or downsizing their volunteer pool, the desire to get involved and contribute led to a massive surge of spontaneous and informal "crisis volunteering" (Hustinx, 2021). Defined as a onetime and short-term response to emergencies, disasters, and sociopolitical crises (Smith et al., 2016, as cited by Hustinx, 2021), this type of informal volunteering also includes social crises like the refugee crisis in Europe (Simsa et al., 2019, as cited by Hustinx, 2021). When it comes down to motivation, informal volunteering appears to be fueled by 'self-enhancement' (feeling needed, feeling important, raising self-esteem) and 'protection' (a good escape from one's own troubles, feeling less lonely), all confirmed by research done among COVID-19 volunteers in Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands (Hustinx, 2021).

This volunteering energy exists in a latent form outside of urgent threats, so governmental and non-profit entities are looking for ways to channel it, but recruiting in the post-pandemic era can prove difficult, especially in formal contexts. For people that had not been engaged as formal volunteers before the COVID-19 pandemic, their preferences gravitate more towards informal and/or more episodic types of volunteering. Surveys done in Flanders among informal volunteers during the pandemic revealed that for them future volunteering interest depended on the flexibility regarding the moment/frequency of volunteering (91%), freedom of choice in terms of the type of volunteering (91%), and a more short-term, relatively noncommittal type of engagement engagement (86%). (Hustinx & Gorleer, 2020, as cited by Hustinx, 2021).

It remains to be seen how a balance can be reached between formal and informal volunteering opportunities, given that matching the real needs on the field with a large-scale volunteering pool requires proper organization and failing to do so can genuinely impact youth motivation in a negative way. Available research shows that people who signed up on various online volunteering platforms during the pandemic and were not contacted or supported to get involved showed a higher level of frustration and a lower willingness to volunteer again in the future (Hustinx & Gorleer, 2020, as cited by Hustinx, 2021).

Just as with volunteering, when engaging in sports activities, motivation is the main force which drives athletes to train consistently, challenge themselves, and develop teamwork skills (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). Young athletes often thrive in environments where goal-setting, peer encouragement, and structured feedback mechanisms are in place (Duda & Treasure, 2015). As they learn to face disappointments and success, overcome their personal fears and limitations and develop a truly strong cohesion within their sports team, young people become better at taking responsibility and facing challenges in their own personal lives as well. Encouraging motivation in these areas not only enhances individual growth but also contributes to the development of well-rounded, engaged, and productive members of society.

Introduction to the Goal of Creating a Free App for Youth Motivation

As mentioned previously, the "Motivate Youth" project includes among its goals the development of a free mobile application designed to support and enhance youth motivation. The rationale behind it derives from the fact that in today's fast-paced world, young people often struggle to maintain focus, set meaningful goals, and stay engaged in their personal and professional growth and in many cases, they lack the financial resources to invest in a paid version of a digital support resource. Therefore, we envision an app that is easily accessible for youth, regardless of their status or conditions, which seeks to address these challenges by providing a user-friendly digital platform, where young users can feel empowered to take control of their motivation. By offering goal-setting tools, personalized reminders, and interactive challenges, the app will create an engaging and supportive environment where youth can track their progress and stay committed to their aspirations.

A key feature of the "Motivate Youth" app will be its peer mentoring system, allowing users to connect with other individuals who share similar goals and challenges. We consider this feature to be fundamental in fostering a sense of community, enabling young people to support and inspire one another, bridging the gap often fueled by digital interactions in general. In terms of other functionalities, the app will also integrate gamification elements, for example achievement badges and progress tracking, in order to encourage users' consistency and reward their efforts. By combining these elements, the app will serve as both a motivational coach and a social platform, helping users maintain long-term engagement and personal development.

Aside from its individual use, the "Motivate Youth" app is a key element in a larger strategy to bridge digital innovation with youth empowerment. As ongoing research assesses its effectiveness, the results and feedback will allow us to improve its features based on users' experience. The app is designed to be accessible and adaptable, ensuring that young people from diverse backgrounds can benefit from its tools. By leveraging technology to make motivation more structured and interactive, the "Motivate Youth" app aspires to become a valuable resource for young individuals seeking to stay motivated, set goals, and achieve success in various sectors of their life, such as education, workplace, volunteering and sports.

Methodology and Scope of the Research

The methodology employed in the "Motivate Youth" project is a mixed-methods research approach, merging quantitative and qualitative data collection in order to gain an extensive perspective on youth motivation. A series of surveys and questionnaires will be distributed to young individuals across various sectors, specifically education, employment, volunteering, and sports, so as to identify the key factors that have an impact on their motivation. To enhance the nuanced understanding of the challenges faced, focus groups and interviews with youth workers, educators, and mentors will be the main source for deeper insights into the barriers young people face and the strategies that can help sustain their motivation in the long run. This primary research phase will also focus on assessing existing mobile applications and digital tools designed for motivation, so as to identify the gaps and best practices, ensuring that the development of the Motivate Youth app has a solid and realistic base.

Overall, the quantitative and qualitative research stage of this project will involve a minimum of 390 young people and stakeholders. The target group for the surveys will include a minimum of 240 responders, as at least 40 answers from young people from each partner country (10 per area of research - motivation in education, workplace, volunteering, sports) will be required. For the focus groups, a total of 150 people will be selected to participate.

Each partner will be in charge of organizing five focus groups, each with five relevant stakeholders involved. The focus group on the topic of factors influencing youth motivation will require participation from psychologists, sociologists etc., while the investigation on youth motivation in higher education will include university teachers. Employers and human resources managers will be attending the focus group centered on the labour market motivation and for the topic of youth motivation in volunteering, partners will collaborate with youth workers and presidents of youth organizations. Finally, the focus group about youth motivation in sports will rely on answers from trainers, managers of sport clubs etc. A specific chapter of the research report will be assigned to each partner, and they will need to analyze the responses relevant to their topic. EducPro (Spain) will lead the chapter about the factors influencing youth motivation, IUC (Turkiye) will handle the topic of motivation in Higher Education, and garagErasmus (Belgium) will be in charge of the chapter on youth motivation in the labour market. FAJUB (Portugal) will address youth motivation in volunteering, while the chapter of the report assigned to UBS (Ukraine) will dive into the sports area motivation.

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As for the scope of the research, this extends beyond individual motivation, as the project aims to explore how digital tools, peer mentoring, and gamification can be used to improve engagement and goal-setting. The study will focus on diverse youth demographics, ensuring inclusivity across different backgrounds, education levels, and career paths. A fundamental component of the research is evaluating the effectiveness of the mobile app, measuring its impact on user motivation through user engagement data and feedback analysis. The findings will, on one hand, contribute majorly to the development of the app and adjusting its features to match the real needs and preferences. On the other hand, they will bring to light valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and organizations working in youth development, allowing them to adjust better to the needs of younger generations. Integrating both desk and field research, the "Motivate Youth" project aims to create a sustainable tool to effectively support youth motivation. Our research-driven, evidence-based app will be more than just a standalone digital solution, as it will be tailored accordingly to address the specific challenges faced by young people struggling with intrinsic motivation, reflected by our ongoing research

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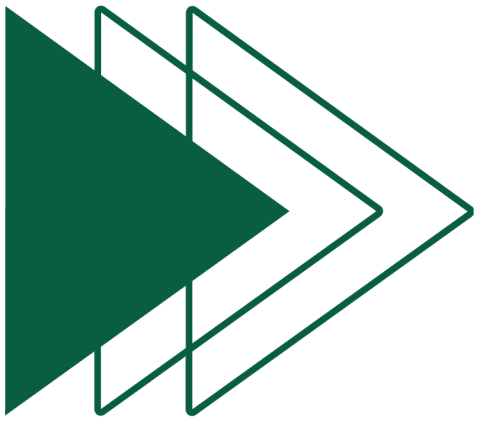
Chapter 2 : Understanding Youth Motivation



In our effort to design effective strategies that can engage young people and support their personal and professional development, it is crucial to understand motivation from various perspectives. Young individuals face diverse challenges, from academic pressures to career uncertainties, and their motivation plays a crucial role in shaping their aspirations and achievements. By examining key motivation theories, the identification of the factors that drive youth engagement becomes a more achievable goal.

Across different theoretical approaches, intrinsic passion, external rewards, or social belonging are considered to be the foundation nurturing youth motivation. Becoming aware and tapping into these insights can prove useful for educators, mentors, and policymakers to create environments that foster more autonomy, competence, and purpose—critical elements for sustained motivation and success.

1. Overview of the 5 motivation theories

Motivation drives behavior, influences goal-setting, and shapes long-term success. By exploring different theories—such as Reinforcement Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Vroom's Expectancy Theory, and Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory—we can better understand what inspires and sustains motivation among youth, tailoring our interventions adequately to address their needs, passions and aspirations. By integrating these theories into our youth-focused initiative, we can create more supportive, inspiring, and effective programs that empower young people to realize their full potential.

Reinforcement Theory

Reinforcement Theory, proposed by Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1953), is deeply rooted in behaviorism and suggests that human behavior can be shaped by its consequences. The theory emphasizes four key reinforcement strategies: positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, punishment, and extinction. Positive reinforcement involves providing a reward for a desired behavior to encourage its repetition, such as offering bonuses for high performance. Negative reinforcement, on the other hand, removes an undesirable stimulus to strengthen a behavior, like for example, providing an exemption from an unwanted task after an employee manages to meet a goal. Punishment, by contrast, introduces an unpleasant consequence to deter a certain undesired behavior. As for extinction, this involves withholding reinforcement to reduce the occurrence of a behavior (Skinner, 1953).

Reinforcement Theory has been widely applied in various educational and workplace motivation strategies. It is common among many institutions and organizations to use reward systems, such as promotions, bonuses, and praise, to reinforce productive behavior. However, critics argue that extrinsic motivation—such as rewards—may not be sustainable in the long term, as individuals may require increasing incentives to maintain performance. Aside from that, in a professional context, over-reliance on punishment can lead instead to dissatisfaction and resentment among employees (Podsakoff et al., 2006). Despite these limitations, Reinforcement Theory remains a fundamental principle in shaping behavior in schools, workplaces and beyond, through structured incentives and consequences.

Recent studies suggest that while reinforcement techniques are effective, they should be used in combination with intrinsic motivation strategies for long-term success (Deci & Ryan, 2000). A balanced approach that includes both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators can enhance engagement, performance/job satisfaction, and overall productivity. For our "Motivate Youth" project, Reinforcement Theory highlights the importance of structured reward systems to encourage positive behaviors and sustained engagement among young participants.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard Ryan (1985), emphasizes the role of intrinsic motivation in human behavior. According to the SDT, there are three fundamental psychological needs individuals are driven by: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the need for self-direction and the ability to manage one's actions. Competence encompasses the aspiration to excel in tasks and acquire skills, while relatedness signifies the need to establish connections with others and experience a sense of belonging. When these needs are fulfilled, individuals experience greater motivation, engagement, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

SDT contrasts with traditional behaviorist perspectives, such as Reinforcement Theory, by arguing that intrinsic motivation—rather than external rewards—plays a far more significant role when it comes to long-term engagement. Some research highlights that when individuals feel autonomous and competent in their roles, they exhibit higher levels of creativity, persistence, and performance (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This is supported by examples of workplaces that encourage employee autonomy through flexible work arrangements and participatory decision-making, where there is a visible tendency towards more motivated and satisfied employees. The context of volunteering also confirms the premises of this theory, as satisfaction reaches a higher level and leads to more involvement among those who feel they can contribute and choose how to contribute.

Even though it comes with notable strengths, SDT has faced criticism for its limited consideration of cultural differences in motivation. Some researchers argue that extrinsic motivators, such as financial incentives, remain important in collectivist cultures where group achievements and external validation play a larger role (Gagné & Deci, 2005). In the context of our project, the Self-Determination Theory highlights the significance of promoting autonomy, skill development, and social connections to enhance intrinsic motivation in young individuals.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, first introduced by Abraham Maslow in 1943, presents a five-tiered model of human motivation, structured as a pyramid with basic physiological needs at the bottom and self-actualization at the top. The five levels include at the base the layer of physiological needs (e.g., food, water, shelter), followed by the layer of safety needs (e.g., financial and job security). The middle level consists of social needs (e.g., friendships and belongingness), and as we advance towards the tip of the pyramid, we find esteem needs (e.g., recognition and self-respect), and self-actualization (e.g., personal growth and achieving potential). Maslow suggested that individuals must satisfy lower-level needs before progressing to higher levels of motivation (Maslow, 1943).

If we are to analyze workplace settings for example, Maslow's theory has been applied to understand employee motivation and job satisfaction. Organizations often address physiological needs by offering competitive salaries and benefits, while safety needs are met through stable employment and supportive work environments. Social needs can be fulfilled through team-building activities and inclusive cultures, while recognition programs and career advancement opportunities cater to esteem needs. Finally, self-actualization is encouraged through professional development, autonomy, and meaningful work (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). In contrast with this, the lack of adequate educational facilities in underdeveloped areas poses a significant barrier to youth motivation, often discouraging them from completing their studies. When basic safety and comfort needs are not met, students may struggle to focus on learning, leading to higher dropout rates (UNESCO, 2015).

Some critics suggest that Maslow's model may be too rigid, as individuals often do not adhere to a strictly linear progression through the levels. Some people may prioritize esteem or self-actualization despite lacking basic security or social connections. It also must be taken into account how cultural variations influence the prioritization of needs, with collectivist societies for example, which emphasize social belonging over individual achievement (Hofstede, 1984). For us, Maslow's framework remains relevant, as it helps ensure that we maintain young people's fundamental, social, and psychological needs in our focus and we continue to address them so as to create a strong foundation for personal and professional growth.

Vroom's Expectancy Theory

Vroom's Expectancy Theory, formulated by Victor Vroom in 1964, looks at motivation from the perspective of a three-key factor influence: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. Expectancy pertains to an individual's belief that their efforts will result in a particular performance outcome. Instrumentality represents the perceived likelihood that good performance will result in a desired reward, while valence refers to the value an individual places on the reward (Vroom, 1964). Together, this triad of elements determines the level of motivation an individual experiences in a given task.

Expectancy Theory is widely used in performance management and employee motivation strategies. Managers can enhance motivation by improving employees' confidence in their abilities (expectancy), establishing clear reward structures (instrumentality), and offering meaningful incentives (valence). For example, if an employee believes that working harder will lead to a promotion and values that promotion, they will be more motivated to perform at a high level. However, if the connection between effort and reward is unclear, motivation may decrease (Van Eerde & Thierry, 1996). In the context of education and volunteering, students are more likely to engage in academic or extracurricular initiatives when they perceive a clear link between their efforts and meaningful rewards, such as skill development or social recognition. For instance, research indicates that volunteers are more committed when they believe their work will lead to valuable experiences, career benefits, or a positive social impact (Clary et al., 1998).

One criticism of Expectancy Theory is its assumption that individuals make rational calculations about their motivation levels. In reality, emotions, biases, and organizational constraints often influence decision-making processes. Additionally, the theory does not fully account for intrinsic motivation, as it primarily focuses on external rewards (Latham & Pinder, 2005). In the context of our project, Vroom's Expectancy Theory highlights the importance of establishing clear and attainable goals, accompanied by meaningful rewards, to enhance motivation and engagement among young individuals.

Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory

Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory, also known as the Two-Factor Theory, was developed by Frederick Herzberg in 1959. The theory distinguishes between two types of workplace factors: motivators and hygiene factors. Motivators, such as achievement, recognition, and personal growth, lead to job satisfaction and increased motivation. Hygiene factors, including salary, company policies, and working conditions, do not directly motivate employees but can cause dissatisfaction if absent (Herzberg, 1959).

This theory suggests that organizations should focus not only more than just preventing dissatisfaction through adequate hygiene factors. They need to also enhance motivation through intrinsic rewards. Research supports Herzberg's claim that job enrichment—such as providing meaningful work, opportunities for growth, and autonomy—leads to higher levels of engagement and performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Many modern companies apply this principle through career development programs, employee recognition initiatives, and flexible work arrangements. As for educational or volunteer settings, this theory puts under the spotlight the necessity to have both well-structured programs and supportive environments to prevent dissatisfaction, but also nurture true engagement from intrinsic motivators such as recognition, skill development, and a sense of purpose. There is research that indicates volunteers and students are more likely to remain committed when they find personal growth and meaning in their activities, rather than just focusing on external conditions (Fallon & Rice, 2015).

Despite its wide impact, Herzberg's theory has been criticized for its methodology and oversimplification of motivation. Some researchers argue that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction exist on a single continuum rather than two separate dimensions (House & Wigdor, 1967). From our perspective, Herzberg's theory remains relevant for the "Motivate Youth" project, as it emphasizes the need to create meaningful, growth-oriented opportunities while ensuring supportive environments that prevent dissatisfaction among young participants.

Understanding these theoretical approaches on motivation has provided valuable insights into how we can effectively engage and support youth in their personal and professional development. By utilizing frameworks such as Reinforcement Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Vroom's Expectancy Theory, and Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory, we can now identify better the key factors influencing youth motivation and create environments conducive to their growth. By integrating these perspectives, we can design interventions that not only address fundamental needs and external rewards but also promote intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and personal fulfillment. Ultimately, this empowers young people to reach their full potential. This comprehensive understanding is essential for developing effective strategies that align with the diverse needs and aspirations of today's youth.

2. Insights from the focus groups related to understanding youth motivation

In the framework of the "Motivate Youth" Erasmus+ project, six focus groups were conducted across partner countries (Romania, Portugal, Belgium, Spain, Turkey, and Ukraine) each bringing together professionals such as psychologists, sociologists, educators, youth workers, digital experts, and NGO representatives. These focus groups aimed to explore and define the factors that influence youth motivation today, particularly in relation to education, employment, volunteering, and physical activity.

Each session followed a common structure, using a set of guiding questions focused on how digital tools, specifically a future mobile app, could support young people in staying motivated. Participants discussed barriers to motivation, the role of digitalization, and how features such as gamification, social connection, and personalization could be leveraged to support youth in overcoming challenges.

1. What kinds of digital tools or resources do you think young people currently lack to stay motivated across various areas of life?

Focus groups across the 6 partner countries highlighted a common gap: the absence of integrated, youth-friendly digital platforms that combine personal development, mental health support, academic or career guidance, and real-life skill-building. While many apps exist, they are often fragmented, impersonal, or fail to address the actual needs and lived experiences of young people, especially those from rural or under-resourced backgrounds (Portugal, Spain, Turkey).

Several countries (Belgium, Romania, Ukraine) stressed that existing tools often ignore personalization and emotional support, which are essential to sustaining youth motivation. Young people are overwhelmed by digital content, yet lack access to clear, reliable, and relevant guidance.

The importance of tools that encourage self-reflection, emotional regulation, and peer connection was especially noted in Ukraine and Turkey. Suggestions included features like visual progress maps, motivational peer groups, and AI-powered mentors that align digital experiences with personal growth. Overall, there's a strong demand for holistic, inclusive, and culturally relevant apps that don't just provide information, but also support emotional and motivational needs in a way that is engaging and accessible.

2. How could an app leverage social media or gamification to positively influence youth motivation?

Portugal, Spain, and Turkey highlighted the importance of reward systems, such as badges, points, or progress bars, especially when they are tied to real-life achievements or personal progress. These features can increase motivation and engagement, especially when combined with group challenges or friendly competitions. However, experts from these countries also warned about the risks of superficial engagement or performance pressure, which could lead to demotivation or negative comparison.

Belgium and Romania emphasized the need for personalization in gamified features. They argued that rewards should be based on individual progress (e.g., beating your own goals) rather than competition with others. Belgium also suggested integrating peer-to-peer interaction, a shared symbolic language (like emojis with special meanings), and short-term rewards, which tend to be more motivating than distant goals.

Ukraine suggested strong social media integration, linking the app to users' existing networks, allowing them to invite friends, share progress via hashtags, and reflect on their experiences through visual or emotional symbols (like choosing an emoji after volunteering). This could help create a sense of digital community and belonging, reinforcing positive habits.

Romania also focused on the psychological benefits of gamification, emphasizing the importance of validation, progress tracking, and team-based challenges to build motivation through social belonging and accountability.

In summary, partners agreed that gamification and social media can significantly boost motivation by tapping into youth's desire for progress, connection, and recognition. However, these features must be carefully balanced to avoid negative effects such as comparison pressure or superficial engagement. The ideal app would combine personalized challenges, peer interaction, and positive reinforcement, all within a safe, non-judgmental digital environment.

3. What features in an app would help address societal or peer pressures that demotivate young people?

Across all six countries, the focus groups emphasized the importance of creating a safe, non-comparative, and supportive digital environment to counteract the negative effects of societal and peer pressures. Participants from Portugal, Romania, and Spain stressed the need for features that promote self-worth, emotional resilience, and personal growth, rather than reinforcing external standards or competition.

Common suggestions included daily affirmations, guided reflections, and anonymous peer discussions, tools that encourage self-exploration and validation of individual progress (Portugal, Romania, Spain). These tools help young users shift their focus inward, away from harmful comparison and toward personal development.

A key point raised by Belgium, Turkey, and Ukraine was the importance of privacy and anonymity. Belgian and Turkish experts highlighted that giving users control over visibility, such as selecting private circles or sharing with close friends, helps reduce social pressure and fosters freer self-expression. Anonymity was also seen as essential for encouraging vulnerability and honesty in interactions.

Belgium and Turkey also emphasized inclusivity and personalization, suggesting that apps should adapt to users' backgrounds, life experiences, and identities. This would help normalize diverse pathways to success and counteract the "one-size-fits-all" culture prevalent in digital platforms. Ukraine echoed this by suggesting features like mentor comments, group project options, and consultation chats, which can build confidence and foster emotional safety for youth who may feel uncertain or self-conscious.

In Spain, where young people are heavily exposed to idealized portrayals on social media, experts underlined the value of values-based content and body positivity. Tools like positive feedback loops and anonymous discussion forums were considered essential to reinforce authenticity and reduce anxiety related to unrealistic societal expectations.

Overall, experts from all countries agreed that the app should validate personal effort, provide emotional support, and allow flexible, private engagement. These features together would create a healthier digital environment where young people feel empowered to be themselves, free from judgment, pressure, or comparison.

4. In what ways could an app foster a sense of purpose and achievement for young users?

A common theme across all six countries is that young people need structured, meaningful, and emotionally engaging digital tools that help them build a sense of direction and recognize their own progress.

In Portugal, Spain, and Romania, experts agreed that the foundation of purpose lies in goal-setting (both short- and long-term) and that the app should support young users in breaking big goals into smaller, achievable steps. These countries emphasized the power of visual progress tracking, customizable milestones, and celebrating small wins to reinforce motivation and achievement. In Spain and Portugal specifically, linking progress to real-world impact, such as community projects or volunteering, was considered essential to cultivating a sense of purpose.

Belgium and Turkey highlighted the need for flexibility and positive reinforcement. Belgian experts suggested that young people should be able to set goals at their own pace and in their own way, even if not all goals are fully defined. They stressed the importance of recognizing partial achievements and using features like likes, comments, and digital streaks to maintain engagement. Turkey added that the learning process itself should be rewarded, not just outcomes, as this supports intrinsic motivation and a growth mindset.

Ukraine proposed integrating more emotional and reflective elements, such as a daily reflection journal, a goal tracker, and a motivational chatbot to encourage users with positive messages or gentle reminders. This emotional feedback loop would help reinforce self-awareness, effort, and continued action.

Overall, there was a shared belief that an app must go beyond tracking goals, it should actively guide young people in defining what matters to them, help them see how their daily efforts contribute to something larger, and offer consistent emotional validation along the way. Whether through digital storytelling, peer encouragement, or progress reviews, each country recognized the app's potential to foster a deep sense of purpose, agency, and achievement in youth.

5. How might an app support young people in managing mental health and well-being to sustain motivation?

Across all partner countries, mental health was identified as a critical pillar for sustaining motivation. Despite differences in emphasis, there was a shared understanding that young people face high levels of stress, anxiety, burnout, and emotional pressure, especially in the post-pandemic landscape.

Portugal, Spain, and Romania strongly advocated for integrated mental health tools within the app, such as mood tracking, breathing exercises, guided mindfulness practices, and access to professional help. These countries also emphasized the need to normalize emotional struggles, making features like daily check-ins, journaling prompts, and reflections part of a healthy routine rather than a reaction to crisis moments.

Belgium brought a unique angle by advocating for anonymous peer support systems, such as a "pen friend" feature, allowing users to connect empathetically with others. They stressed avoiding the promotion of hustle culture and instead suggested promoting mental health-friendly activities like walking, reading, or resting. Encouraging offline breaks was also seen as essential for balancing screen time with real-world engagement.

Ukraine's contribution included more structured and interactive tools: a mental health chatbot, monthly webinars with psychologists, and even audio content like meditation music or affirmations. Their approach focuses both on accessibility to professional support and user-led self-care via educational resources and calming tools.

Turkey echoed similar needs, stressing the value of emotion-monitoring features and micro-interventions for real-time stress relief. Turkish experts suggested that the app should support emotional regulation and build psychological resilience through behavioral nudges and mental health check-ins.

In conclusion, there is a broad consensus across all countries that an app aiming to boost motivation must integrate mental health and well-being support as a core function, not as an add-on. Whether through mood tracking, anonymous support, guided meditations, or access to professionals, these features help young users better manage emotional fluctuations, avoid burnout, and develop the emotional resilience needed to stay consistently motivated.

6. What role do you see personalization playing in keeping young people engaged with an app designed to boost motivation?

In Portugal, Belgium, Romania, Ukraine, Turkey, and Spain, personalization was unanimously identified as one of the most critical elements for maintaining youth engagement in a motivation-oriented app.

A shared conclusion among the countries is that young people are far more likely to remain active users if the app feels tailored to their identity, goals, and preferences, rather than generic or rigid. Personalization builds a sense of ownership, emotional connection, and trust, making the digital tool feel more like a companion than a program.

From Portugal and Spain, the emphasis was on user control and flexibility, letting youth set their own milestones, choose preferred content formats (audio, video, text), and customize the tone of communication. Spanish youth, in particular, appreciate tools that recognize their individuality and lifestyle focus (e.g., study, work, relationships).

Belgium brought forward visual and identity customization, such as allowing users to change color schemes, upload profile pictures, and interact with community-generated content. These elements create a more human-centered and emotionally appealing experience, increasing long-term engagement.

In Romania and Turkey, personalization was connected to adaptive learning and motivation styles. Experts recommended that apps adjust to users' evolving emotional needs, learning preferences, and growth pace, whether someone is goal-driven, social, or introspective. The Turkish team also linked personalization to deeper psychological needs like autonomy and relatedness, essential for sustained intrinsic motivation.

Ukraine added specific features such as customizable dashboards, personal avatars, progress tracking compared to past performance, and affirmation settings, underlining the importance of feeling seen and supported. Their approach highlights the motivational power of personalized feedback and recognition.

In summary, personalization is not just a desirable feature—it is foundational to success. Young people want tools that mirror their journey, adapt to their reality, and help them grow at their own pace. Whether through tone, visuals, goals, or feedback, personalization ensures that the app feels like it's made with them, not just for them.

7. How could an app connect young people to positive role models or mentors?

All six countries agreed on the significant value of connecting young people to relatable, accessible role models through a digital app. However, their approaches to implementation and emphasis varied, reflecting both local realities and shared needs.

In Portugal, professionals stressed the importance of providing access to mentors with similar backgrounds, particularly for youth from disadvantaged contexts. They proposed tools such as short video interviews, live talks, and mentor-matching programs, where young people can reach out to trained professionals or volunteers for informal guidance and check-ins.

Belgium highlighted a more horizontal approach, building a community of role models rather than idolizing high-profile figures. They suggested platforms where users can view behind-the-scenes content, follow peer influencers, and share activities, making success feel more achievable and authentic. The Belgian group also valued shared goals and peer-to-peer inspiration, enabling young users to connect through joint activities and lists of habits or routines.

The Romanian experts focused on technological solutions, recommending AI-based mentor matching based on users' personal goals and life contexts. They emphasized the power of video diaries, live Q&A sessions, and structured mentorship tracks to provide real-life, inspiring guidance. Showcasing testimonials from young professionals was seen as a powerful way to normalize success and foster aspiration, especially for marginalized youth.

Ukraine echoed the importance of personalization and emotional resonance. Though less focused on direct mentorship structures, the Ukrainian group emphasized that young people are more inspired when content feels tailored to their own journey. Custom reminders, goal tracking, and progress updates create a motivational loop where young users feel seen and understood, indirectly mimicking the encouragement role models provide.

In Turkey, participants agreed that structured digital interactions with relatable role models can significantly enhance youth engagement. They suggested including interactive video storytelling, diverse mentor profiles, and Q&A modules to foster identification and emotional connection with various pathways to success.

Spain stressed representation and diversity in mentorship. Professionals proposed featuring Spanish figures from different sectors(artists, athletes, entrepreneurs, and activists) to increase relatability and cultural relevance. Tools like weekly mentor spotlights, video interviews, and the option to register for digital mentorship or coaching sessions were seen as essential in keeping youth inspired and supported.

In summary, partners collectively emphasized that effective digital mentorship should be:

- Relatable, showing real people and real journeys;
- Accessible, through formats like Q&As, video stories, and live sessions;
- Interactive, with peer and mentor engagement;
- Personalized, aligning with the user's interests and growth path.

This shared vision highlights that a motivational app should not only inspire but also humanize success, making it feel achievable for every young person, no matter their background.

8. What specific types of content (e.g., motivational videos, goal trackers) would resonate most with young people?

Across all focus groups, there was a clear consensus that visual, interactive, and personalized content is most effective in engaging and motivating young people. Formats that are quick to consume, emotionally resonant, and easy to interact with were favored in every country.
Portugal, Spain, and Turkey all emphasized the appeal of short motivational videos, infographics, and interactive tools like habit trackers, goal dashboards, and real-time feedback. These formats capture attention while reinforcing a sense of progress and accomplishment.

Romanian and Belgian participants highlighted the value of bite-sized, emotionally intelligent content, such as daily affirmations, reflective prompts, and mood-based motivation. The content should promote a non-judgmental tone, encouraging users to adapt their goals when they face challenges. Formats like journaling tasks, personal progress loops, and goal adjustment tools were also recommended.

Ukrainian participants stressed the importance of personal stories and peer success examples, presented through mini-blogs, videos, or text posts. These stories should feel authentic, showcasing both young role models and everyday youth overcoming obstacles. Features like reminders to track progress and interactive chats with mentors were seen as valuable to keep users engaged and accountable.

Belgium also mentioned voice notes as a compelling format for users who prefer audio content, especially in older youth demographics.

Finally, Spain suggested using cultural elements like humor, music, and pop culture references to create familiarity and relevance, alongside TikTok-style formats that appeal to today's digital-native youth.

In summary, the most resonant content types across countries include:

- Short, visual storytelling (videos, infographics, reels)
- Interactive tools (goal trackers, habit challenges, emotion journals)
- Peer success stories and relatable testimonials
- Motivational messages and reminders
- Culturally relevant, personalized content

All partners agree: content should not only inform but also inspire action, validate personal journeys, and foster a sense of connection and growth.

9. How might an app provide instant, meaningful feedback or rewards to keep young people motivated?

There was strong agreement that instant and meaningful feedback plays a key role in maintaining youth motivation. However, all focus groups emphasized that the quality and relevance of feedback are more important than frequency or extravagance. Portugal, Ukraine, and Spain suggested using instant reactions such as motivational quotes, emojis, or affirming chatbot responses immediately after a user completes a task or logs progress. This kind of light, emotional recognition creates a quick sense of accomplishment without overwhelming the user.

Romanian and Turkish experts agreed that feedback should not just reward outcomes, but also acknowledge effort, emotional resilience, and personal growth. Tiered rewards or progress-based acknowledgements, like unlocking content or receiving customized affirmations, were seen as more effective than competitive rankings. The emphasis was on supportive encouragement rather than judgment or performance pressure.

In Belgium, participants warned against superficial instant gratification. They recommended a balanced approach, where feedback is contextualized and not given for every minor task, to avoid dependency on rewards. Instead, feedback should be tied to personal goals, community achievements, or shared progress with peers.

Ukraine also stressed the value of virtual badges and points systems that can be shared on social media, creating both individual recognition and community validation. Spain echoed this by suggesting that peer acknowledgment, through likes, comments, or group celebrations, can be a powerful motivator even without material incentives.
Finally, real-world rewards were mentioned in Romania and Spain, such as discounts for events, books, or youth services, but these were positioned as complementary, not central, to the feedback mechanism.

In summary, the most recommended features for effective in-app feedback include:

- Instant emotional reactions (e.g., emojis, motivational quotes)
- Personalized and context-based messages
- Progress tracking that highlights effort, not just results
- Tiered or milestone-based rewards (badges, unlocked content)
- Peer validation (likes, comments, group milestones)
- Optional real-world perks (discounts, event access)

10. What barriers to motivation should an app prioritize addressing to have the most significant impact on young users?

Across all focus groups, partners emphasized that internal psychological barriers (such as fear of failure, self-doubt, lack of direction, and low self-esteem) are among the most pressing issues that hinder youth motivation. These were consistently identified by Portugal, Romania, Belgium, and Ukraine, all highlighting the importance of fostering a growth mindset, offering emotional support, and normalizing setbacks as part of development.

Spain and Turkey also emphasized future-related anxiety, citing economic instability, academic pressure, and digital distractions as major demotivators. Young people feel overwhelmed by uncertainty and societal expectations, which often leads to procrastination and emotional fatigue.

Belgium, Portugal, and Spain added that social comparison, especially amplified by social media, contributes to a toxic sense of inadequacy. Thus, any digital tool should work to reduce comparison culture and instead promote personal milestones, peer empathy, and realistic success narratives.

Belgium and Ukraine emphasized the existential barrier of nihilism, young people questioning the purpose of their efforts. Suggested app solutions included showcasing local-level impact, providing relatable role models, and celebrating small, meaningful achievements that give users a sense of value and agency.

Common recommendations across countries include:

- Reframing failure as learning
- Promoting emotional resilience and self-worth
- Providing personalized, achievable goal-setting
- Offering peer support and a sense of community
- Delivering realistic and culturally relevant content
- Reducing pressure through flexible pathways and encouraging feedback

In summary, the app should primarily address internal emotional barriers, social disconnection, and uncertainty about the future by offering a safe, supportive, and empowering space. Tools that normalize imperfection, promote connection, and make personal progress visible are considered essential to have a lasting motivational impact on youth.

3. Motivation Techniques

Motivation is a critical driver of youth engagement, learning, and personal development. Various techniques can be employed to enhance motivation, ensuring that young individuals remain committed to their goals and aspirations. One of the key distinctions in motivation is between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation stems from internal factors such as curiosity, personal growth, and the joy of learning. Encouraging self-directed learning and passion-driven projects enhances intrinsic motivation. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards such as recognition, incentives, and social approval. While extrinsic motivation alone may not be sustainable, it can complement intrinsic drivers when used strategically.

Setting specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals is another effective motivation technique. When young individuals break down large goals into smaller, manageable tasks, they experience frequent moments of achievement, reinforcing their motivation. Positive reinforcement also plays a crucial role in maintaining motivation. Encouraging progress through praise, rewards, and acknowledgment boosts confidence, while celebrating small wins helps maintain momentum and encourages perseverance.
Gamification and reward systems are increasingly used to enhance engagement and motivation. By incorporating game-like elements such as points, levels, leaderboards, and challenges, young people are incentivized to stay committed to their goals. Rewards, such as virtual badges, certificates, or real-world benefits, further encourage participation. Similarly, mentorship and social support structures help sustain motivation. Peer mentorship and guidance from experienced individuals provide accountability, while support groups and collaborative learning reinforce motivation by creating a sense of belonging.

Another critical aspect of motivation is autonomy and empowerment. Allowing young people to have control over their learning and decision-making increases their investment in outcomes. Encouraging creativity and personal choice in projects fosters a sense of ownership. Additionally, mindfulness and mental well-being techniques help young individuals manage stress, anxiety, and burnout, ensuring long-term motivation. Teaching resilience and a growth mindset enables them to view challenges as opportunities for development rather than obstacles.
Providing constructive feedback and opportunities for reflection enhances motivation by helping individuals understand their progress and areas for improvement. Reflecting on personal growth, lessons learned, and achievements fosters continuous motivation and self-improvement.

4. Relevance of Technology and Mobile Apps in Engaging Young People

Technology has revolutionized the way young people engage with education, personal development, and motivation. Mobile applications, in particular, play a crucial role in maintaining engagement and fostering motivation by providing accessible resources and interactive experiences. One of the key advantages of mobile apps is their accessibility and convenience. Young people can instantly access learning resources, goal-setting tools, and motivational content from any location, allowing them to engage with materials at their own pace and in their preferred environment.

Personalization and adaptive learning further enhance engagement by tailoring content to individual user needs. AI-driven applications offer personalized recommendations based on user preferences and progress, making the experience more relevant. Customizable features, such as setting personal goals, receiving tailored motivational messages, and tracking individual progress, further increase motivation and engagement.

Gamification and interactive features are also integral to technology's role in motivation. Elements like progress tracking, leaderboards, challenges, and rewards boost engagement by introducing competition and achievement. Interactive quizzes, virtual reality experiences, and digital storytelling provide immersive learning experiences that captivate young users.

Social connectivity and peer engagement are additional factors that make technology a powerful tool for motivation. Mobile apps facilitate social interaction through forums, discussion groups, and peer mentorship programs, allowing young people to share achievements, seek support, and collaborate on projects. Social media integration further reinforces motivation by enabling users to showcase their progress and engage with a broader community.

Mental health and well-being support is another crucial aspect of technology's role in motivation. Many apps now include features for stress management, mindfulness, and emotional well-being, helping users sustain motivation even in challenging times. Daily affirmations, guided meditation, and mood-tracking tools offer personalized support for mental well-being.

Instant feedback and real-time progress monitoring help keep young people on track with their goals. Mobile apps provide immediate feedback on completed tasks, offering encouragement and areas for improvement. Digital reminders and notifications prevent procrastination and loss of motivation, ensuring that users remain engaged and committed.

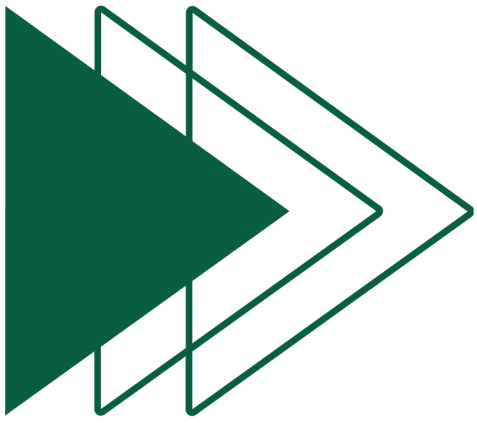
Engaging multimedia content is another key component of technology's relevance in motivation. Video tutorials, podcasts, motivational talks, and interactive learning modules cater to different learning styles, making motivation-building resources more effective. Short, engaging content formats, such as microlearning, align with the digital consumption habits of young people and increase retention.

Technology also plays a role in integrating real-world opportunities into digital learning. Some mobile apps connect young people with mentorship programs, internships, and skill-building workshops, reinforcing motivation through practical applications. By bridging the gap between digital and real-life experiences, these apps help young individuals stay motivated and develop meaningful skills for the future.

Technology and mobile apps have become essential tools in engaging and motivating young people. By incorporating gamification, personalization, social connectivity, and mental well-being support, digital platforms can effectively sustain motivation, helping young individuals achieve their goals and build lifelong self-discipline. The "Motivate Youth" project aims to leverage these technological advancements to create an impactful and sustainable digital platform for youth empowerment.

MOTIVATE YOUTH

Chapter 3: Motivation in Higher Education



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Motivation plays a crucial role in a young person's decision to pursue higher education and to remain committed throughout their academic journey. However, many students face complex personal, social, and structural challenges that can significantly diminish their motivation levels. Within the Erasmus+ "Motivate Youth" project, addressing the motivational needs of young people in higher education is a key focus—particularly through the development of a free, accessible, and engaging mobile application. This section outlines the challenges students face, reviews existing solutions, and proposes app features that can effectively support educational motivation.

Challenges Young People Face in Pursuing Higher Education

Young people today encounter various obstacles that can negatively impact their access to and performance in higher education. These include:

Financial Constraints: High tuition fees, cost of living, and lack of sufficient scholarship opportunities can discourage students—especially those from low-income families—from enrolling or continuing their studies.

Mental Health Issues: Increased levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout among university students can lead to academic disengagement and dropout.

Lack of Academic Support and Mentoring: Many students, particularly first-generation college attendees, often lack access to guidance and mentoring, making it difficult to navigate the university system or stay motivated.

Uncertainty About Future Careers: When students are unsure about the relevance of their studies to real-world job opportunities, they may question the value of their education and lose interest.

Digital Distractions: Overuse of social media and other digital platforms often leads to decreased attention spans, reduced study discipline, and overall academic underperformance.

Imposter Syndrome and Low Confidence: Some students feel they do not belong or are not competent enough, which can erode their motivation and willingness to persist through challenges.

These challenges underscore the importance of providing personalized, ongoing motivational support that extends beyond the classroom.

Existing Apps Focused on Helping Students with Focus and Motivation

There are several mobile applications designed to assist students in maintaining focus and staying motivated during their academic journeys. Some noteworthy examples include:

Forest: Encourages users to stay off their phones and focus by growing a virtual tree—offering a visual and gamified incentive to stay on task.

Study Bunny: Allows students to track study time and earn virtual coins, promoting study consistency through simple reward mechanics.

Habitica: Gamifies daily tasks, including academic responsibilities, by turning them into a role-playing game where users earn experience points and level up.

Notion / **Evernote**: Provide productivity tools for note-taking, organizing schedules, and managing tasks—although not primarily motivational.

Shovel: A time-management tool specifically for students, helping them visualize workload and avoid overcommitting.

Duolingo: A gamified language-learning app that uses streaks, badges, and bite-sized lessons to motivate daily practice and track progress.

Cold Turkey: A distraction-blocking app that locks users out of selected websites or apps for set periods, helping them focus on important tasks.

Clockwork Tomato: Combines a timer and task manager, encouraging focused work sessions with structured breaks.

Quizlet: A study tool that uses flashcards, games, and quizzes to help users memorize information efficiently and stay engaged in learning.

While these tools offer valuable support, most are limited in scope and fail to address broader motivational needs such as social connection, mental resilience, or career direction. They are often not youth-centered or tailored to the diverse cultural and educational contexts of European learners.

Features Needed in the App to Support Education-Related Motivation

To effectively support motivation among students in higher education, the mobile application developed under the "Motivate Youth" project should go beyond basic productivity features. It should provide an engaging, holistic, and youth-driven experience. Recommended features include:

- **Study Reminders and Smart Scheduling:** Personalized alerts and planning tools to help users develop and sustain productive study habits.
- **Gamification Elements:** Integration of points, badges, levels, and challenges that reward consistent learning behavior and goal completion.
- **Peer Communities**: Secure and moderated in-app forums or group chats where students can connect with peers, share experiences, and provide encouragement.
- **Goal Setting and Progress Tracking:** Visual dashboards that help students define short- and long-term academic goals and monitor their achievements over time.
- **Mentorship Matching**: Access to volunteer mentors, academic advisors, or older students for one-on-one support, guidance, and motivational check-ins.
- **Mental Health & Resilience Content:** Curated videos, articles, and podcasts focused on managing stress, building confidence, and staying motivated.
- **Localized Language and Contextual Relevance:** Content adapted to users' native language, local education systems, and cultural references to increase relatability and effectiveness.
- **Offline Access:** Availability of key motivational content without internet connectivity, ensuring inclusivity for students in rural or under-connected areas.

Higher education represents a significant phase in young people's lives, not only for acquiring academic knowledge but also for fostering personal development, career aspirations, and a sense of social belonging. However, today, participation in higher education and the ability of young people to sustain their motivation throughout this process are shaped by numerous individual, social, and economic factors. Despite the growing variety of opportunities offered by educational institutions and the widespread availability of digital technologies, participation and retention rates in higher education remain below desired levels, especially among socio-economically disadvantaged groups (Kuh, G. D. 2009). This situation not only disrupts individuals' personal career goals but also negatively impacts societal development as a whole.

The challenges young people face in their educational journey range from financial difficulties and academic pressure to mental health issues and uncertainties about career prospects. Although entry into university is a pivotal milestone, students need more than academic competence to succeed; they require intrinsic motivation, self-regulation skills, and robust social support networks. Students experiencing a loss of motivation are at risk of irregular attendance, declining academic performance, social isolation, and ultimately, dropping out of higher education (Tinto, 1993).

Particularly in the post-pandemic period, uncertainty, feelings of loneliness, and dependence on digital environments have emerged as major factors undermining students' motivation. (Salmela & Upadyaya, 2014) While digital platforms facilitate access to information, they can also shorten young people's attention spans and reduce face-to-face social interactions. Additionally, economic crises and concerns about unemployment significantly undermine students' determination to continue higher education.

Within this context, one of the primary aims of the Motivate Youth project is to support young people in overcoming the obstacles they encounter during their higher education journey and to help them rebuild and sustain their motivation. The planned interventions will not solely focus on academic success but will also be designed to enhance students' mental health, strengthen their social connections, and integrate their educational pathways with career aspirations.

In this chapter, the challenges experienced by young people in pursuing higher education will be examined in detail, drawing on findings from focus group discussions conducted in various countries and survey data collected from students. Furthermore, a brief overview of existing applications designed to boost youth motivation will be presented, and proposed features for the planned mobile application will be discussed. In doing so, the project aims to develop solutions that support young people holistically, addressing not only their academic needs but also their personal and professional development.

Insights from the focus groups related to motivation in higher education

1. How could an app support young people in navigating the financial barriers to higher education, such as scholarships or grants?

Partners highlighted that an app supporting young people in overcoming financial barriers to higher education should serve multiple functions. A common view is that the app should provide young people with information and guidance about scholarships, grants, financial support opportunities, and budget management.

According to the Ukrainian contribution, the app should include a searchable database of scholarships and grants filtered by country and field of study. It should also offer information on application processes, support for preparing documents (such as motivation letters and CV templates), and notifications to remind users of upcoming deadlines.

Spain emphasizes the importance of increasing financial literacy. They suggest the app should offer practical tools for financial planning, income and expense tracking, and budget creation, thereby reducing financial stress. They also stress the value of push notifications for scholarship and grant announcements.

Romania underlines that the app should not only inform users about scholarships but also educate them on financial literacy. They stress the importance of guiding young people through digital tools on how to manage application processes effectively.

Turkey highlights the need for personalized content tailored to user profiles within the app to help young people access financial resources more easily. They particularly recommend providing detailed information on local scholarship opportunities, government support, and European programs.

Belgium believes the app should not only provide information but also include interactive features that motivate young people and guide them step by step through the process. They propose integrating a community forum where users can share experiences and advice.

Portugal emphasizes that the app should help young people access accurate information and prepare their application documents properly. They also suggest that the app should connect financial support mechanisms with social entrepreneurship and job opportunities.

In summary, all partners agree that an app offering centralized information, guidance on scholarships and grants, personalized content, and interactive features would greatly help young people overcome financial barriers to higher education. Key common elements include providing information, notification systems, financial literacy tools, support for application processes, and community interaction. Each partner offered detailed suggestions based on their country-specific or thematic expertise, but all highlighted the crucial role of technology in helping young people navigate financial obstacles.

2. What features in an app would help students stay organized and manage academic workload effectively?

Partners agreed that an app aiming to help students stay organized and manage their academic workload should combine practical planning tools, personalized notifications, and motivational support.
Ukraine suggests the app should include a calendar for planning tasks, exams, and deadlines, integrated with reminders and notifications to help students keep track of their schedule. They highlight the need for task prioritization tools and progress tracking so students can monitor what has been completed and what still needs attention.

Spain emphasizes the importance of a customizable dashboard that allows students to visualize their academic workload at a glance. They propose tools for breaking larger tasks into smaller steps, with progress indicators to make studying feel more manageable. Additionally, they recommend integrated note-taking features and cloud storage to keep all academic materials accessible in one place.

Romania points out that many students struggle with balancing various assignments and deadlines. They suggest integrating time management techniques like Pomodoro timers or study session trackers into the app. They also propose collaborative features, such as shared calendars or group task boards, to facilitate teamwork in projects.

Turkey recommends the app should offer personalized study plans based on the student's learning style and academic field. They highlight the value of integrating reminders for classes, assignments, and exams, and including tools for setting personal academic goals and tracking achievements over time.
Belgium believes the app should not only organize tasks but also promote well-being by offering stress management tools, such as breathing exercises or short mindfulness sessions, to help students cope with academic pressure. They suggest having motivational quotes or daily tips to keep users engaged and positive.

Portugal emphasizes that students often feel overwhelmed by different systems and platforms for each course. They propose an app that centralizes all course information, deadlines, and communication in one place. They also recommend having templates for note-taking, summaries, and reports to save time and improve organization.

In summary, all partners agree that an app supporting academic organization should combine scheduling, reminders, task breakdown, progress tracking, and personalized features. There's also significant emphasis on integrating well-being tools, collaboration functions, and the consolidation of study resources into a single platform. Each partner has highlighted slightly different priorities, but collectively, they envision an app that helps students manage both their tasks and their mental load effectively.

3. How could an app provide career guidance to help students see the value of higher education for their future goals?

Partners collectively emphasize that an app providing career guidance should serve as both an information hub and a personalized coaching tool to help students connect higher education with future career opportunities.

Ukraine suggests that the app should include a career database where students can explore various professions, required skills, and educational pathways. They highlight the importance of interactive features like career quizzes to help users discover suitable career options based on their interests and abilities. Additionally, they recommend providing real-life success stories to show how higher education contributed to personal and professional growth.

Spain underscores the role of mentorship and networking. They propose integrating a virtual mentoring system within the app, where professionals from different fields can share insights, experiences, and career advice. They also stress the value of offering practical resources, such as guides on writing CVs, preparing for interviews, and developing personal branding.

Romania points out that many students lack a clear vision of how their studies connect to the job market. They recommend that the app should include labor market trends, emerging professions, and salary expectations for various career paths. They also suggest integrating an internship and job-matching feature, where students can find relevant opportunities based on their academic background.

Turkey emphasizes the need for personalized career planning tools within the app. They advocate for features allowing students to set career goals and receive tailored advice on courses, skills, and extracurricular activities that align with those goals. They also propose integrating information about international mobility programs and scholarships that can enhance career prospects.
Belgium believes that the app should not only inform but inspire students. They propose using engaging multimedia content—videos, podcasts, and interactive infographics—to illustrate career paths and the real-world impact of higher education. They also suggest including testimonials from young professionals who recently transitioned from university to the workforce.

Portugal emphasizes that career guidance should be practical and connected to local contexts. They recommend that the app includes local labor market data, profiles of regional employers, and sector-specific advice. They also suggest offering tools to help students identify how their skills can transfer to various industries, helping them feel more secure about their educational choices.

In summary, all partners agree that an app providing career guidance should combine personalized tools, inspiring content, practical resources, and up-to-date labor market information. Key shared ideas include interactive career exploration, mentorship opportunities, job-matching features, and motivational success stories. While partners focus on different aspects—from local labor data to global mobility—there is consensus that connecting higher education to tangible career outcomes is crucial to helping students see its value for their future goals.

4. In what ways could an app connect students with mentors or alumni for guidance and support?

Partners broadly agree that connecting students with mentors or alumni via an app is a powerful way to provide personalized guidance, motivation, and real-world perspectives on both academic and career paths.

Ukraine suggests the app should include a dedicated mentorship platform where students can search for mentors based on criteria like field of study, career interests, country, and professional experience. They propose chat and video call functionalities to facilitate direct communication, as well as scheduling tools to arrange meetings or Q&A sessions.

Spain emphasizes the creation of virtual communities within the app, where students and alumni can engage in discussion forums, share experiences, and provide mutual support. They advocate for a structured mentoring program, including guided discussion topics and resources to help both mentors and mentees make the most of their connection.

Romania underlines that many students feel isolated or uncertain about their future. They recommend that the app include a matching algorithm to connect students with mentors or alumni who have similar backgrounds or career goals. They also suggest regular webinars and group sessions where alumni share their professional journeys and lessons learned.

Turkey highlights the value of personalized mentor recommendations generated based on a student's profile, academic interests, and career aspirations. They propose integrating a feedback system so students can rate their mentorship experiences, helping to ensure quality and continuous improvement of the service.

Belgium believes that connecting with mentors should be engaging and inspiring. They suggest incorporating multimedia content such as video introductions from alumni and success stories to help students identify relatable role models. They also propose integrating a question-and-answer feature where students can post inquiries to a community of mentors and receive collective insights.

Portugal stresses the importance of trust and safety in mentorship connections. They recommend implementing verification systems for mentors and clear guidelines for communication etiquette. Additionally, they propose the app should include resources like conversation starters and goal-setting templates to help students structure their interactions effectively.

In summary, partners collectively agree that an app can facilitate meaningful connections between students and mentors or alumni through several features: personalized matching, interactive communication tools, structured programs, multimedia storytelling, and community-driven Q&A spaces. Key shared priorities include ensuring accessibility, security, and creating engaging ways for students to receive guidance and build confidence in their academic and career choices.

5. What role could an app play in improving access to mental health resources for students dealing with stress or anxiety?

Partners unanimously recognize that an app can play a significant role in improving students' access to mental health resources, helping them cope with stress, anxiety, and the pressures of academic life.

Ukraine emphasizes that the app should provide direct access to mental health information and resources, including articles, videos, and self-help guides tailored to young people's needs. They also propose integrating an anonymous chat or helpline feature where students can seek immediate advice or emotional support without fear of stigma.

Spain highlights the importance of offering practical tools such as mindfulness exercises, breathing techniques, and guided meditations that students can use independently to reduce anxiety and manage stress. They also recommend personalized notifications that remind students to take mental health breaks or check in with their emotions.

Romania suggests that many students avoid seeking help due to social stigma or lack of awareness about mental health services. They propose that the app should include a mental health self-assessment tool to help students identify when they might need professional support. Additionally, they advocate for the inclusion of directories with contact details for local counseling centers, psychologists, or university mental health services.

Turkey underlines the importance of personalized mental health support. They recommend integrating AI-driven chatbots that can provide initial guidance and resources based on the user's inputs and emotional state. They also propose including educational content about the connection between mental health, academic performance, and physical health.

Belgium believes the app should go beyond simply offering resources by creating an interactive and supportive community space. They suggest including moderated discussion forums where students can share their experiences, ask questions, and find encouragement from peers facing similar challenges. They also emphasize the importance of ensuring that all information provided is scientifically validated and up to date.

Portugal stresses the necessity of privacy and confidentiality in mental health support. They propose implementing secure data protection measures and allowing users to access resources anonymously. Additionally, they recommend linking the app with institutional services, so students can easily schedule appointments or attend online counseling sessions.

In summary, all partners agree that an app can significantly improve access to mental health resources for students dealing with stress and anxiety. Shared priorities include offering self-help tools, anonymous support channels, personalized guidance, mental health education, and community-based support. Partners also emphasize the need for user privacy, scientific credibility, and seamless connections to professional services, recognizing the vital role mental health plays in students' overall well-being and academic success.

6. How could gamification or progress tracking in an app keep students motivated to complete their studies?

Partners broadly agree that gamification and progress tracking can be powerful tools in an app to help students stay motivated, engaged, and committed to completing their studies.

Ukraine highlights that gamification features like earning badges, points, or levels can create a sense of achievement and make academic tasks feel less burdensome. They propose integrating daily or weekly challenges that encourage consistent engagement and reward students for reaching milestones.

Spain emphasizes that progress tracking should be visual and interactive. They suggest features like dashboards displaying completed tasks, percentage of syllabus covered, and progress bars to help students see how their efforts accumulate over time. They also propose offering virtual rewards, such as unlocking new content or gaining access to exclusive resources as incentives for progress.

Romania notes that many students struggle with long-term motivation and feel overwhelmed by large goals. They propose breaking academic objectives into smaller, manageable tasks and using gamified elements to celebrate each small success. Additionally, they suggest incorporating friendly competitions, such as leaderboards among peers, to foster a sense of community and healthy competition.

Turkey emphasizes the importance of personalized gamification. They recommend adapting challenges and rewards to the individual student's learning style, interests, and pace, ensuring that gamified elements remain relevant and motivating rather than stressful. They also propose integrating reflective features where students can review their progress and adjust their goals accordingly.

Belgium believes that gamification should also focus on intrinsic motivation, not just external rewards. They suggest including storytelling elements where students become "heroes" in their learning journey, with quests tied to academic tasks. They also propose including motivational quotes, positive feedback, and social recognition to keep students emotionally connected to their progress.

Portugal stresses that gamification should be meaningful and educational, not just entertainment. They propose integrating quizzes, interactive learning activities, and skill-building games that directly reinforce the curriculum. They also recommend that progress tracking should highlight both academic achievements and personal development milestones to encourage holistic growth.

In summary, partners agree that gamification and progress tracking can effectively boost students' motivation and commitment to their studies. Key shared ideas include rewarding progress with badges or points, visualizing achievements through dashboards and progress bars, breaking tasks into smaller goals, personalizing challenges, and integrating community-based competition. While each partner has unique nuances—from storytelling to educational games—they all emphasize that these features should inspire students to persist and succeed in their academic paths.

7. What resources or tools could an app include to help students align their studies with real-world applications or job opportunities?

Partners widely agree that an app can bridge the gap between academic studies and real-world applications by integrating practical resources, career-oriented tools, and industry insights.

Ukraine suggests including a database of professions and industries that details required skills, educational pathways, and typical job responsibilities. They propose offering practical case studies, project examples, and interactive scenarios to help students understand how their academic knowledge translates into workplace tasks. They also recommend integrating a section where students can explore local and international internship opportunities.

Spain emphasizes the importance of connecting students directly with professionals and companies. They propose including a feature for virtual company visits or video interviews with professionals from various fields who explain how their academic background relates to their current roles. They also suggest incorporating job market insights and employability trends to guide students in choosing relevant courses and skills.

Romania highlights that many students are unaware of how their studies fit into the broader job market. They recommend that the app should include interactive career-mapping tools, allowing students to trace potential career paths from specific degrees or fields of study. They also suggest integrating practical exercises, such as virtual simulations or problem-solving tasks, that mimic real job challenges.

Turkey underscores the value of personalized guidance. They propose tools that align a student's academic progress with emerging industry demands, suggesting additional certifications, workshops, or skill-building activities. They also recommend linking the app to job and internship portals, ensuring students can apply directly for opportunities that match their qualifications and interests.

Belgium believes that an app should make real-world learning engaging and relatable. They propose using storytelling and multimedia—videos, podcasts, and infographics—to show how different professions utilize specific academic knowledge. They also suggest offering networking opportunities within the app, where students can connect with industry mentors for practical advice and insights.

Portugal emphasizes the need for local relevance in career tools. They propose including region-specific labor market information, local job fairs, and contacts with local businesses to help students understand how their studies can be applied close to home. They also recommend including templates for CVs, cover letters, and portfolios tailored to different industries, helping students present themselves professionally.

In summary, all partners agree that an app should help students link their studies to real-world applications and job prospects through practical resources, industry connections, and personalized guidance. Shared priorities include access to career pathways, interactive learning tools, multimedia content, and local job market insights. While partners vary in focus—from global industry trends to local business networks—they all see the app as a bridge between academic learning and successful career planning.

8. How might an app assist students in building skills outside of the classroom to make them more competitive for future careers?

Partners agree that an app can play a crucial role in helping students build additional skills beyond traditional classroom learning, ultimately making them more competitive and adaptable in the job market.

Ukraine suggests the app should include short online courses, tutorials, and interactive modules focused on soft skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and time management. They also propose integrating practical challenges or mini-projects where students can apply these skills and receive feedback.

Spain emphasizes that the app should offer resources for personal development and professional growth. They recommend integrating workshops, webinars, and digital badges for skills like critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and entrepreneurship. They also suggest tools for self-assessment, helping students identify their strengths and areas for improvement.

Romania highlights that many employers value skills beyond academic knowledge. They propose the app should connect students with extracurricular opportunities like volunteering, community projects, and internships. Additionally, they recommend including gamified skill-building exercises and quizzes that make learning enjoyable and practical.

ITurkey underlines the importance of personalized learning pathways. They advocate for the app to suggest specific extracurricular activities, online courses, and training based on students' career goals and interests. They also propose tracking the acquisition of new skills so students can build a digital portfolio to showcase to employers.

Belgium believes that building skills outside the classroom should be engaging and socially connected. They propose including collaborative projects, peer challenges, and virtual hackathons within the app, where students can work in teams and develop practical skills. They also stress the value of integrating resources on digital literacy, sustainability, and cultural awareness to prepare students for diverse global workplaces.

Portugal emphasizes practical applications and career relevance. They suggest that the app should provide access to industry-specific skills training, such as software tools, technical certifications, or sector-focused workshops. They also recommend including mentoring sessions or career talks from professionals who can share insights into essential real-world skills.

In summary, partners collectively see the app as a powerful tool for helping students build valuable skills outside the classroom. Shared ideas include offering short courses, interactive challenges, personalized recommendations, digital badges, and connections to real-world experiences like volunteering or internships. While partners focus on slightly different aspects—from soft skills and global awareness to industry-specific training—they all agree that equipping students with a broader skill set is key to enhancing their competitiveness and success in future careers.

9. What kind of peer-to-peer interaction features (e.g., study groups, discussion forums) would make an app appealing to students?

Partners unanimously agree that peer-to-peer interaction is a key element that can make an app highly attractive to students by fostering a sense of community, collaboration, and mutual support.

Ukraine suggests incorporating virtual study groups where students can collaborate on assignments, exchange notes, and prepare for exams together. They also recommend including instant messaging and video chat functions to enable real-time communication and build connections among peers from different regions or countries.

Spain emphasizes the value of discussion forums organized by topics, where students can ask questions, share experiences, and discuss academic or personal challenges. They propose creating spaces for subject-specific discussions as well as general life skills and mental health conversations, allowing for both academic support and emotional connection.

Romania highlights the importance of collaborative learning. They suggest integrating tools like shared whiteboards, group task lists, and document collaboration features so students can work together efficiently on projects. They also propose peer review systems where students can give constructive feedback on each other's work, fostering critical thinking and communication skills.

Turkey stresses the benefit of personalized peer connections. They recommend matching students with similar academic interests or career goals to facilitate meaningful collaborations. They also propose including interactive polls, quizzes, and peer challenges to keep the community dynamic and engaging.

Belgium believes that peer-to-peer features should not only be practical but also fun and motivating. They suggest incorporating gamified elements like team competitions, leaderboards, and badges for participation in discussions or helping others. They also advocate for multimedia sharing, such as allowing students to upload short videos, podcasts, or visual notes to enhance engagement.

Portugal focuses on building trust and inclusivity in peer interactions. They recommend implementing moderation tools to ensure respectful communication and prevent negative interactions. They also propose multilingual support in forums to accommodate diverse student populations, as well as spaces where students can connect locally for in-person study meetups.

In summary, partners agree that peer-to-peer features are crucial for making an app appealing to students. Common ideas include virtual study groups, discussion forums, collaborative tools, real-time chat, and gamified engagement. Partners emphasize creating a safe, inclusive, and interactive environment that blends academic support with social connection. Each partner highlights slightly different features, but all see peer interaction as essential for keeping students engaged and motivated.

10. How could an app encourage students to set and achieve academic and personal goals effectively?

Partners agree that an app can be a highly effective tool to help students set, track, and achieve both academic and personal goals by providing structured support, motivation, and personalized guidance.

Ukraine suggests that the app should include goal-setting templates where students can define specific, measurable, and time-bound objectives. They recommend integrating reminders and progress trackers so students can visualize how close they are to reaching their goals. Additionally, they propose motivational features such as daily tips or inspirational quotes to keep users engaged.

Spain emphasizes that goal setting should be interactive and personalized. They propose including guided goal-planning wizards that help students break large goals into smaller, manageable tasks. They also highlight the value of reflection tools, where students can record their progress, successes, and challenges to better understand their growth journey.

Romania points out that many students struggle to maintain motivation over time. They recommend incorporating gamified elements, such as rewards or badges for achieving milestones, to keep students engaged. They also propose community features where students can share their goals and progress, fostering mutual encouragement and accountability.

Turkey highlights the importance of aligning goals with students' personal interests and career plans. They suggest the app should offer personalized recommendations for academic activities, extracurricular engagements, and skill development opportunities linked to students' goals. They also propose periodic check-ins where the app asks users to evaluate and adjust their goals as needed.

Belgium believes that goal setting should connect both academic success and personal well-being. They propose integrating well-being goals into the app, such as stress management, healthy routines, or time for hobbies, to ensure holistic development. They also recommend providing multimedia resources, like videos or podcasts, to inspire and educate students on effective goal-setting strategies.

Portugal emphasizes that clarity and simplicity are key. They recommend visual dashboards that allow students to see all their goals in one place, with color-coded progress indicators. They also suggest including templates for goal-setting specific to different areas, such as academic work, personal development, language learning, or career planning, to make the process less overwhelming.

In summary, partners unanimously see the app as a powerful platform to help students set and achieve goals effectively. Common ideas include structured goal-setting tools, reminders, progress tracking, gamification, personalization, and motivational content. Partners stress that goals should be realistic, connected to students' broader life plans, and supported by practical tools to help students stay committed and feel accomplished along the way.

Insights from the surveys related to understanding motivation in higher education

The survey among Ukrainian students shows that the strongest motivation for pursuing higher education is "career opportunities," followed by personal growth. However, the biggest barrier students face is often a lack of interest in their chosen field of study, which makes it difficult for them to stay focused and maintain motivation. Mental health challenges and financial concerns also stand out as significant obstacles. A large portion of students are willing to use an app that offers personalized motivational tips and find motivational content very helpful. Opinions are mixed regarding the use of an app that tracks academic progress and offers rewards; some students find this motivating, while others remain unsure. The most desired features in such an app include personalized reminders for important deadlines, mental health support tools, study productivity tips, and options for social support and peer connection. Many students view connecting with mentors or peers who share similar academic or career goals positively, though there are also clear reservations. Goal-setting tools are generally valued, and apps offering mental health support are seen as important for maintaining motivation. Additionally, many students indicate they would feel more motivated to pursue higher education if an app helped them connect their studies to real-world job opportunities and market trends.

According to the survey results from Turkey, the strongest motivation driving young people toward higher education is "career opportunities," while personal growth also emerges as an important reason. The biggest barrier faced by students is predominantly "financial stress," along with a lack of interest in their chosen field and uncertainty about clear career goals. Most students indicate that they are willing to use an app offering personalized motivational tips tailored to their goals and challenges, and they generally find motivational content either "somewhat helpful" or "very helpful." Opinions are divided regarding apps that track academic progress and offer rewards; some students find this motivating, while others say their interest would depend on the rewards offered. The most needed app features include study tips and productivity tools, social support and peer interaction, and access to motivational content. Students generally respond positively to the idea of connecting with mentors or peers who share similar academic or career goals. Goal-setting tools are largely considered valuable. Apps providing mental health support are seen as important for enhancing motivation, and many students indicate that they would feel more motivated to pursue higher education if an app helped them connect their studies with the job market and career opportunities.

In Spain, the main motivation driving students toward higher education is "career opportunities," followed closely by personal growth and family expectations. The biggest challenges they face in staying motivated include academic pressure and a lack of interest in their chosen subjects, alongside mental health concerns and financial stress. A significant majority of students are very likely to use an app offering personalized motivation tips and generally find motivational content either somewhat or very helpful. Many students say they would be motivated by an app that tracks academic progress and offers rewards, though some remain skeptical about its usefulness. The most requested app features include personalized reminders for deadlines, study tips and productivity tools, and access to motivational videos and articles. There's a strong interest in connecting with mentors or peers who share similar academic or career goals, with most students believing this would definitely help boost their motivation. Goal-setting features are valued highly, and mental health support through apps is widely regarded as very helpful. Half of the students believe they would be more motivated to pursue higher education if an app helped them connect their studies to job opportunities and market trends, though some indicate this would depend on how the information is presented. Overall, Spanish students appear open to digital solutions that combine practical tools, emotional support, and career-oriented insights to help them stay engaged in their academic journey.

In Belgium, the leading motivation for pursuing higher education is "career opportunities," followed by family expectations, the desire to contribute to society, and personal growth. The main barrier faced by students is overwhelmingly mental health challenges, such as stress and anxiety, with some also reporting a lack of clear career direction and financial stress as obstacles (Conley, Durlak & Dickson, 2013). A significant majority of students are either very likely or likely to use an app that offers personalized motivation tips, and most find motivational content somewhat or very helpful. Opinions are mixed regarding apps that track academic progress and offer rewards; while many students believe such tools would motivate them, others remain hesitant. Key features students want in an app include personalized reminders for deadlines, mental health support tools, study tips, and options for peer interaction. Interest in connecting with mentors or peers who share similar goals is strong, though evenly split between definite interest and conditional interest depending on app features. Goal-setting tools are highly valued, and most students see mental health support through apps as either somewhat or very helpful. Importantly, a clear majority of students believe they would be more motivated to pursue higher education if an app helped link their studies with career opportunities and job market trends, underscoring the importance of practical, career-oriented support. Overall, Belgian students appear eager for digital solutions that blend personal motivation, mental health care, and concrete career guidance.

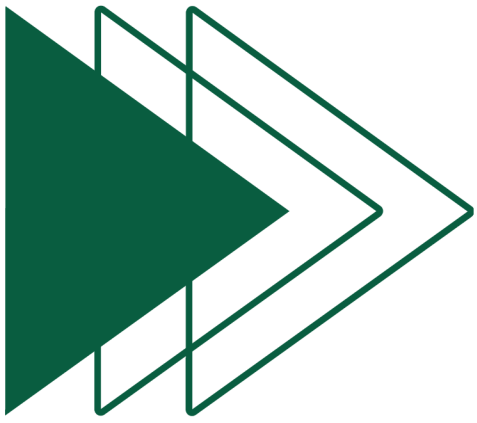
In Portugal, the primary motivation driving students to pursue higher education is overwhelmingly "career opportunities," with only a small fraction citing personal growth. The main challenges faced by students include academic pressure, lack of interest in their chosen subjects, and financial stress, along with some reporting uncertainty about career direction and mental health concerns. A large majority of students are very likely to use an app offering personalized motivational tips, and most find motivational content very helpful. Views are mixed about apps that track academic progress and offer rewards, with many saying their use would depend on the type of incentives offered. The most requested app features include peer support and social interaction tools, personalized reminders for deadlines, study tips and productivity resources, and access to motivational content. Interest in connecting with mentors or peers who share similar academic or career goals is strong, with most students saying this would definitely boost their motivation.

Goal-setting features are highly valued, and mental health support is seen as very helpful in maintaining motivation. Almost all respondents believe they would be more motivated to pursue higher education if an app helped connect their studies with job opportunities and market trends, highlighting the importance of practical career guidance. Overall, Portuguese students appear eager for digital tools that combine career-focused resources, personal support, and mental health features to help them navigate their academic journey.

In conclusion, the surveys conducted across Ukraine, Turkey, Spain, Belgium, and Portugal consistently highlight career aspirations as the primary driver for pursuing higher education, complemented by personal development goals. Nonetheless, students face persistent challenges, including disengagement from their fields of study, mental health concerns, financial stress, and academic pressure. There is a clear interest in digital tools that provide personalized support, goal-setting, mental health resources, and connections to career pathways. However, the effectiveness of features like gamification remains uncertain and context-dependent. Overall, the findings underscore the need for integrated, student-centered technological solutions that bridge academic pursuits with tangible career outcomes, thereby enhancing motivation and retention in higher education.

MOTIVATE YOUTH

Chapter 4: Motivation in the workforce



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According to the indicators published by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, 2.835 million people under 25 were unemployed in the EU in February 2025. This means that 14,5% of young people are unemployed, against 6,1% when taking into account all active population (Eurostat, 2025).

Even when youth is able to find a job in today's very competitive job market, their working conditions tend to be very precarious. Approximately 6 million young people in the EU are employed under temporary contracts, constituting about 25% of all working-age individuals in such arrangements (European Student Think Tank, 2024). Moreover, in a press release published in June 2023, the European Economic and Social Committee acknowledged that young workers are subject to lower minimum wages solely based on their age, despite performing the same tasks as older colleagues.

Besides the economic precarity of these contracts, a position paper published by the European Youth Forum published in March 2024 highlights how this instability and lack of career progression are linked to increased mental health issues among youth, particularly stress and anxiety.

To better understand how youth employment is felt throughout Europe, focus group discussions were conducted with employers and human resources professionals in Portugal, Spain, Romania, Belgium, Ukraine and Turkey, as well as surveys administered to young people from the same countries. These allowed us to understand the barriers to youth engagement in meaning employment, both from the point of view of the employers and youth itself.

Participants of the focus groups stressed how young people lack a clear understanding of the current job market. On one hand, they struggle to understand the different job roles, the skills required and the possible progression path for each of them. This makes it harder for young people to make informed decisions, while disregarding some industries, such as agriculture, caregiving and manufacturing, just because they are socially less attractive than other sectors.

Another barrier to youth employment is the job application process. The first obstacle is that the offers published by the companies aren't always clear on the tasks that will be performed and the skills necessary to do it. Furthermore, companies seem to be looking for a "sheep with five legs", that is having unrealistic expectations for a single profile. Even though recruiters may be flexible in some requirements, considering candidates whose profile matches most of the company and the position, some young people don't apply for the position because they don't meet every qualification.

From the candidate point of view, there is a lack of information on how to create effective resumes and cover letters, and how to prepare for job interviews. Young people also tend to struggle with confidence in themselves, facing challenges with imposter syndrome and self-doubt, making it hard to feel qualified for jobs they're interested in and to interact with the recruiters during the recruitment process.

This highlights the importance of skills development, both for the execution of the job, but also to get it in the first place. Soft skills, like communication, time management and teamwork are essential and transferable skills that are often undeveloped. It is important that young people are available to develop them throughout their life, as well as they must understand how to present their competences when applying for a job position.

Finally, a difficulty young people are confronted with is adapting to a new reality when they finally get a job position. Some of the human resources professionals that participated in the focus groups mentioned that the transition into workplace culture can be difficult for first-time employees, especially those with least extracurricular experiences.

Addressing these barriers requires a multifaceted approach, combining policy initiatives with innovative digital approaches. Generic apps and websites focused on job search and career development have attempted to respond to some of these issues, with varying degrees of success.

LinkedIn is probably the most comprehensive app available on this topic. Its free version allows (aspiring) professionals to network with their peers, to search for jobs and apply directly through the app/web, as well as to request or provide recommendations to and from their connections. LinkedIn Premium, its paid version, allows for advanced job research tools and access to insights that are not available for free users, in addition to unlimited access to courses covering various professional skills. Premium users can also message people outside their network, access analytics about their profile and benefit from interview tips from industry experts.

Glassdoor allows professionals to job search, but also to get some insights on the companies they are applying for, such as salary expectations, company reviews, and interview advice. Similarly, Indeed is particularly useful for job search, allowing filtered research, and it can also be used to access reviews on different companies.

RescueTime assists individuals in staying motivated at work by providing insights into how they actually spend their time. This helps users prioritize important tasks and reduce distractions. The application sits conveniently in the taskbar for easy access, offering daily focus goals tailored to your work style and meeting schedule. It also sends alerts when distractions occur, helping you regain your focus. At the end of the day or week, RescueTime generates detailed productivity reports, giving you a clear overview of how you managed your time and highlighting areas for improvement.

Fabulous is a self-care and productivity app designed to help you stay motivated at work by prioritizing your well-being. The app acts as a daily coach, reinforcing positive habits through reminders and structured routines. Users can create morning, lunch, and evening rituals to improve focus, efficiency, and overall productivity. By promoting self-discipline and inner strength, Fabulous helps people stay energized, motivated and ready to tackle their to-do lists with a balanced mindset.

Pep Talk is a motivational app that helps you stay inspired at work with audio speeches from leaders, public figures, and celebrities. Whether you're at work, commuting or exercising, you can listen to powerful messages that motivate you to stay focused and productive. With a variety of speakers to choose from, Pep Talk lets you find the right voice to keep you motivated and energized throughout the day.

Hello Work is a French app that compiles job offers and training opportunities, offers its users the possibility to publish their CV to be consulted by companies, and calculates salaries Brut-Net based on French law. Moreover, Parcours Emploi France Travail is an app created by the French government to facilitate job search. It allows users to search and apply directly for jobs, as well as to find job-related events nearby, such as training and job fairs.

In Flandres (Belgium), **VDAB Uitsprekenden** is a governmental app that supports job search, particularly by offering paid access to certified job coaches.

These apps offer different features, but they still don't manage to answer the particular needs of young people or, when they do, they tend to be at a cost. There is a need to leverage technology that can provide free personalized support, real-world experience opportunities, and professional guidance to empower the next generation in their career journeys.

To better understand how digital tools can support young people in finding meaningful work, we held focus groups in six countries: Belgium, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Turkey and Ukraine. Each group included a mix of young people, employers, and human resources professionals. They were asked to share their thoughts on how a mobile app could help young people build skills, find jobs, and grow in their careers.

The next section brings together all their ideas and suggestions to help design an app that really meets the needs of young job seekers.

Insights from the focus groups related to motivation in workforce

1. What tools or resources do young people need to better understand the skills required for different job roles?

Young people need accessible and engaging tools that offer a clear understanding of various job roles, required skills, and career paths. This includes interactive job explorers, career simulations, videos of professionals sharing real-life experiences, and sector-specific guides. Tools should combine visual content (infographics, interviews, day-in-the-life videos) with skill-mapping exercises and mentorship opportunities. These features help demystify the labor market and enable youth to make informed decisions about their future.

Belgium highlighted existing tools like VDAB Career Vouchers and suggested employer transparency in job descriptions. Spain and Portugal focused more on visual and user-friendly tools like interviews and videos. Ukraine emphasized professional exchange and mentorship programs as central tools. Romania and Turkey suggested the need for career simulations and skill-alignment exercises as key strategies.

2. How could a mobile app help bridge the gap between young people's current skills and the qualifications employers are looking for?

A mobile app can serve as a personalized career coach, offering skill self-assessments, gap analysis, and custom learning paths. It should provide access to curated online courses, training resources, volunteering and micro-internship opportunities, and mentorship. Real-time feedback, progress tracking, and motivational tools can keep users engaged while helping them develop both hard and soft skills aligned with employer expectations.

Portugal and Turkey emphasized linking the app to local volunteering opportunities. Belgium suggested integrating HR-led guidance (e.g., Q&A sessions with recruiters). Ukraine focused on mentor-matching and feedback tools, while Romania stressed simulation-based skill-building. Spain leaned toward self-assessment linked with curated course recommendations.

3. What features would be valuable in an app that connects young people with internships, apprenticeships, or entry-level job opportunities?

Key features include job-matching algorithms, real-time listings, location and sector-based filters, and one-click applications. The app should support building and updating digital portfolios, allow for feedback from mentors or recruiters, and offer interview preparation resources. Integration with local partners (e.g., municipalities, employment centers, NGOs) would enhance relevance and reach. Notification systems and application tracking would also support user engagement and follow-through.

Portugal emphasized integration with municipal and regional job platforms. Ukraine and Romania highlighted the need for resume and portfolio building tools. Turkey and Spain pushed for automatic matching and tailored job suggestions. Belgium uniquely proposed featuring employer ratings and offering mentorship access post-application.

4. How could an app help young people gain relevant work experience or develop portfolios that make them more employable?

An app can support employability by offering digital portfolios where users upload certificates, describe projects, and receive feedback. Simulated job challenges, micro-tasks, and links to volunteer or community projects can help users gain informal but valuable experience. Features like endorsements or project logs validated by mentors or professionals can further enhance the portfolio's credibility.

Spain and Portugal emphasized documenting informal learning and offering project upload functions. Romania and Turkey proposed including simulation-based micro-experiences and feedback loops. Ukraine focused on peer feedback and nonprofit collaboration. Belgium emphasized showcasing practical examples from users (e.g., community work, school projects) and proposed employer-recognized endorsements.

5. What role could gamification or rewards play in helping young people build soft skills?

Gamification can make the learning of soft skills (like teamwork, communication, and time management) more engaging and accessible. Interactive games, challenges, role-playing, and scenario-based exercises provide a safe space for practice. Rewards such as badges, points, or employer-endorsed certificates can increase motivation and reinforce achievements. This approach is especially effective for keeping users engaged over time.

Belgium focused on issuing recognized certificates in areas like conflict management and workplace safety. Portugal and Spain leaned toward weekly soft skill challenges and digital badges. Romania and Turkey emphasized the use of peer recognition and group-based activities. Ukraine discussed how gamified feedback and progress metrics can reduce pressure and boost self-confidence.

6. How might an app support young people in discovering career paths that match their interests and the demands of the job market?

The app should offer career discovery tools such as interest-based quizzes, personality assessments, and real-time labor market data. By linking user preferences with growing industries and in-demand roles, the app can suggest relevant and fulfilling career paths. Visual career maps, testimonials, and success stories help users connect personal interests with practical opportunities and long-term potential.

Turkey and Portugal recommended using regional employment data and adapting content to the local context. Belgium proposed integrating emotional intelligence tools and self-awareness courses. Spain and Romania stressed the importance of real-world videos and up-to-date labor trends. Ukraine favored mentor matching by career interest and access to sector-specific stories.

7. What barriers do young people face in preparing for job interviews or creating effective resumes, and how could an app address them?

Young people often lack experience, confidence, and access to guidance when preparing resumes or for interviews. The app should offer AI-powered resume and cover letter builders, customizable templates, mock interviews, video tutorials, and feedback systems. Step-by-step instructions and peer or mentor support can reduce anxiety and improve preparation, making young users more confident and job-ready.

Spain and Portugal emphasized low confidence and the value of mock interviews. Romania and Ukraine focused on the importance of peer and mentor feedback. Turkey stressed the usefulness of sample CVs and industry-specific interview practice. Belgium recommended tutorials about interview myths and included company-specific insider tips.

8. What resources or training modules should be included in an app to help young people adapt to workplace cultures?

To support young professionals in transitioning to the workplace, the app should offer interactive modules on topics like time management, communication etiquette, teamwork, receiving feedback, and conflict resolution. Content should reflect real-life workplace situations and be tailored to various industries. Testimonials, case studies, and industry-specific cultural insights can enhance relatability and effectiveness.

Romania and Ukraine recommended including empathy, emotional regulation, and diversity awareness. Portugal and Turkey stressed adapting content for industry-specific needs (e.g., hospitality vs. tech). Belgium emphasized the importance of training in digital responsibility and professional etiquette. Spain focused on transitioning content aimed at recent graduates entering the workplace.

9. How can an app encourage youth to explore industries or career paths that currently struggle to attract young talent?

To generate interest in undervalued sectors like caregiving, agriculture, or manufacturing, the app should feature engaging content such as "day-in-the-life" videos, behind-the-scenes previews, and interactive sector-specific challenges. Highlighting success stories, offering trial tasks or internships, and showcasing companies with strong social values can positively shift perceptions and boost participation in these fields.

Spain and Portugal highlighted success stories and real-world missions. Ukraine proposed promoting socially responsible companies and ranking employers based on ESG efforts. Turkey and Romania recommended interactive storytelling and trial internships. Belgium suggested sector-focused certifications and integrating simulation challenges from industries facing shortages.

10. How can an app support the ongoing development of young employees and keep them motivated over time?

An effective app should provide long-term support through progress dashboards, personalized upskilling recommendations, monthly check-ins, and access to communities or mentors. Push notifications with motivational content, goal-setting features, and career reflection tools (e.g., journals or mentor feedback) can help young employees stay engaged, grow professionally, and remain motivated throughout their career journeys.

Romania suggested journaling tools and supervisor feedback loops. Portugal and Spain focused on community features and alumni networks. Ukraine proposed a chatbot "people partner" and suggested curated content updates. Belgium highlighted reminders and resource recommendations as key tools for long-term engagement.

Insights from the surveys related to motivation in workforce

Based on the survey responses from young people in Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Romania, Turkey, and Ukraine, a number of shared trends and national differences emerge regarding youth motivation, employment barriers, and the perceived value of a career-oriented mobile app.

Across all countries, the most common motivators for pursuing employment were financial independence, personal career development, and skill-building. These were consistently echoed by respondents in Portugal, Romania, and Ukraine, where financial stability was the top priority. In Belgium, however, many respondents also expressed a strong desire to make a positive social impact, suggesting a more values-driven motivation in parts of that cohort. Spain reflected a similar mix, combining economic goals with the ambition to gain meaningful experience.

When it comes to barriers, a number of regional distinctions appear. Lack of job opportunities dominated the responses from Spain, Portugal, and Turkey, with Spanish youth in particular voicing frustration about limited openings, especially in smaller regions. Romanian and Ukrainian participants were more concerned with the lack of relevant skills and work experience, suggesting a stronger need for structured learning and practical exposure. Belgium highlighted uncertainty about career paths and limited networking, underscoring a gap in accessible professional guidance, even in relatively resource-rich environments.

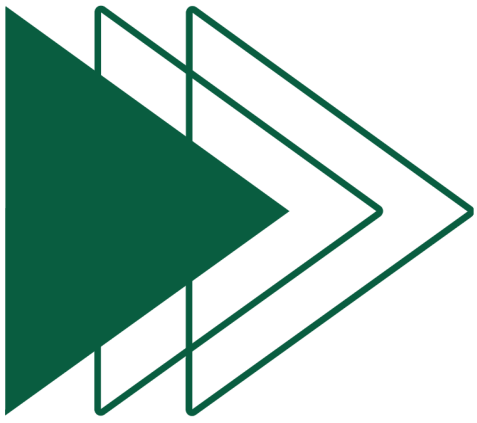
The idea of a mobile app tailored to youth employment was highly appealing across all countries, but Romania and Ukraine showed more cautious attitudes towards peer-to-peer features like social networking and job search communities. A significant portion of respondents from these countries stated that they would "prefer to search for jobs alone," indicating a cultural preference for self-reliance or perhaps a lack of trust in digital peer support systems. In contrast, respondents from Belgium, Spain, and Portugal were much more enthusiastic about community-driven features—such as motivational stories, competitions, and networking—suggesting a higher degree of comfort with collaborative, gamified, or social learning tools.

On the subject of soft skills and mentorship, the responses also varied. Belgian and Portuguese youth rated soft skills as "very important," with many supporting the idea of incorporating training modules on communication, time management, and teamwork. Turkish respondents, while acknowledging the value of these skills, were more ambivalent—rating them from "somewhat important" to "not important" depending on the respondent. Similarly, Ukrainian answers showed mixed engagement with motivational features and goal-tracking tools, though many still supported structured content like resume building and interview prep.

In conclusion, while there is broad support for a digital tool to support youth employment across all six countries, the design and features of the app must reflect local expectations and cultural norms. While young people in Belgium, Spain, and Portugal favor interactive, social, and gamified experiences, those in Romania, Turkey, and Ukraine tend to prioritize individual learning paths, clear skill development resources, and practical guidance. Addressing these nuanced preferences will be key to maximizing the app's impact across different national contexts.

MOTIVATE YOUTH

Chapter 5 : Motivation in volunteering



Co-funded by the European Union

Volunteering plays a fundamental role in social cohesion, community development, and personal growth. However, youth participation in volunteering remains significantly low in many regions, despite the increasing need for civic engagement. Understanding the underlying causes of this trend is crucial to developing effective strategies that encourage and sustain youth involvement in volunteering activities. This chapter delves into the reasons behind the low participation rates among young people, highlights existing digital platforms promoting volunteering opportunities, and proposes essential app features that can foster greater interest in volunteering. Youth volunteering has been recognized as a powerful tool for fostering civic engagement, developing skills, and contributing to societal progress. According to a 2021 report by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV), only about 30% of young people worldwide participate in volunteer activities regularly. The European Youth Forum also found that while 65% of young Europeans express a willingness to volunteer, only 25% engage actively. This gap suggests that while the desire to contribute exists, multiple barriers prevent youth from engaging in volunteering.

Factors such as changing social dynamics, digital distractions, and economic pressures have contributed to declining participation. In an era where young people are increasingly focused on academic success, career-building, and personal development, volunteering often takes a lower priority. Additionally, the rise of social media activism has altered the way young people engage with causes, shifting involvement from direct action to digital advocacy. While online engagement has increased awareness, it has not necessarily translated into more hands-on participation in volunteer work.

Insights from the focus groups related to motivation in volunteering

To better understand the specific reasons for low participation, focus groups discussions were conducted with youth workers from Portugal, Spain, Romania, Belgium, Ukraine and Turkey, complemented by surveys administered to young people and active volunteers from the same countries.

Despite the well-documented benefits of volunteering, youth participation in civic activities remains low across many European contexts. Focus groups conducted in Spain, Belgium, Portugal, Turkey, Romania, and Ukraine revealed a complex web of social, cultural, and structural challenges that prevent young people from engaging consistently in volunteering initiatives.

1.What challenges do you observe that prevent young people from engaging in volunteering activities?

Focus groups across partner countries identified several key barriers that prevent young people from engaging in volunteering. A major issue is the lack of awareness about available opportunities, especially in rural or disadvantaged areas. Many youth also perceive volunteering as offering little personal or career benefit, making it a lower priority compared to work or studies. Time constraints and financial limitations further discourage participation, particularly when volunteering is unpaid or involves extra costs.

Emotional barriers such as self-doubt and fear of inadequacy are also common, especially in roles involving sensitive topics. Additionally, there is often a lack of support from schools, families, and institutions, particularly for youth from low-income backgrounds. In some countries, volunteering is culturally undervalued and not promoted as a meaningful or prestigious activity.

Overall, increasing youth engagement in volunteering requires a comprehensive approach that addresses these information gaps, reshapes perceptions, provides emotional and structural support, and ensures inclusive access, especially for underrepresented groups.

2. How could an app raise awareness about the benefits and opportunities of volunteering among young people?

Participants across all countries agreed that an app aimed at raising awareness about volunteering among youth should focus on visibility, personalization, and emotional connection. A centralized, user-friendly platform displaying updated opportunities filtered by location, interest, availability, and skills was considered essential. Push notifications and matching tools were recommended to keep users informed and engaged.

Educational and motivational content—such as success stories, testimonials, and impact videos—was seen as key to changing perceptions about volunteering by highlighting personal and professional benefits. Social features like community chats, peer mentorship, and communication with experienced volunteers were proposed to make volunteering more approachable.
Accessibility was also emphasized, with suggestions for multilingual and inclusive design to reach rural or marginalized youth. Interactive, localized content and collaborations with influencers were recommended to enhance engagement. Lastly, integrating the app with existing platforms and clearly communicating the value of volunteering through dedicated sections was seen as beneficial for increasing youth participation.

3. What features would make it easier for young people to discover and connect with local volunteering opportunities?

To help young people discover and connect with local volunteering opportunities, focus group participants across all countries emphasized the need for digital tools that are user-friendly, personalized, and accessible.

A geolocation-based search feature was one of the most commonly recommended tools, enabling users to quickly find nearby opportunities—highlighted as crucial in Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Romania, and Ukraine. Additional filtering options by interest, availability, duration, cause, and required skills were suggested to make the experience more relevant and efficient. Personalized recommendations based on user profiles or past activity were also encouraged, particularly in Spain and Romania.

To streamline the application process, participants from Turkey, Portugal, Ukraine, and Romania recommended features like direct application buttons and in-app messaging with organizers. Planning tools such as calendar synchronization and the ability to save or follow opportunities were also suggested to help manage participation.

From a motivational perspective, Belgium emphasized recognition systems—digital certificates, badges, or small rewards—that link volunteering to personal growth and employability. Short-term or one-off opportunities were seen as ideal for first-time volunteers or those with limited time.

Belgium and Ukraine proposed creating searchable databases of local organizations and allowing user-submitted projects to encourage bottom-up engagement. Additionally, Belgium recommended combining digital tools with offline outreach—like info sessions in schools or cafés—to build trust and broaden access beyond the app.

4. How might an app help address time constraints or scheduling conflicts that deter youth from volunteering?

Time constraints were identified across all countries as a major barrier to youth volunteering. To address this, participants recommended that an app offer flexible, personalized scheduling features that align with young people's busy lives.

A widely supported solution was the inclusion of micro-volunteering—short, task-based activities that can be completed quickly, remotely, or asynchronously. These allow youth to contribute without long-term commitments. Countries like Spain, Portugal, Turkey, and Romania also emphasized the importance of tools like calendar synchronization, smart reminders, and automated planners to help users fit volunteering into their schedules more easily.

Belgium proposed broader systemic solutions, such as encouraging companies to support volunteering through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, allowing employees to volunteer during work hours. Belgium also suggested adding time management resources and prioritization tools to help young people avoid burnout.

To further support emotional well-being, Belgium and Romania recommended including mental health support features, such as ambassadors or in-app resources. Ukraine and Romania also emphasized the need to categorize opportunities by time commitment (e.g., one-time, ongoing) and proposed group or peer-based volunteering options to boost motivation and flexibility.

Overall, the app should combine flexible formats, smart planning tools, and well-being support to reduce scheduling barriers and make volunteering more accessible.

5. In what ways could an app use gamification (e.g., badges, leaderboards, rewards) to motivate young people to volunteer?

Participants across all countries agreed that gamification can significantly boost youth engagement with volunteering apps if implemented in a way that aligns with users' motivations. Commonly suggested features included badges, points, volunteer streaks, and impact meters, which help users visualize progress and feel rewarded for their efforts. Leaderboards were also supported, though with optional privacy settings to avoid pressure, and team-based rankings with monthly resets (suggested by Ukraine) to encourage fresh participation.

Real-world rewards—such as access to events, digital certificates, discounts, and featured profiles—were seen as powerful motivators, especially in Romania, Belgium, and Turkey. These tangible incentives help validate volunteers' efforts and enhance the value of their contributions.

Storytelling and visibility were also highlighted. Reaching milestones could unlock opportunities for volunteers to share their experiences through blogs or videos, both to recognize their achievements and inspire others. Social media integration, especially for sharing badges and achievements, was recommended to amplify peer motivation.

Additional ideas included custom avatars or volunteer ID cards (Spain), and collaborative challenges (Belgium), which promote a sense of community through shared goals.
In summary, gamification elements—when used thoughtfully—can make volunteering more rewarding, visible, and socially engaging for young people.

6. How could an app showcase the impact of volunteering (e.g., stories of change, testimonials) to inspire participation?

Participants across all countries agreed that storytelling is one of the most effective ways to inspire youth to volunteer. Authentic, emotional, and peer-driven stories were seen as more impactful than statistics alone.

All six countries emphasized showcasing real volunteer experiences through video testimonials, photo diaries, "before and after" galleries, blog posts, and mini-stories of change. These formats help humanize volunteering and foster emotional connections with potential volunteers.
Personal dashboards—proposed by Romania and Ukraine—can display each user's contributions (e.g., trees planted, students tutored), making their impact tangible. Badges, achievement levels, and volunteer cards (suggested by Belgium and Spain) were recommended to track and recognize hours volunteered, activities completed, and causes supported.

Public recognition was also considered important. Suggestions included "Volunteer of the Month" spotlights, peer endorsements, and sharing success stories on social media to validate volunteers and encourage peer motivation. Belgium further suggested offering local perks (e.g., discounts, event access) as rewards for active involvement.

Additional ideas included categorizing types of supported projects (Ukraine), using blogs and data visuals to reflect collective impact (Romania), and gamifying both volunteer and organizational engagement (Belgium).

Overall, combining storytelling, recognition, and visible impact within the app can significantly enhance motivation and inspire wider youth participation.

7. What role could an app play in helping youth overcome concerns about lacking skills or qualifications for volunteering?

Across all countries, a common concern among young people is the feeling of being unqualified or unsure about what volunteering entails. An app can play a vital role in building confidence, clarifying expectations, and reinforcing that volunteering is open to all, regardless of prior experience.

Participants from Spain, Portugal, and Romania highlighted the need for clear role descriptions, including indicators like "Beginner-friendly" and "No experience needed," along with task details, time estimates, and difficulty levels. A dedicated "Volunteering for beginners" section and encouraging language can make opportunities feel more approachable.

All six countries emphasized the importance of onboarding content, such as short tutorials, soft skills training (e.g., communication, teamwork), and guides to help match personal skills to suitable roles. Romania proposed a Skills-Based Volunteering Guide, while Belgium, Spain, and Romania recommended testimonials and "Day in the Life" videos to showcase real journeys of first-time volunteers.

Ukraine and Turkey stressed the value of peer support features, including forums, chat spaces, and mentor matching, helping newcomers feel supported and less alone. Real-time updates and visual project previews (Belgium) were also suggested to demystify the experience.

Finally, countries like Turkey and Romania emphasized inclusive messaging, promoting the idea that everyone has something to contribute and that volunteering is a space for growth.

In summary, by offering clear information, training materials, peer support, and inspiring stories, an app can help young people overcome skill-related doubts and feel empowered to start volunteering.

8. How might an app foster a sense of community or belonging among young volunteers to sustain their engagement?

Across all countries, participants agreed that fostering a sense of community and belonging is essential to sustaining youth engagement in volunteering. An app can support this by offering interactive and social features that go beyond simply listing opportunities.

Participants from Spain, Portugal, Turkey, and Romania highlighted features such as group chats, forums, comment sections, photo galleries, and volunteer groups organized by interest or cause. These tools help reduce feelings of isolation and create a sense of being part of a larger movement.

Belgium, Ukraine, and Turkey emphasized forming thematic or cause-specific communities and team spaces that promote collaboration and shared purpose. Ukraine and Romania also recommended mentorship or buddy systems to guide newcomers, boost their confidence, and create leadership opportunities for experienced volunteers.

To strengthen motivation and belonging, many countries supported recognizing contributions through Volunteer of the Month features, appreciation walls, peer shout-outs, and milestone trackers. Belgium also suggested Youthpass-style reflections to help volunteers track their growth.

Ukraine proposed organizing online or offline meet-ups to deepen community ties and support cross-regional connection, strengthening long-term loyalty to the app.

In summary, a volunteering app can foster a strong sense of community by combining interactive features, peer support, recognition systems, and opportunities for shared experiences and growth.

9. What tools or resources in an app could help youth track and showcase their volunteering contributions (e.g., certificates, portfolios)?

Participants across all countries emphasized the importance of tools to track and showcase youth volunteering contributions, which can add value to their experiences and improve employability or academic prospects.

In Spain, participants suggested digital portfolios to log hours, list projects, and receive coordinator endorsements, with automatic generation of certificates and resumes. Portugal proposed similar features, including an in-app logbook, downloadable certificates, and portfolio sharing options for schools or employers.

Turkey recommended volunteer profiles that include logged hours, photos, digital certificates, and supervisor recommendations, making it easier for users to export their achievements. In Ukraine, youth workers highlighted the use of personal or team dashboards to display completed work and supported causes, alongside skills trackers and digital CVs to summarize progress.

Romania emphasized that achievement tracking boosts consistency. They suggested automatic activity logs, testimonial collection, verified certificates, and integration with LinkedIn. Visual tools like impact dashboards and milestone badges were seen as motivational features.

Belgium focused more on the community aspect, recommending local hubs, interest-based networks, and buddy systems to encourage coordination while naturally supporting contribution tracking.

10. How could an app provide recognition or incentives (e.g., public acknowledgment, redeemable points) to encourage consistent volunteering?

Participants from all countries agreed that recognition and incentives are crucial for encouraging consistent youth participation in volunteering. An app can support this through both public acknowledgment and tangible rewards.

Spain suggested a "Wall of Impact" to highlight top volunteers, alongside redeemable points for events or training, and regular updates celebrating achievements. Similarly, Portugal proposed leaderboards, personalized thank-you messages, and digital appreciation cards, with a point system that unlocks access to training or special events.

Belgium emphasized tools like a competency repository, step trackers, and impact archives, as well as the option for users to manage privacy around their achievements. Project evaluations were also suggested to support reflection and growth.

Turkey recommended visible in-app recognition, monthly spotlights, and integration with national award systems, while Ukraine emphasized Volunteer of the Week/Month features and social media sharing to boost motivation and visibility. Romania proposed digital recommendation letters, discounts, and partnerships with businesses, which could translate volunteer experience into career or educational opportunities.
The app should combine public praise, private tracking, point-based rewards, and career-oriented incentives to help youth feel valued and remain engaged in volunteering over the long term.

Insights from the suveys related to motivation in volunteering

Across all countries, altruism emerged as the strongest motivator, with many respondents—especially from Ukraine, Portugal, and Turkey—emphasizing a desire to help others and feel useful during uncertain times. This sense of purpose was often paired with a pursuit of personal growth and fulfillment, particularly in Belgium, Romania, and Spain, where youth linked volunteering to emotional satisfaction and self-discovery.

Social connection was another major motivator. Young people see volunteering not just as a means to give back, but also as a way to build friendships, expand networks, and interact with like-minded peers. This was especially important in Belgium, Portugal, and Turkey, where community was seen as central to long-term involvement.

On a practical level, many participants—especially from Romania, Spain, and Turkey—noted that volunteering helps them develop valuable skills such as leadership, communication, and job-readiness. However, despite strong motivation, young people face notable barriers: the most common being lack of time due to school or work, limited awareness of volunteering opportunities (especially in Romania, Ukraine, and Portugal), and doubts about the real-world impact of their efforts.

When asked about the potential of a digital app to support their volunteering journey, responses were overwhelmingly positive. Youth expressed interest in tools that not only provide opportunities but also offer motivation. Desired features included goal tracking, progress monitoring, and inspiring stories from other volunteers. Visual tools for tracking hours and accomplishments were especially appealing in Romania and Ukraine. Recognition systems—such as badges, certificates, and rewards—were also welcomed, provided they felt meaningful rather than overly competitive. The social and community aspect was seen as equally important in a digital space. Young people wanted to connect with peers, share experiences, and access mentorship and training. Crucially, they emphasized the need for personalization—an app that adapts to their needs, interests, availability, and emotional states. Features like reminders, encouraging messages, and custom content were seen as vital for sustained engagement.

In conclusion, the surveys highlight that while youth are eager to contribute, they need better access, emotional support, and recognition. A thoughtfully designed app—centered on personalization, motivation, and community—could play a transformative role in empowering a new generation of committed young volunteers across Europe.

Existing Apps promoting volunteering opportunities

In response to these challenges, various digital platforms have emerged to connect volunteers with NGOs and community initiatives. These platforms provide structured listings of volunteer opportunities, allowing users to find roles based on their interests, skills, and availability. Below are some of the most widely used platforms facilitating volunteer engagement:

- VolunteerMatch – Matches volunteers with organizations based on their interests and geographic location.
- GoVolunteer – A European-based platform offering diverse volunteering projects across multiple causes.
- UNV (United Nations Volunteers) – Connects individuals with humanitarian and development-related volunteering projects worldwide.
- Idealist – Provides a database of nonprofit jobs, internships, and volunteer positions.
- AllForGood – Aggregates volunteer listings from multiple sources, helping users find opportunities suited to their interests.
- GivingWay – Facilitates international volunteer placements, especially for youth looking for global experiences.
- DoSomething – Encourages activism and community service among young people through digital challenges and campaigns.
- European Solidarity Corps App - the app allows users to search and apply for various volunteer, training or employment opportunities focused on promoting unity and community support.
- HelpUp - app designed to connect young people who want to volunteer with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that need help.

While these platforms play a crucial role in increasing access to volunteering, there remains significant potential for improvement, particularly in engagement strategies, personalization, and motivation-building techniques.

Features needed in the App to foster volunteering interest

Digital applications have transformed the way young people access opportunities, communicate, and engage with their interests. A well-designed mobile application can play a crucial role in breaking down barriers to volunteering by making opportunities more visible, accessible, and engaging. By incorporating technology-driven features, the app can facilitate easy onboarding, increase motivation, and provide continuous support throughout the volunteer journey. Below is an in-depth look at key features needed in the app to foster volunteering interest and long-term commitment.

1. Geolocation-based volunteering opportunities

A location-based search tool is essential in helping users discover volunteering opportunities near them. By integrating GPS technology, the app can display available projects in real-time, sorted by proximity. This ensures that users can quickly find and engage in activities without the challenge of long travel times. Additionally, highlighting remote and online volunteering opportunities ensures inclusivity for those who may face transportation or mobility challenges.

2. Personalized recommendations and AI-driven matching

Personalization is a critical factor in increasing engagement. AI-driven algorithms can analyze user preferences, past experiences, and skills to suggest tailored volunteering opportunities. By providing recommendations that align with personal interests and availability, the app enhances the likelihood of sustained participation. Users can also set preferences to receive notifications about new opportunities that match their interests.

3. Gamification and reward systems

Incorporating gamification elements can significantly enhance user motivation. Features such as points, badges, progress tracking, and leaderboards make the experience more interactive and rewarding. Users can unlock achievements for milestones, such as completing a certain number of volunteer hours or participating in various causes. Gamification elements provide a sense of progression and encourage long-term commitment.

4. Recognition and certification system

Recognition is a key factor in sustaining motivation. Providing volunteers with digital certificates, badges, and endorsements adds value to their contributions. Partnering with educational institutions and employers to recognize volunteer hours as valid experience for academic credits or job applications can further incentivize participation. A portfolio feature within the app can allow users to showcase their achievements.

5. Mentorship and community building

A strong sense of community can significantly enhance volunteer engagement. The app should include discussion forums, peer mentorship programs, and networking spaces where experienced volunteers can guide newcomers. Connecting users with like-minded individuals fosters a sense of belonging and encourages continuous participation.

6. Impact tracking and storytelling features

Volunteers are more likely to stay engaged when they can see the impact of their work. An interactive dashboard displaying metrics, testimonials, and success stories can reinforce the value of their contributions. Users can also share their own experiences, upload photos, and engage with others through storytelling features, creating a more emotionally connected community.

7. Flexible and short-term volunteering opportunities

Given the busy schedules of young people, offering short-term and micro-volunteering opportunities allows users to engage without long-term commitments. Options such as one-time events, virtual volunteering, and weekend projects cater to individuals who may not be available for extended commitments but still want to contribute meaningfully.

8. Social media integration and sharing

Social media plays a crucial role in modern engagement. By integrating sharing features, volunteers can post their achievements, experiences, and opportunities on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. This not only raises awareness but also inspires peers to participate, further expanding the reach of the volunteering community.

9. Multi-language support and inclusivity features

Ensuring accessibility for diverse populations enhances engagement. A multi-language interface allows non-native speakers to navigate the app with ease. Additionally, features accommodating different abilities, such as text-to-speech functions, adjustable font sizes, and high-contrast modes, promote inclusivity.

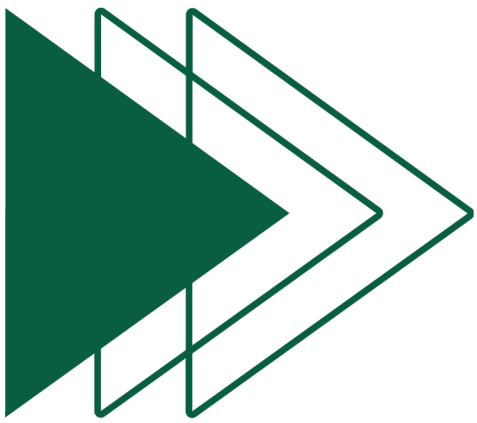
10. Notifications and personalized reminders

Push notifications and reminders keep users informed about upcoming events, deadlines, and new opportunities. Personalized messages with motivational quotes, milestone achievements, and progress summaries can keep volunteers engaged and committed.

Youth engagement in volunteering is crucial for both community development and personal growth, yet participation remains low due to several barriers. Addressing these challenges through technology can bridge the gap between young volunteers and organizations, creating a more dynamic and fulfilling experience. By implementing innovative features such as geolocation-based matching, gamification, recognition systems, and impact tracking, the "Motivate Youth" project aims to develop an app that fosters a strong culture of volunteerism among young people.

MOTIVATE YOUTH

Chapter 6: Motivation in sports



Decline in physical activity and sports participation among youth

In recent years, a lot of research has highlighted a troubling trend across Europe: a steady decline in physical activity and sports participation among young people. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), over 80% of youth and adolescents worldwide are insufficiently active, missing out on the recommended daily activity levels necessary for physical and mental well-being. While sport has long been recognized as a vital tool for health, social inclusion, and personal development, modern youth face new challenges that influence their motivation to engage in it regularly.

Meanwhile, our comparative study brings together insights from six countries – Ukraine, Portugal, Turkey, Belgium, Spain and Romania. Through surveys of young people and focus group interviews with sports coaches, trainers, and managers of sport clubs etc, we wanted to explore key motivational drivers and barriers that affect youth participation in sports.

Key questions addressed include:

- What discourages young people from continuing regular sports participation?
- How do trainers and educators perceive the motivation of youth today?
- What applications have proven effective in sustaining motivation in sports?

Reasons behind decline in physical activity and sports participation among youth

This analysis seeks not only to understand the problem, but to highlight practical, evidence-based solutions that can be adapted locally and shared across borders. Our findings through focus groups and surveys contribute to a broader European dialogue on youth well-being, public health, and the role of sport as a tool for inclusion and empowerment and increasing the motivation of youth.

Insights from the focus groups related to motivation in sports

1. **What do you believe are the primary reasons for the decline in physical activity and sports participation among young people?**

Across all six countries in this study (Ukraine, Belgium, Portugal, Turkey, Romania, and Spain) participants identified a consistent and worrying trend: youth are becoming increasingly inactive. While the causes vary by national context, common patterns emerged, highlighting the multifaceted nature of the issue.

The most universally cited factor was the dominance of digital entertainment, including video games, social media, and streaming platforms. In Belgium, youth feel it's hard to compete with the instant gratification of digital content. This opinion was also shared by Romania and Portugal.

Turkey and Spain added that screen time has become normalized in daily routines. Ukrainian youth were also described as more withdrawn into online life, contributing to reduced motivation for in-person activities.

Participants in Portugal, Turkey, Belgium, Romania, and Spain many students feel they simply don't have the time or energy for physical activity. In Belgium, this is compounded by the stress of juggling multiple priorities – school, work, and social life. Ukraine experiences this more indirectly, as unsafe conditions because of war and economic hardship often limit access to sports more than time.

Another shared theme was a shortage of relatable, local role models who promote active lifestyles. In Belgium, this leads to a perception that fitness is only for elite athletes. In Portugal and Turkey, the absence of parental support or encouragement was also noted. Ukraine and Romania highlighted a general cultural deprioritization of sports in some families and schools.
In Ukraine, the war has made unsafe environments a serious obstacle, preventing many young people from safely accessing sports infrastructure or public spaces. Portugal and Romania raised the issue of limited sports programs and poor infrastructure, especially in rural or low-income areas. Spain added that community-based sports programs are disappearing, leaving youth with few options. Turkey emphasized the lack of inclusive or accessible programs, particularly for girls or marginalized youth.

In Belgium, Romania, Turkey, and Spain, participants noted that mental health challenges – including anxiety, depression, and fear of judgment – limit participation. Many young people feel social anxiety or performance pressure, making team sports or group fitness intimidating.

2. How could an app make sports and physical activity more appealing to young people?

Across all six countries, participants saw digital tools not as a threat to physical activity, but as a potential solution if used creatively. Youth today are deeply connected to digital culture, and partners emphasized that a well-designed app could act as a powerful bridge between screens and sport.

Gamification was universally endorsed as an essential feature to keep young users engaged. In Belgium, it's all about badges, leaderboards, and achievements tied to real progress. Ukraine similarly highlighted that challenges and measurable results attract youth. Portugal and Spain proposed daily challenges and streaks as a way to introduce consistency. Romania added that celebrating small wins helps sustain motivation and confidence. In Turkey, variety-based workouts and visual progress tracking were considered vital for engagement.

Youth don't just want to move – they want to move together. Belgium emphasized sports buddy finders, team goals, and virtual group events. Ukraine suggested that a common communication network would boost motivation. Spain and Portugal underlined the importance of social challenges, group chats, and fun interactions that reflect how youth already use digital platforms.

Also, youth across countries stressed the importance of customized content. In Turkey, adaptive routines based on fitness levels and cultural context were key. Romania supported personalized playlists, story-based engagement, and interactive feedback. Portugal and Spain suggested using trending language, music, and humour to reflect local youth culture. Ukraine emphasized offline accessibility as a key consideration in regions with limited connectivity.

Mental wellness was seen as a necessary component of the app, not a separate issue. Belgium proposing mindfulness tools, mental check-ins, and body-positive messaging. Romania and Spain agreed. Turkey noted the need for non-judgmental, low-pressure environments.

Several countries wanted the app to not only support online activity, but also to link back to real-life opportunities. In Belgium, this meant maps of local events and discounts for sports gear.

Portugal and Spain wanted the app to make local activities more visible and accessible. Turkey saw the app as a way to break urban barriers and guide users to inclusive programming.
So to summarize, a successful app must combine:

- Gamification for engagement,
- Social features for connection,
- Customization for inclusion,
- Emotional support for resilience,
- Local integration for action.

3. **What features in an app would help youth overcome barriers such as lack of time, resources, or access to facilities?**

Almost all countries emphasized the importance of features addressing lack of time and resources.

- Short, Equipment-Free Workout. This was one of the most common suggestions, appearing in Ukraine, Portugal, Romania, and Spain.
- Flexible Scheduling and Micro-Workouts. Belgium suggested flexible scheduling and reminders, as well as the ability to suggest mini-workouts for short time slots. Portugal and Spain also mentioned breaking workouts into small blocks or suggesting early morning/evening routines and micro-workouts. Romania emphasized integration with calendars.
- Belgium, Portugal, Romania, and Spain proposed features to find nearby gyms, sports complexes, parks, or community centres offering free or low-cost access.
- Ukraine focused on practicality and adaptability: "quick 15-20 minute workouts," "workouts without the use of special equipment or space," and "workouts with different levels of difficulty (from beginners to professionals)."
- Portugal offered universal solutions: "quick, equipment-free workout routines," "using location-based services to show free or low-cost activities nearby," and "breaking workouts into small time blocks."
- Turkey emphasized that the app should offer variety-based workouts, real-time progress visualization, and adaptive routines tailored to fitness levels.
- Despite some differences, most countries agree that an effective mobile app for overcoming barriers to sports participation among youth should offer short, flexible, equipment-free workouts, along with the ability to find accessible sports facilities.
- Beyond these basic functionalities, there were variations in emphasis. Belgium stands out with its focus on the social aspect (Sport Buddies) and gamification, while Turkey underscores the importance of visual appeal and cultural relevance. Romania and Spain, in addition to practical features, also highlight educational aspects (time management). Ukraine focuses on adaptability and varying difficulty levels.

4. How might an app use gamification (e.g., challenges, achievements, rewards) to encourage consistent physical activity?

While many core gamification elements are universally desired, there are interesting nuances in emphasis across the countries.
All six countries explicitly mentioned challenges as a key gamification tool. These are typically envisioned as weekly or monthly tasks, ranging from step goals to specific workout completions. The idea is to keep the experience fresh and provide clear objectives.
Digital trophies (Portugal, Romania, Spain), fitness badges (Portugal, Spain), and unlockable achievements (Turkey, Spain) are widely supported as ways to recognize progress and provide a sense of accomplishment. Belgium also highlights the importance of rewarding "milestones unique to them," emphasizing personalization. Rewards are a crucial element, with all countries suggesting some form of reward system. Ukraine focus group proposed uniquely emphasizes tasks and challenges that "need to be shared or combined to be completed in groups," highlighting a strong social motivation.

5. In what ways could an app foster a sense of competition or teamwork to motivate youth to participate in sports?

To effectively motivate youth in sports, an app can strategically integrate features that leverage both competition and teamwork. Feedback from Ukraine, Belgium, Portugal, Turkey, Romania, and Spain highlights several key approaches.
Many countries emphasize competitive elements to drive engagement:

- Leaderboards. Almost everyone recommended, leaderboards can be configured for friends (Belgium), teammates (Belgium), or even public rankings (Ukraine, Spain). The goal is to foster a sense of friendly rivalry and encourage users to compare and outdo each other.
- Virtual Tournaments/Leagues. Portugal, Romania, and Spain specifically suggest virtual tournaments or league-style scoreboards, adding a structured competitive format that mirrors real-world sports.
- Friend vs. Friend Competitions. Turkey and Romania propose direct "friend vs. friend" challenges or "challenge circles" to enhance personalized competition and accountability among peers.
- Public/Social Recognition. Ukraine advocates for public results, shareable on social media, to amplify competitiveness and the desire to perform well. Belgium also supports social media integration for sharing progress and achievements, which can motivate friends to join.

- Regional/State-Level Competitions. Ukraine suggests the adoption of the app at a state or regional level to facilitate competition between regions, leveraging a broader, institutionalized sense of rivalry

Alongside competition, a strong emphasis is placed on fostering teamwork. Team challenges are a core idea across all countries. Users can form or join teams (Belgium, Romania) with friends, family, classmates (Portugal), or sports clubs/schools (Ukraine). These teams then work towards collective goals in weekly or monthly challenges.

Several countries, particularly Turkey, Romania, and Spain, highlight the importance of healthy competition and inclusive approaches to prevent discouragement or exclusion. Turkey emphasizes "encouraging collaboration rather than pure ranking" to reduce exclusion and build community. Spain advises that features should "prioritize friendly competition to avoid creating pressure. For introverted or remote users, Romania recommends "digital multiplayer games and private leaderboards" to simulate group participation while maintaining comfort.

6. How could an app connect young people to local sports programs, trainers, or fitness groups?

To effectively connect young people with local sports programs, trainers, and fitness groups, an app should combine several key features.

An ideal app would be user-friendly, interactive, localized, and socially engaging—offering not only access to sports but also fostering a sense of community, trust, and enthusiasm among young people. The most commonly emphasized features across all countries-participants were location-based directories, simple registration and messaging, and building trust through verified trainer and club information.

Localization and Access to Information Portugal, Turkey, Spain, Ukraine, Romania emphasized this need for clear, organized access to local opportunities. The app should include an interactive map or searchable directory based on sport type, age group, and location.

Focus groups of Portugal, Turkey, Romania, Spain, Ukraine suggested registration and communication tools to simplify participation. In-app registration for programs and built-in messaging with trainers or organizers can reduce entry barriers and build trust.

Turkey, Romania, Spain focus groups highlighted needs for Informational Support and Engagement. Trainer profiles with videos, user reviews, and push notifications about local events or tryouts can increase awareness and engagement. Features like trainer intros, Q&A sessions, and user feedback to humanize access and attract youth.

In Belgium and Spain emphasized the role of Social Interaction and Peer Motivation. Features like activity feeds, the ability to share events with friends, or invite peers can encourage participation through social influence.

In Ukraine, Turkey, stressed the importance of official authorization and trust-building through verified information. Mandatory registration and verification of institutions, teams, or trainers can build a secure and credible platform.

7. What tools or features could an app include to help youth set and track fitness goals?

An effective fitness goal-setting app for youth should combine personalization, visual progress tracking, motivation, adaptability, and social interaction. Across all countries, the most commonly emphasized features were personalized goal-setting, visual progress tools, and motivational systems, showing a shared vision of how technology can empower young people to stay active and committed to their wellness goals.

The app should help users create realistic and individualized goals based on fitness level, habits, and preferences. This can be done through guided setups or quizzes.
Spain, Romania, Portugal, Belgium highlighted the importance of personalization, with tools like guided wizards and quizzes to tailor goals to each user.

Visual tools like graphs, dashboards, streak counters, and achievement summaries help youth see their growth in areas like strength, endurance, or consistency. Romania, Turkey, Portugal, Belgium, Spain recommended progress trackers, dashboards, and regular summaries to visualize achievements and keep motivation high. Push notifications, motivational messages, and reward systems (e.g., badges or virtual awards) can reinforce engagement and support consistency.

Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Turkey emphasized reminder systems, in-app rewards, and motivational alerts to keep youth on track.
The app should allow for dynamic goal adjustments based on performance, including suggestions for scaling up or simplifying goals depending on user progress.

Belgium, Turkey noted the need for adaptive systems that evolve with the user's development and regular prompts to reassess and refine goals.

Allowing users to share results or progress photos with friends, reflect after sessions, or engage with peer groups can strengthen motivation through emotional and social connections.

Ukraine, Romania, Portugal suggested social sharing, team tracking, and reflection tools to create a deeper connection to one's fitness journey.

8. How might an app integrate social features (e.g., sharing progress, group challenges) to keep young people engaged in physical activities?

To keep young people motivated and engaged in physical activity, integrating social features into a fitness app is essential. Across all countries, there was strong consensus on the importance of community, peer interaction, and gamified engagement. Young people are more likely to stay engaged in physical activities when fitness feels social, fun, and shared. The most commonly emphasized features across countries include progress sharing, group challenges, and interactive feedback tools (likes, comments, emojis). By creating a fitness environment that mirrors the interactivity and support of social media, the app can foster a vibrant community that turns movement into a collective experience.

Users should be able to share personal milestones, completed workouts, and achievements through photos, videos, or stories—similar to social media platforms. Spain, Romania, Ukraine, Portugal, Belgium, Turkey all emphasized progress sharing, especially through dynamic formats like stories, highlight reels, or public profiles.

Group-based challenges, themed clubs (e.g., "morning joggers"), or team competitions can turn solo fitness into a shared journey and increase accountability. Spain, Romania, Turkey, Portugal, Belgium suggested group challenges as a way to add fun, connection, and collective motivation.

Features like likes, comments, emoji reactions, and digital shout-outs can create a supportive atmosphere and boost morale. Romania, Ukraine, Portugal, Spain, Belgium highlighted the role of positive peer reinforcement in building a sense of community.

Nudges when friends complete workouts, reminders to check in, or congratulatory prompts when someone hits a milestone help maintain regular interaction and engagement. Ukraine, Belgium proposed real-time notifications and interaction prompts to sustain momentum and celebrate progress.

Allowing users to share content directly to popular apps like Instagram or WhatsApp enhances visibility and peer involvement beyond the app. Turkey, Belgium supported integration with external social platforms to widen the reach and relevance of users' fitness journeys.

9. What type of content (e.g., workout tutorials, sports tips) would be most valuable to include in an app aimed at promoting physical activity among youth?

To engage young people and support their physical activity journeys, fitness app content should be short, practical, relatable, and varied. Across countries, there was strong agreement on video-based tutorials, relatable stories, and educational tips that are easy to understand and fun to use. Also, the focus groups highlighted the most engaging fitness app content for youth should be diverse, and tailored to different fitness levels and lifestyles. Video tutorials, relatable stories, and practical tips around health, recovery, and motivation were universally recommended. The key is to balance fun and functionality, helping youth feel empowered, informed, and inspired to stay active.

10. How could an app address psychological barriers, such as fear of judgment or lack of confidence, to encourage youth participation in sports?

To support emotional well-being and reduce psychological barriers to participation, the app must prioritize privacy, personalization, positive reinforcement, and mental health support. The most commonly emphasized features across countries include anonymous tracking, body-positive messaging, and progress-focused motivation. Above all, the app should help youth feel seen, supported, and confident – no matter where they're starting from.

The fear of judgment, failure, or not being "fit enough" discourages many young people from participating in physical activity. The app should help users feel safe, accepted, and supported regardless of their fitness level or body type. Spain, Romania, Portugal, Turkey, Ukraine, Belgium all emphasized the need for a non-competitive, inclusive environment that avoids public rankings and focuses on personal progress.

Customizable privacy settings, private goal tracking, and the option to participate in challenges anonymously allow youth to engage without fear of exposure or comparison. Spain, Romania, Portugal, Turkey, Belgium, Ukraine recommended features like private profiles, invisible progress, and anonymous challenge participation.

Shifting the narrative from performance to consistency, effort, and self-growth helps build confidence. Positive reinforcement such as "You showed up – that's a win" encourages persistence. Spain, Romania, Ukraine, Turkey, Portugal supported celebrating small wins, motivational messages, and affirming progress as essential for youth engagement.

Educational content on mental resilience, confidence-building, and healthy body image can help reduce anxiety and promote self-efficacy. Belgium, Ukraine, Romania, Turkey, Spain advocated for mental health support, body positivity messaging, and realistic representations of youth (not just elite athletes).

Peer interaction should be designed to uplift rather than compete. Encouraging comments, supportive communities, and anonymous forums can foster connection without comparison. Spain, Romania, Turkey suggested positive peer engagement, such as supportive feeds, safe discussions, and emphasis on shared journeys.

Insights from the surveys related to motivation in sports

To better understand reasons to decline in physical activity and sports participation among youth, six partner organizations conducted national surveys targeting youth. The responses provide valuable insights into the aspects of motivation, barriers, and potential app features to address the decline in physical activity and sports participation among youth – and how digital tools could support this motivation.

Staying Healthy and Fit – emerged as the predominant motivator across all countries as a motivation to participate in physical activities or sports. This consistent finding underscores a universal awareness among youth about the health benefits of physical activity. Youth in Belgium, Portugal, and Ukraine mentioned that fun and enjoyment are the key. This indicates that while health is a primary driver, the intrinsic pleasure derived from the activity itself is also crucial. Discipline is Uniquely mentioned in the Ukrainian sample, indicating that for some Ukrainian youth, the structured aspect of discipline can be a motivator.

The main reasons youth do not participate in physical activities or sports regularly are: lack of Time (Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Ukraine), indicating that busy schedules (academic, social, etc.) are a primary obstacle to regular participation, lack of Motivation is as a major barrier in Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and Ukraine. Lack of Facilities or Resources frequently cited in Spain, Turkey and Ukraine, suggesting that geographical access or financial constraints related to sports facilities and equipment are significant hurdles in these regions. Respondents in Spain and Turkey mentioned lack of Interest. Appeared as a barrier In Belgium and Spain appeared no Support or Encouragement. A small percentage in Belgium and Ukraine already participate regularly, indicating a subset for whom these barriers are less relevant.
The response to the question "Would you be more likely to participate in sports or physical activities if there were an app that made it easier to find local events or sports programs?" was largely positive across all countries.

Personalized challenges and goals were generally seen as "Very helpful" or "Somewhat helpful" across all countries for an app to offer personalized fitness challenges and goals based on your interests and fitness level. "Not helpful" / "Not sure" responses were minimal, suggesting a strong overall belief in the utility of personalization.

About the rewards in app (e.g., badges, points, discounts on sports equipment) for achieving fitness goals. While many responded with "Yes, definitely" (especially in Belgium and Portugal), there was a significant proportion across all countries that selected "Maybe, depending on the rewards" (prevalent in Ukraine, Spain, and Turkey). This suggests that the type and perceived value.

Across Belgium, Spain, Turkey and Ukraine, workout Plans and exercises would help youth more likely to engage in physical activity, underscoring the need for structured guidance on what to do.

Progress Tracking and Milestones are highly valued in Belgium, Portugal, and Ukraine. Tips for Improving Performance are frequently selected in Spain, Turkey and Portugal. Success Stories from others only Mentioned in Spain.

“Would an app that connects you with other young people for group challenges or competitions increase your motivation to stay active?” – while "Yes, definitely" was a strong response in Belgium, Portugal, and Turkey, a notable number in Ukraine and Spain responded "Maybe, depending on the group" or "No, I prefer to exercise alone." This suggests that while social connection and competition can be powerful motivators for some, others prefer individual pursuits or are selective about their social fitness circles. An app should ideally offer both options, or allow users to choose their level of social engagement.

Reminders and notifications were consistently rated as "Very important" across Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and Turkey. Some respondents in Ukraine and Spain also rated it as "Somewhat important."

Most respondents in all countries answered "Yes, it would motivate me to get more active." if an app will provide information and resources about the benefits of physical activity (e.g., mental health, physical health, stress reduction). However, a significant portion across all countries (especially Ukraine and Turkey) also selected "Maybe, depending on the content." This implies that simply providing information isn't enough; the content needs to be engaging, relevant, and presented in an accessible way to truly resonate with youth.

“Would access to virtual coaching or workout support (e.g., trainers, fitness groups) through an app make you more likely to participate in sports and physical activities?” – "Yes, definitely" was a common answer, particularly in Belgium, Portugal, and Turkey, suggesting that guided support is valuable for many. However, "Maybe, depending on the coaching style" was also very frequent across all countries, including Spain, Ukraine and Turkey. This indicates that the quality, personality, and approach of the virtual coaching are critical for its effectiveness.

As an overall trends and conclusions across all countries, we wanted to mention that:

1. "Lack of time" and "Lack of motivation" are the most universal barriers. Apps need to offer flexible, time-efficient, and highly engaging content to combat these.
2. Youth across all countries are very open to an app that helps them find local events and programs, indicating a gap in current accessibility.
3. Personalized challenges and goals are highly valued, suggesting that one-size-fits-all approaches are less effective.
4. Rewards Need to Be Meaningful. While rewards are appealing, their effectiveness hinges on being relevant and desirable to the individual.
5. Workout plans, exercises, and progress tracking are preferred content types, reflecting a desire for direct guidance and feedback on performance.
6. While group challenges and competitions appeal to many, a significant portion prefers individual exercise or is selective about social involvement. Apps should offer both options.
7. Timely reminders are universally recognized as important for adherence and consistency.
8. While youth are open to learning about benefits, the delivery of this information must be compelling.
9. Virtual coaching is promising, but its success depends heavily on the coaching style and individual preference for guided versus independent workouts.

These findings provide a robust foundation for developing an app that is tailored to the expressed needs and preferences of youth in these diverse European countries, with a strong focus on addressing common barriers to physical activity.

Existing fitness and sports motivation apps (e.g., workout trackers, community challenges).

In response to these challenges, there are several platforms to provide structured listings of sport opportunities, allowing users to find roles based on their interests, skills, and availability. Below are some of the most widely used platforms for fitness and sports motivation:

- Strava – a GPS-based activity tracker for running, cycling, and hiking, but supports over 40 other sport types.
- BetterMe – a comprehensive health and wellness platform with a strong focus on personalized fitness and mental well-being. It originated in Ukraine and has gained significant global reach.
- Google Fit – a basic activity tracker and a central hub for health and fitness data gathered from various apps and wearables on Android devices.
- Apple Fitness+ – a subscription-based fitness and wellness service offering a vast library of trainer-guided workout videos and meditations, deeply integrated with the Apple ecosystem (iPhone, iPad, Apple Watch, Apple TV).
- WOWBODY – a comprehensive women's fitness and nutrition program, primarily focused on home workouts and healthy eating for weight loss and overall well-being. It is a Ukrainian-origin app.
- Freeletics is a fitness app that provides personalized HIIT (high-intensity interval training) workouts tailored to individual goals and fitness levels.
- HeiaHeia is a Finnish social wellness app developed by HeiaHeia Ltd. that promotes holistic health by allowing users to log physical activities, set personal goals and engage in a supportive community.

These apps demonstrate various successful strategies to motivate users, combining robust tracking with social interaction, personalized content, and gamified experiences.

Features needed in the app to encourage sports participation (e.g., social challenges, rewards for milestones)

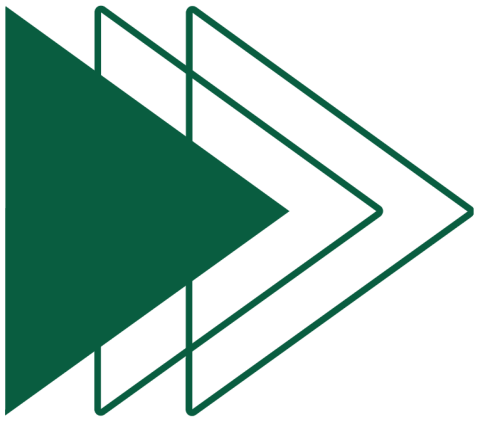
Trainers noted that it would be useful to use the following features to motivate young people:

- Group fitness challenges with friends, schools, or clubs
- Badges, points, or real-life incentives (e.g., sport equipment) for achievements.
- Tracking fitness goals with progress and reminders
- Gamified apps with levels, ranks, or avatars
- Share workouts, achievements, and photos with friends
- Communicate via apps with teammates, trainers, or other users
- Adaptive Workouts to fitness level, available time, and goals
- Mood tracking, mindfulness activities, or motivational messages
- Offline access to workouts for use without internet access
- Ukrainian Language Support
- Integrate with nearby sports clubs or community events

At that time, the surveyed youth identified the following motivational components that could increase their physical activity and participation in sports:
Most respondents said that the app may have increased their involvement in sports, but depending on its functionality. Also, most respondents said that the app would be very useful or somewhat useful to them. Almost everyone responded positively that if the application had the ability to send notifications, it would significantly motivate them to exercise.

MOTIVATE YOUTH

Chapter 7: Analysis of existing mobile Apps



The apps presented in this chapter have been carefully selected for their relevance to fostering motivation across the four key fields explored in the Motivate Youth project—education, work, volunteering, and sports. Each app offers unique features, tools, or strategies that support goal-setting, focus, skill-building, and sustained engagement. By examining their functionalities, we can identify practical design elements and motivational mechanisms that could inspire and inform the development of the Motivate Youth app.

Education:

Clockwork Tomato is a Pomodoro-inspired time management app designed to increase productivity by breaking work into 25-minute sessions with short breaks. It helps young students stay focused and manage their study time effectively, making learning more engaging and less overwhelming. It acts as a timer, clock, and activity log, and has a relaxing display and customizable interface with over 50 configuration options.

Cold Turkey is a powerful productivity application that helps users stay focused by blocking distracting websites and applications. Ideal for students and professionals, it prevents mindless web browsing by allowing users to create customized block lists for different study or work sessions. Instead of succumbing to digital distractions, users receive encouraging messages when they try to access blocked sites and can track the time they've saved over the course of a day, week, or month.

Forest is a productivity app that helps users stay focused and turns concentration into a rewarding experience. When studying or working, users plant a virtual tree that grows as long as they stay focused on the task. When they leave the app to seek distractions, the tree withers, reinforcing self-discipline. This app is particularly useful for young people, encouraging deep concentration, reducing phone distractions, and promoting effective study habits. Over time, users cultivate a virtual forest that represents their commitment to productive learning.

Duolingo app that makes learning fun through gamification, bite-sized lessons, and daily streaks. It helps users develop reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills in multiple languages through interactive exercises.

Quizlet is a versatile online learning platform that offers multiple learning modes to suit different learning preferences. Users can create and study customizable flashcards, play interactive games, and take practice quizzes to enhance their learning experience. The platform is accessible through web browsers and mobile apps, and supports multiple languages to cater to a diverse user base.

Work:

RescueTime assists individuals in staying motivated at work by providing insights into how they actually spend their time. This helps users prioritize important tasks and reduce distractions. The application sits conveniently in the taskbar for easy access, offering daily focus goals tailored to your work style and meeting schedule. It also sends alerts when distractions occur, helping you regain your focus. At the end of the day or week, RescueTime generates detailed productivity reports, giving you a clear overview of how you managed your time and highlighting areas for improvement.

Fabulous is a self-care and productivity app designed to help you stay motivated at work by prioritizing your well-being. The app acts as a daily coach, reinforcing positive habits through reminders and structured routines. Users can create morning, lunch, and evening rituals to improve focus, efficiency, and overall productivity. By promoting self-discipline and inner strength, Fabulous helps people stay energized, motivated and ready to tackle their to-do lists with a balanced mindset.

Pep Talk is a motivational app that helps you stay inspired at work with audio speeches from leaders, public figures, and celebrities. Whether you're at work, commuting or exercising, you can listen to powerful messages that motivate you to stay focused and productive. With a variety of speakers to choose from, Pep Talk lets you find the right voice to keep you motivated and energized throughout the day.

Volunteering:

The European Solidarity Corps App is a mobile application designed to connect young people aged 18-30 with solidarity projects across Europe. Through the app, users can create and manage their profiles, access learning resources and engage in a community by sharing and interacting with photo diary entries. In addition, the app allows users to search and apply for various volunteer, training or employment opportunities focused on promoting unity and community support. Available for both iOS and Android platforms, the app is a comprehensive tool for young people who want to make a positive contribution to society while developing their skills and experience.

HelpUp is a free mobile application designed to connect young people who want to volunteer with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that need help. Developed by a team of students from Colegio Montserrat Spain, the app addresses the challenge many young people face in finding suitable volunteer opportunities, especially those under 18 or without local connections. Users can create personalized profiles detailing their interests, availability and location to be matched with relevant volunteer opportunities. After participating, volunteers can rate their experience and earn points that can be redeemed for rewards such as educational courses and museum tickets. Recognized for its innovative approach, HelpUp was named Europe's most creative problem-solving company in 2022.

Sport:

Freeletics is a fitness app that provides personalized HIIT (high-intensity interval training) workouts tailored to individual goals and fitness levels. Using artificial intelligence and the knowledge of sports scientists, the app offers a variety of workout styles, including bodyweight exercises, running and strength training, allowing users to exercise anytime, anywhere without the need for gym equipment. To motivate young people to exercise, Freeletics incorporates several key features. The AI-powered trainer designs workouts based on the user's preferences, fitness level and goals, ensuring exercises are both challenging and achievable. With routines that can be done anywhere, Freeletics removes common barriers to exercise such as lack of time, space or equipment, making it easier for young people to stay active.

HeiaHeia is a Finnish social wellness app developed by HeiaHeia Ltd. that promotes holistic health by allowing users to log physical activities, set personal goals and engage in a supportive community. The app provides a comprehensive platform for tracking over 600 different activities, from traditional exercise to hobbies, catering to different interests and fitness levels. The app emphasizes the philosophy of "casual wellbeing" and encourages people of all ages and activity levels to take charge of their health in a fun and personalized way. HeiaHeia's user-friendly interface and gamified features such as wellness points and challenges motivate users to maintain an active lifestyle. The app also supports integration with various wearable devices for seamless tracking of workouts and daily activities. Available in multiple languages, HeiaHeia has attracted users from over 150 countries, fostering a global community focused on improving well-being.

Strava is a fitness-tracking app that combines activity monitoring with social networking features for a wide range of physical activities, including running, biking, hiking and swimming. Users can track their workouts using GPS, analyze performance metrics such as distance, speed and elevation, and share their progress with a global community. The app's social component allows users to follow friends, join clubs, participate in challenges and give "kudos" to others' activities, increasing motivation and engagement. Strava offers both free and premium subscriptions, the latter providing advanced features such as personalized workout plans, detailed performance analysis, and safety tools such as real-time location sharing.

Categorization by field and functionality:

Time management and productivity:
- Clockwork Tomato
- Cold Turkey
- Forest
- RescueTime
- Fabulous

Education and learning:
- Duolingo
- Quizlet

Motivation and well-being:
- Fabulous
- Pep Talk

Volunteering and community engagement:
- European Solidarity Corps App
- HelpUp

Fitness and health:
- Freeletics
- HeiaHeia
- Strava

Pros and Cons of Existing Apps

The effectiveness of these applications relies on three main pillars: community support, gamification, and goal setting with tracking to enhance user motivation and engagement, making the pursuit of personal goals a more enjoyable and collaborative experience.

1. Goal setting and tracking

Many apps, regardless of their primary focus, incorporate features that allow users to set personal goals and monitor their progress:

- Sports Apps: Applications like Freeletics and Strava enable users to define fitness objectives and track their achievements over time.
- Productivity Apps: Tools such as RescueTime and Clockwork Tomato allow users to set productivity goals and monitor their work patterns.
-

2. Gamification elements

Integrating game-like features to enhance user engagement is a common strategy:

- **Forest**: Encourages focus by allowing users to grow virtual trees during periods of concentration.
- **Duolingo**: Utilizes levels, rewards, and challenges to make language learning engaging.

3. Social integration and community support

This feature enhances user engagement and motivation by fostering a sense of community and accountability.

- **Strava**: This fitness app incorporates social networking features, allowing users to connect with friends, join clubs, participate in challenges, and share achievements, fostering a sense of community among athletes.
- **Duolingo**: In the realm of language learning, Duolingo offers community features where learners can engage in discussions, join clubs, and motivate each other, enhancing the overall learning experience.
- **Forest**: While primarily a focus-enhancing app, Forest allows users to plant trees together, promoting a shared commitment to productivity and environmental sustainability.

Upon analyzing the applications in question, four primary weaknesses emerge that may limit their effectiveness:

1. Privacy and data security concerns: Many fitness and productivity apps collect a lot of user data, raising potential privacy and security concerns. Applications like Strava have faced criticism for exposing sensitive location data, raising significant privacy issues that can deter young users who are increasingly conscious of data security.
2. Promotion of unhealthy behaviours: Fitness apps like Freeletics and HeiaHeia encourage physical activity, but may unintentionally encourage excessive exercise or unhealthy behaviours, especially among those who are prone to body image issues or eating disorders.
3. Inadequate personalization: Apps such as Cold Turkey and Clockwork Tomato offer limited customization options that may not meet the diverse needs and preferences of young users, reducing overall efficiency and user satisfaction.
4. Insufficient social interaction features: While some apps offer community support, most of these apps presented are designed to build individual habits and routines and boost productivity but do not include social engagement components: Clockwork Tomato, Cold Turkey, Forest, RescueTime, Fabulous, Pep Talk. Integrating social components fosters a sense of community, enhances motivation, and encourages sustained engagement among users. However, not all apps require social features; their inclusion should align with the app's purpose and the preferences of its target audience.

Common features that succeed in engaging users.

1. Gamification elements

Gamification integrates game-like elements into non-game contexts to stimulate user engagement and motivation. Key components include points, which are numerical values awarded for performing specific actions, providing immediate feedback and stimulating a sense of achievement. Badges serve as visual symbols representing achievements, motivating users to reach new milestones. Leaderboards display where users stand in relation to others, stimulating competition and encouraging improved performance. Levels provide a structured path and clear goals as users progress by earning points or completing tasks. Challenges and Missions present time-bound tasks that provide short-term goals, keeping users engaged and promoting regular interaction.

Duolingo: Utilizes levels, rewards, and challenges to make language learning interactive.

Forest: Encourages focus by allowing users to grow virtual trees during concentration periods.

2. Social integration and community support

Integrating social features into mobile apps significantly increases user engagement by promoting a sense of community and facilitating interaction. Features such as in-app messaging and group chats enable real-time communication, allowing users to connect and collaborate seamlessly. Forums and discussion boards offer users platforms for sharing knowledge and engaging in conversations on specific topics, strengthening community ties. Encouraging user-generated content and offering personalization options fosters a sense of ownership and relevance among users. Event coordination tools such as shared calendars promote offline interactions and strengthen community connections. Timely push notifications keep users informed of community activities, stimulating regular app usage and sustained engagement.

- **Strava**: Allows users to connect, share achievements, and participate in group challenges.
- **HeiaHeia**: Provides a platform for users to engage in group activities and support each other's fitness goals.

3. Personalized experiences

Personalized experiences in mobile apps involve tailoring app content and functionality to align with individual user preferences, behaviours and needs. This approach increases user engagement by making interactions more relevant and intuitive. By analyzing user data, apps can provide personalized content, recommendations and interfaces that resonate with each user, fostering deeper connection and satisfaction. Such personalization not only enhances the user experience but also increases retention rates, as users are more likely to continue using an app that feels unique to them.

- **Freeletics**: Offers customized workout plans based on user goals and fitness levels.
- **Fabulous**: Provides personalized habit-building routines to improve well-being.

4. Progress tracking and analytics

Progress tracking and analysis in mobile applications involves monitoring and analyzing user interactions to increase engagement and optimize application performance. By collecting data on user behaviour, such as session duration, feature usage, and navigation patterns, developers gain insights into how users engage with the app. This information helps to identify popular features, detect user abandonment points, and understand overall user satisfaction.

RescueTime: Tracks digital activity to provide insights into productivity patterns.
Quizlet: Enables users to track learning progress through various study modes.

5. Reward systems

Reward systems in mobile apps are designed to increase user engagement and loyalty by offering incentives for specific behaviors. These systems often include elements such as points, badges and leaderboards that motivate users to interact with the app more frequently. For example, implementing a loyalty point system allows users to accumulate points based on their level of engagement, which can be redeemed for various rewards such as in-app currency, special perks or physical goods.

HelpUp: Offers incentives like educational courses for volunteer participation.
Duolingo: Provides virtual rewards and streaks to motivate daily practice.

These shared features contribute to the effectiveness of the applications in engaging users across various domains.

Shortcomings that fail to address youth needs

Despite the diverse functionalities of the analyzed applications, significant needs of young people remain insufficiently addressed.

In conclusion, the Motivate Youth app will be designed as a comprehensive platform that brings together key motivational tools, task tracking, rewards, goal setting, prioritization features, and daily motivational quotes, to support young people in four interconnected fields: sports, higher education, volunteering, and work.

While existing apps may partially address similar goals within individual fields, there is currently no application that combines all four domains into a single, integrated experience. In particular, the volunteering sector lacks digital solutions specifically aimed at sustaining motivation over time. The Motivate Youth app will fill this gap by providing users with a unified space to monitor and balance their activities across all areas, giving them a clear overview of their progress and achievements. This holistic approach will not only encourage consistent engagement but also help young people see the connections and mutual benefits between their efforts in education, work, sports, and volunteering.

Lessons Learned

Young Europeans today face significant challenges, including rising living costs, environmental concerns and mental health issues. A recent Eurobarometer survey of young people found that 40% of 16-30-year-olds are concerned about rising prices, while environmental and climate change issues are a priority for a third of them. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated mental health issues among young people, leading to increased anxiety and depression. In this context, mobile apps such as Fabulous and Forest aim to promote well-being and productivity. Fabulous encourages positive habits and self-discipline, while Forest uses gamification to reduce phone distractions. However, their effectiveness may be limited by the need to purchase apps to unlock the full benefits.

The pervasive use of social media and technology among youth has become a pressing concern, leading to various unproductive habits and negative outcomes. Excessive screen time often distracts adolescents from essential activities such as homework, physical exercise, and family interactions, thereby hindering their overall development. Moreover, constant engagement with digital devices can disrupt sleep patterns, contributing to fatigue and diminished cognitive functions. The phenomenon known as "popcorn brain" describes individuals who, accustomed to rapid digital stimulation, struggle with slower-paced tasks and real-world interactions, impacting their socioemotional functioning.

Cold Turkey is a website blocker designed to help users focus on work or study by blocking distracting websites and apps, including social media platforms and games. Users can customize block lists and even block the entire internet, ensuring a distraction-free environment for increased productivity. Another effective tool is **Forest,** an app that encourages users to stay focused by planting a virtual tree that grows when they avoid using their phones. If the user leaves the app, the tree dies, promoting self-discipline and reducing unnecessary screen time. Not only does this gamified approach help users focus on tasks, but it also contributes to environmental efforts, as the app works with organizations to plant real trees based on user engagement. By incorporating these apps into their routines, young people can develop healthier digital habits, increase productivity, and mitigate the negative effects associated with excessive technology use.

RescueTime is another tool that helps users manage screen time and enhance productivity. RescueTime provides insights into how users spend their time on digital devices, tracking usage patterns and identifying areas where they may be losing productivity. By offering detailed reports and setting focus goals, RescueTime helps users become more aware of their digital habits and make conscious efforts to minimize distractions.

Gaps in the market that the "Motivate Youth" app could fill.

There are two significant gaps in the current app market: the need for increased social engagement and comprehensive mental health support for young people. While many existing apps focus on individual productivity, they often neglect the importance of community connection and emotional well-being. By integrating features that encourage peer-to-peer interaction and offer accessible mental health resources, Motivate Youth can create a more holistic platform that addresses the diverse needs of today's youth.

To ensure sustained engagement, the app can incorporate several key features. First, a community forum will allow users to share experiences, seek advice, and build support networks, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual encouragement. Second, gamified goal-setting will enable users to set personal goals and earn rewards upon completion or compete with peers, making self-improvement both enjoyable and motivating. Third, the app will include a dedicated Resources section designed to provide users with valuable and inspiring content that supports their journey across all four fields—sports, higher education, volunteering, and work. This section will feature a carefully curated collection of articles, blog posts, documentaries, podcasts, and other multimedia materials. The aim is to cover a wide spectrum of topics, from practical "how-to" guides and skill-development tips to motivational stories and thought-provoking insights.
By offering this diverse range of resources, the app will serve not only as a task and goal management tool but also as a learning hub. Users will have easy access to relevant, credible, and engaging content that can deepen their understanding, broaden their perspectives, and keep their motivation high. This section will be regularly updated to remain fresh, dynamic, and aligned with the evolving needs and interests of young people.

By combining these elements, "Motivate Youth" could create a comprehensive platform that not only boosts productivity but also cultivates social connections and mental well-being, ultimately enriching the lives of its users.

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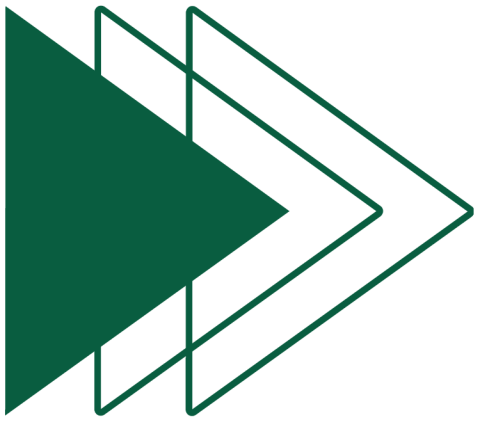
Chapter 8: Recommendations for the "Motivate Youth" App



Young people across Europe face similar challenges in maintaining motivation across key areas of their lives—education, work, volunteering, and sports. The findings from the Motivate Youth research, including surveys and focus groups conducted in Spain, Belgium, Portugal, Turkey, Ukraine, and Romania, provide valuable insight into the motivational patterns and preferences of youth today. This chapter outlines cross-field recommendations to guide the development of a user-centered and motivational digital application.

A. Unified Strategies for Motivating Youth Across Fields

Despite the diversity of activities (academic, professional, civic, or athletic) young people's motivational needs show significant overlap across sectors. The following unified strategies emerged as essential:

1.1 Goal Orientation and Progress Visibility

Youth are more motivated when they can set personal goals and track their progress in real time. Whether pursuing educational achievements, volunteering hours, or sports milestones, youth need clear feedback loops that highlight their improvement and validate their efforts. A digital app should integrate progress-tracking tools and offer visual summaries (e.g., progress bars, badges, personal dashboards) that apply across contexts.

1.2 Low Barrier to Entry

Many young people hesitate to get involved due to a fear of failure, lack of experience, or perceived complexity. Across all four sectors, the need for clear expectations, simple onboarding, and starter-level opportunities was emphasized. An app that showcases beginner-friendly options and provides step-by-step support can build confidence and increase initial engagement.

1.3 Tangible Outcomes

Motivation rises when activities lead to concrete, visible results—whether that's new skills, social impact, improved health, or career benefits. Volunteering contributes to employability, sports build discipline, education boosts job readiness, and work develops real-life skills. The app should emphasize these cross-sectoral benefits, helping users understand how actions in one field enhance success in another.

2. The Role of Personalization in Youth Motivation

Personalization emerged as a critical factor for sustained engagement. Youth across all countries requested tools and recommendations that reflect their interests, time availability, preferred goals, and location.
A well-designed app should allow users to:

- Set their preferences (topics, skills, schedule).
- Receive curated content and opportunities.
- Get personalized motivational prompts.
- View their achievements in a way that reflects their unique path.

Such personalization increases relevance, reduces decision fatigue, and makes young people feel seen and valued. It also allows for flexibility, accommodating users who may shift their focus between education, volunteering, work, or sports over time.

3. Gamification as a Motivational Engine

Gamification, integrating game-like features in non-game environments, was consistently identified by youth as an appealing and effective way to stay motivated.
Key features include:

- Badges and Points: Recognizing consistency and milestones.
- Leaderboards: Fostering friendly competition.
- Streaks and Levels: Encouraging routine engagement.
- Redeemable Rewards: Incentivizing participation with real or symbolic benefits (e.g., training, discounts, visibility).

Across sectors, gamification provides a sense of achievement, progress, and fun. For youth who might feel disengaged from traditional systems of recognition (e.g., grades, salaries), gamified elements can serve as alternative motivators that are more interactive and affirming.

4. Community Engagement as a Long-Term Driver

A sense of belonging is one of the most powerful motivational forces. In every country studied, youth reported higher engagement and retention when activities involved peers, mentors, or group achievements.

To foster this, the app should:

- Include social features like forums, chats, and group challenges.
- Highlight shared experiences and testimonials.
- Promote collaborative goals (e.g., "Let's reach 1,000 volunteering hours together").
- Offer peer mentoring or buddy systems to support newcomers.

Community engagement not only motivates youth to participate but also helps them sustain involvement over time, especially during challenges or transitions. Whether it's a classmate, colleague, teammate, or co-volunteer, connection fuels persistence.

B. Proposed Features for the Motivate Youth App

1.1. Key Features Tailored to Each Field

Volunteering

- A geolocation-based search tool for discovering local or remote opportunities.
- Filters by time availability, cause, required skills, and language.
- A digital volunteering portfolio logging hours, achievements, and endorsements.
- Gamified progress tracking (e.g., badges for completed missions, hours logged).

Education

- Goal-setting features connected to academic or personal learning paths.
- Micro-learning modules and quizzes tied to motivational streaks and learning badges.
- Reflection journals where students log their progress and build soft skills.

Work & Employability

- A feature suggesting volunteer or learning opportunities aligned with career goals.
- CV builder integrating verified app activities.
- Digital certification and testimonials from partner organizations.

Sports & Wellness

- Fitness or activity goal-setting (e.g., "Join 3 local sports events this month").
- Social challenges promoting team-based activities and wellness check-ins.
- Integration with wearables or fitness logs to reward physical activity.

1.2. User Interface (UI) and Experience (UX) Considerations

We identified clear youth preferences that the app must reflect to ensure high usability and long-term engagement:

- **Personalized dashboards** showing individual progress across all four fields.
- **Clean, playful UI** using emojis, icons, video content, and minimal text.
- **Multilingual interface** ensuring inclusion across partner countries.
- **Accessibility-first design**, including colorblind modes, audio-read options, and simple navigation.
- **Gamified feedback** (e.g., celebratory animations, progress meters, sound cues).

1.3. Integration of Motivational Theories into App Design

To effectively drive behavior change and maintain engagement, we recommend aligning app design with the following motivational frameworks:

- **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**: Embed autonomy (choice of goals), competence (feedback, levels), and relatedness (peer connection through community features).
- **Goal-Setting Theory**: Allow users to set SMART goals, visualize their progress, and celebrate milestone achievements.
- **Gamification Theory**: Leverage extrinsic motivation through points, badges, and leaderboards while slowly building intrinsic motivation through reflection and impact storytelling.

The research clearly shows that integrating motivational theory into app design is not optional—it is essential for achieving sustained youth engagement.

C. Implementation Challenges and Strategic Solutions

As with any multi-country digital intervention, we anticipate several implementation challenges. These are outlined below alongside our proposed mitigation strategies:

1.1. Heterogeneity of Youth Needs

Young people differ widely in digital literacy, motivation, location, and availability. A "one-size-fits-all" approach is likely to fail.

Recommendation: Modular features, simple onboarding, needs-based profile setup

1.2. Unequal Access to Technology

Some youth, especially in rural or marginalized areas, have limited internet access or digital devices.

Recommendation: Offline usability, web-based version, NGO/school partnerships

1.3. Sustaining Engagement Over Time

Initial engagement may be high, but dropout rates increase if features become repetitive or if progress is not visible.
Recommendation: Dynamic content, seasonal campaigns, personalized nudges

1.4. Data Privacy and Trust

Young users are increasingly sensitive to data use and privacy, especially regarding personal progress or public recognition.
Recommendation:GDPR compliance, customizable privacy, optional recognition features

1.5. Organizational Participation and Opportunity Quality

Without active involvement from youth organizations, volunteering and learning opportunities may be limited or outdated.
Recommendation: Admin portals, digital incentives, platform partnerships

D. Collaborating with Youth Organizations and Stakeholders

To ensure real-world impact, collaboration beyond the digital space is essential.

- Youth organizations can co-create local content, moderate discussions, and promote the app.
- Municipalities and education institutions can embed app usage into extracurricular programs and civic initiatives.
- Private sector actors may contribute through CSR initiatives by sponsoring rewards or offering volunteering time for employees.
- Young people themselves should be involved at every level—as beta testers, content creators, ambassadors, and advisors.

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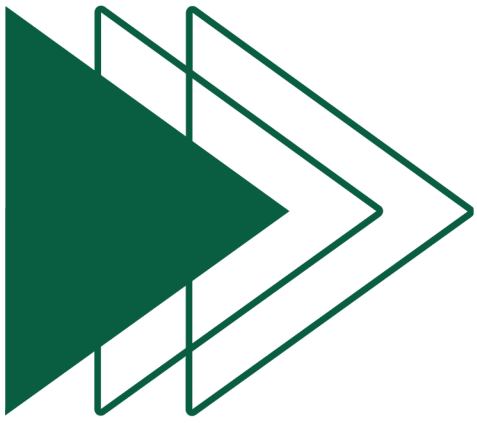
Chapter 9 : Conclusion



The "Motivate Youth!" project was conceived in response to the pressing challenges faced by young people across Europe in maintaining motivation across key domains of life—namely education, employment, volunteering, and physical activity. As highlighted in the introduction, motivation is not only a personal driver but a structural factor that influences participation, retention, and success in these fields.

The decision to develop a free and user-centered mobile application stems from the understanding that young people are increasingly reliant on digital platforms for learning, communication, and engagement. Therefore, a cross-sectoral, gamified, and inclusive app serves as an innovative solution to reach youth where they are, while addressing the unique motivational barriers in each life domain.

The methodology adopted in this project—which combines qualitative data (focus groups with relevant stakeholders) and quantitative data (surveys administered to young people)—ensures a robust, evidence-based design process. This allows the app development team to ground decisions in real needs, preferences, and lived experiences.

As such, the foundation laid in this introductory chapter affirms that interdisciplinary, youth-informed, and digitally enabled strategies are not merely innovative, but essential. The forthcoming parts of this conclusion will delve into the specific insights gathered across each thematic area, drawing concrete recommendations for the app's final design.

Insights from General Youth Motivation (Chapter 2)

An understanding of youth motivation must begin with a theoretical foundation. In this project, five major theories—Reinforcement Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Vroom's Expectancy Theory, and Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory—were employed to frame the multifaceted nature of youth motivation. These theories emphasize intrinsic drivers, extrinsic rewards, needs satisfaction, expectancy of results, and the role of working and learning conditions in sustaining motivation.

The focus groups held with psychologists, sociologists, and youth development professionals further illuminated how societal pressures, digital distractions, mental health struggles, and lack of purpose or recognition undermine youth engagement across domains. Stakeholders consistently emphasized the importance of personal relevance, social connection, and feedback in helping youth remain committed to long-term goals.

Digital technologies, particularly mobile apps, were seen as promising yet underutilized tools in this context. While young people are immersed in digital environments, few apps are currently designed with youth-specific motivational needs in mind.

The research underscored a strong demand for mobile platforms that:

- Offer gamification (points, badges, levels) to reinforce small wins,
- Enable goal setting and personal progress tracking,
- Promote peer interaction and mentor accessibility,
- Integrate instant feedback and social recognition features.

Ultimately, this chapter validates that youth motivation is not a fixed trait but a dynamic, context-sensitive construct. For an app to succeed in engaging youth meaningfully, it must blend psychological insights with digital engagement strategies, making motivation both visible and rewarding.

Insights from Higher Education (Chapter 3)

Motivation in higher education remains a critical determinant of student success, retention, and well-being. Through the analysis presented in Chapter 3, it is evident that students face multifaceted barriers that range from financial difficulties and mental health challenges, to academic overwhelm, digital distractions, and uncertainty about future career paths. The findings from focus groups with academic staff and surveys with students emphasize that these issues often intersect and intensify one another, leaving many students disengaged or at risk of dropping out.

While there are existing tools such as Forest, Study Bunny, and Habitica, which offer gamified approaches to task completion and study consistency, most of these applications lack emotional, social, and contextual adaptability. They do not sufficiently address issues such as:

- Self-doubt and imposter syndrome,
- A lack of mentoring or personalized academic guidance,
- The disconnection between university life and real-world applications.

Based on the research, the "Motivate Youth" mobile app should offer a comprehensive ecosystem of support, going beyond time management to nurture motivation holistically. Recommended features include:

- Study reminders and adaptive scheduling tools to build consistent habits,
- Gamification through point systems, badges, and personal challenges to incentivize academic persistence,
- Peer community features, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual encouragement,
- Mentorship matching to connect students with role models and guides,
- Mental resilience content to address stress, anxiety, and burnout,
- Career-alignment pathways to help students connect academic work to future opportunities.

Additionally, localized content and offline access are essential to ensure that the platform is inclusive, especially for students in under-resourced or rural regions.
In conclusion, motivation in higher education is not merely a matter of willpower; it is shaped by systems, support networks, and access to tools. A well-designed, youth-oriented mobile app can act as a crucial bridge—connecting students' intentions with the capabilities and communities they need to thrive.

Part 4 – Insights from Workforce Motivation (Chapter 4)

Youth motivation in the workforce is shaped by economic instability, unrealistic employer expectations, and a pervasive lack of guidance. Findings from focus groups and surveys conducted across Europe reveal that many young people struggle not only to access employment, but also to remain engaged once employed due to temporary contracts, wage discrimination, and limited progression opportunities.
The emotional consequences—such as imposter syndrome, self-doubt, and stress—combine with a systemic lack of support in navigating job markets, developing soft skills, and identifying career paths, leading to disconnection and underperformance. Existing digital platforms like LinkedIn, Indeed, and Glassdoor offer visibility into the labor market, but they remain impersonal, often paid, and not designed for youth development.

To address these challenges, the "Motivate Youth" app should take on a proactive, personalized role by:

- Helping users explore career paths through visual, interactive resources (e.g., videos, job simulations, sector trends),
- Offering self-assessment tools and progress tracking dashboards for skills development,
- Enabling direct interaction with HR experts, mentors, and career advisors,
- Integrating micro-learning modules for both hard and soft skills,
- Providing job-matching tools based on interest, location, and readiness.

Moreover, gamified challenges, badges, and feedback systems would make professional development engaging and continuous. The app should also allow companies to contribute content and feedback, promoting public-private synergy for youth empowerment.
In conclusion, motivation in the labor market is not simply about employment access—it is about readiness, confidence, and clarity. A mobile app grounded in youth realities and learning needs can serve as a vital tool to bridge the gap between potential and opportunity, preparing a new generation for meaningful, dignified, and sustainable work.

Part 5 – Insights from Volunteering (Chapter 5)

Volunteering is a powerful channel for youth empowerment, civic engagement, and social integration. Yet, as shown in this chapter, actual participation rates remain low—despite young people expressing strong interest. This gap is attributed to a series of barriers: lack of awareness, limited time, insufficient recognition, mismatch between skills and tasks, and perceived irrelevance.

Focus groups and surveys conducted across six partner countries confirmed that many young people are unaware of nearby opportunities or assume that volunteering requires long-term commitments that they cannot afford. Furthermore, volunteering is often viewed as peripheral to academic or professional success—especially when efforts go unrecognized or fail to translate into tangible benefits.

Current platforms like VolunteerMatch, GoVolunteer, and UNV offer broad access to opportunities, but they often lack personalization, gamification, or community-building features that foster long-term engagement. To truly motivate youth, the "Motivate Youth" app must:

- Integrate geolocation-based listings and support remote opportunities,
- Provide AI-driven matching tailored to users' skills, interests, and schedules,
- Offer digital badges, certificates, and volunteer portfolios to enhance career visibility,
- Incorporate interactive dashboards showing personal impact and shared stories,
- Enable community features such as forums, peer mentoring, and storytelling,
- Include short-term and micro-volunteering options suited to modern youth lifestyles,
- Promote inclusivity through multi-language support and accessibility features.

Social validation also plays a crucial role. Features that enable volunteers to share achievements via social media, receive motivational reminders, and track personal growth can elevate volunteering into a fulfilling, identity-shaping experience.

In conclusion, to mobilize youth effectively, digital tools must go beyond listing opportunities. They must recognize, reward, and reflect the values of young people, transforming volunteering from a charitable task into a dynamic and meaningful form of self-development and social contribution.

Part 6 – Insights from Sports Motivation (Chapter 6)

Declining youth engagement in sports and physical activity is a growing concern, exacerbated by time constraints, financial hardship, infrastructural limitations, and in some cases, conflict-related instability. Focus groups with trainers and surveys with young people, particularly from Ukraine, illustrate that access, safety, and mental well-being are central barriers to regular participation in physical activity.

Despite these challenges, youth recognize the value of exercise for both physical health and social integration. Particularly in team sports, coaches and peers play a critical role in building motivation and fostering inclusion—especially for displaced or marginalized youth.

However, existing apps such as Strava, Google Fit, or Apple Fitness+ tend to prioritize performance tracking over social connection or accessibility. Many are not youth-friendly, require subscriptions, or lack community engagement features. Therefore, the "Motivate Youth" app must:

- Offer group fitness challenges to promote accountability and fun among friends, classmates, or clubs,
- Provide badges, progress tracking, and milestone rewards (e.g., points for consistency),
- Include adaptive workout suggestions based on individual goals, time availability, and fitness level,
- Incorporate mood tracking, motivational notifications, and mindfulness features to support mental health,
- Enable photo sharing, community feeds, and messaging with peers and trainers,
- Provide offline access and multilingual support, particularly for underserved and displaced communities,
- Integrate local sport events and club listings for greater real-world engagement.

Importantly, sports can act as a gateway to youth empowerment, identity formation, and social inclusion. A well-designed app that is equitable, engaging, and rewarding can help restore enthusiasm for physical activity, making fitness a sustainable and enjoyable part of youth life.

Part 7 – Lessons from Existing Mobile Applications (Chapter 7)

An extensive analysis of existing mobile applications across education, employment, volunteering, and sports domains reveals both promising engagement strategies and notable shortcomings in meeting the needs of today's youth.

Successful apps—such as Duolingo, Forest, Quizlet, HelpUp, and Strava—share several key design principles:

- Gamification elements (e.g., badges, points, challenges, progress bars) enhance motivation through short-term rewards and goal tracking.
- Social integration via community forums, team challenges, and peer feedback fosters a sense of accountability and belonging.
- Personalization and adaptive learning paths enable content to match user interests, levels, and routines.
- Progress analytics and feedback loops help users reflect on achievements and identify areas for improvement.

While many existing apps focus on individual productivity, they often neglect the importance of community connection and emotional well-being. By integrating features that encourage peer-to-peer interaction and offer accessible mental health resources, Motivate Youth can create a more holistic platform that addresses the diverse needs of today's youth.

To ensure sustained engagement, the app can incorporate several key features. First, a community forum will allow users to share experiences, seek advice, and build support networks, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual encouragement. Second, personalized mental health resources will provide tools such as mindfulness exercises, stress management techniques, and access to professional support to address the various emotional challenges faced by young people. Third, gamified goal-setting will enable users to set personal goals and earn rewards upon completion or compete with peers, making self-improvement both enjoyable and motivating. By combining these elements, "Motivate Youth" could create a comprehensive platform that not only boosts productivity but also cultivates social connections and mental well-being, ultimately enriching the lives of its users.

These gaps present a unique opportunity for the "Motivate Youth" app. Building on the best practices observed in existing tools, the app should:

- Blend gamification and emotional well-being support into one coherent system,
- Offer accessible, free, and inclusive tools that adapt to users' social and cultural contexts,
- Integrate real-time community support, mental health resources, and progress feedback,
- Emphasize digital literacy, time management, and self-care alongside performance goals.

By uniting these elements in a seamless, youth-friendly interface, the "Motivate Youth" app can become more than a motivational tool—it can serve as a companion for personal development, community engagement, and future readiness.

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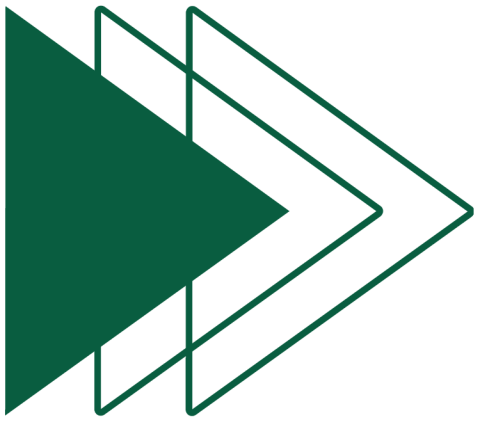
Appendices



Focus Groups Questions - Chapter 2 - Factors influencing youth motivation

1.What kinds of digital tools or resources do you think young people currently lack to stay motivated across various areas of life?

2.How could an app leverage social media or gamification to positively influence youth motivation?

3.What features in an app would help address societal or peer pressures that demotivate young people?

4. In what ways could an app foster a sense of purpose and achievement for young users?

5. How might an app support young people in managing mental health and well- being to sustain motivation?

6. What role do you see personalization playing in keeping young people engaged with an app designed to boost motivation?

7. How could an app connect young people to positive role models or mentors?

8.What specific types of content (e.g., motivational videos, goal trackers) would resonate most with young people?

9. How might an app provide instant, meaningful feedback or rewards to keep young people motivated?

10. What barriers to motivation should an app prioritize addressing to have the most significant impact on young users?

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Focus Groups Questions - Chapter 3 - Challenges young people face in pursuing Higher Education

1. How could an app support young people in navigating the financial barriers to higher education, such as scholarships or grants?

2. What features in an app would help students stay organized and manage academic workload effectively?

3. How could an app provide career guidance to help students see the value of higher education for their future goals?

4. In what ways could an app connect students with mentors or alumni for guidance and support?

5. What role could an app play in improving access to mental health resources for students dealing with stress or anxiety?

6. How could gamification or progress tracking in an app keep students motivated to complete their studies?

7. What resources or tools could an app include to help students align their studies with real-world applications or job opportunities?

8. How might an app assist students in building skills outside of the classroom to make them more competitive for future careers?

9. What kind of peer-to-peer interaction features (e.g., study groups, discussion forums) would make an app appealing to students?

10. How could an app encourage students to set and achieve academic and personal goals effectively?

Focus Groups Questions - Chapter 4 - Barriers to youth engagement in meaningful employment

1. What tools or resources do you think young people need to better understand the skills required for different job roles?

2. How could a mobile app help bridge the gap between young people's current skills and the qualifications employers are looking for?

3. What features would you find valuable in an app that connects young people with internships, apprenticeships, or entry-level job opportunities?

4. How could an app help young people gain relevant work experience or develop portfolios that make them more employable?

5. What role do you think gamification or rewards in an app could play in helping young people build the soft skills you find lacking?

6. How might an app support young people in discovering career paths that align with their interests and the demands of the job market?

7. What barriers do young people face in preparing for job interviews or creating effective resumes, and how could an app address these challenges?

8. What kind of resources or training modules would you recommend including in an app to help young people adapt to workplace cultures?

9. In what ways could an app encourage youth to engage with industries or career paths that are currently struggling to attract young talent?

10. How can an app foster ongoing development for young employees, helping them grow in their roles and stay motivated over time?

Focus Groups Questions -Chapter 5 - Reasons behind low youth participation in volunteering

1. What challenges do you observe that prevent young people from engaging in volunteering activities?
2. How could an app raise awareness about the benefits and opportunities of volunteering among young people?

3. What features would make it easier for young people to discover and connect with local volunteering opportunities?

4. How might an app help address time constraints or scheduling conflicts that deter youth from volunteering?

5. In what ways could an app use gamification (e.g., badges, leaderboards, rewards) to motivate young people to volunteer?

6. How could an app showcase the impact of volunteering (e.g., stories of change, testimonials) to inspire participation?

7. What role could an app play in helping youth overcome concerns about lacking skills or qualifications for volunteering?

8. How might an app foster a sense of community or belonging among young volunteers to sustain their engagement?

9. What tools or resources in an app could help youth track and showcase their volunteering contributions (e.g., certificates, portfolios)?

10. How could an app provide recognition or incentives (e.g., public acknowledgment, redeemable points) to encourage consistent volunteering?

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Focus Groups Questions - " Chapter 6 - Reasons of decline in physical activity and sports participation among youth"

1.What do you believe are the primary reasons for the decline in physical activity and sports participation among young people?

2. How could an app make sports and physical activity more appealing to young people?

3. What features in an app would help youth overcome barriers such as lack of time, resources, or access to facilities?

4. How might an app use gamification (e.g., challenges, achievements, rewards) to encourage consistent physical activity?

5. In what ways could an app foster a sense of competition or teamwork to motivate youth to participate in sports?

6. How could an app connect young people to local sports programs, trainers, or fitness groups?

7. What tools or features could an app include to help youth set and track fitness goals?

8.How might an app integrate social features (e.g., sharing progress, group challenges) to keep young people engaged in physical activities?

9. What type of content (e.g., workout tutorials, sports tips) would be most valuable to include in an app aimed at promoting physical activity among youth?

10. How could an app address psychological barriers, such as fear of judgment or lack of confidence, to encourage youth participation in sports?

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Survey Questions : “Challenges and Motivation in Pursuing Higher Education “

1. What motivates you most to pursue higher education?

2. What is your biggest barrier to staying motivated throughout your higher education journey?

3. How likely would you be to use an app that offers personalized motivation tips and strategies tailored to your goals and challenges?

4. How helpful would it be for an app to provide motivational content such as success stories, motivational quotes, or tips on staying focused?

5. Would you use an app that tracks your academic progress and provides rewards or incentives (e.g., badges, points) for meeting study goals and staying on track?

6. What type of support or resources would you need in an app to maintain your motivation throughout the academic year?

7. Would an app that connects you with mentors or peers who share similar academic or career goals help boost your motivation?

8. How valuable would it be for an app to provide goal-setting features (e.g., setting short-term and long-term academic goals) to help you stay motivated?

9. Would an app offering mental health support (e.g., relaxation techniques, stress reduction exercises, mindfulness practices) help improve your motivation to continue your studies?

10. Would you be more motivated to pursue higher education if an app helped you connect your studies with potential career opportunities and job market trends?

Survey Questions "Barriers to Youth Engagement in Meaningful Employment "

1. What motivates you the most to pursue a job or career?

2. What are the biggest barriers that prevent you from seeking or securing meaningful employment?

3. How likely would you be to use an app that provides job opportunities tailored to your skills, interests, and career goals?

4. Would you be motivated to apply for more jobs if an app offered personalized career guidance, such as tips for resumes, interviews, and job applications?

5. How helpful would it be for an app to offer motivational content, such as success stories from people who have overcome barriers to find meaningful employment?

6. Would an app that tracks your progress toward job-related goals (e.g., building a resume, improving skills, networking) help you stay motivated to find a meaningful job?

7. How important would it be for an app to provide resources for developing soft skills (e.g., communication, time management, teamwork) that are essential for employment?

8. Would you be more motivated to pursue employment opportunities if an app provided access to job shadowing, internships, or mentorship from professionals in your field of interest?

9. Would an app that helps you connect with other young people for networking, job search support, and sharing opportunities motivate you to actively pursue meaningful employment?

10. Would you be interested in an app that offers job search challenges or competitions (e.g., applying to a certain number of jobs in a week, skill-building challenges) to help you stay motivated and engaged?

Survey Questions "Reasons behind low youth participation in volunteering"

1. What factors motivate you to participate in volunteer work?

2. What do you think is the main barrier that prevents you from volunteering regularly?

3. Would you use an app that helps you find volunteer opportunities based on your interests and availability?

4. How likely are you to engage with an app that offers rewards (e.g., points, badges, certificates) for volunteering regularly?

5. What type of motivational content (e.g., success stories, quotes, progress tracking) would encourage you to participate more in volunteer activities?

6. How important would it be for an app to help you set personal goals and track your volunteer hours and impact?

7. Would you prefer an app that includes social features, like the ability to share your volunteer experiences with friends or peers?

8. Would access to learning resources (e.g., training for specific volunteer roles, leadership skills) in an app make you more likely to volunteer?

9. How helpful would it be for an app to provide personalized reminders or notifications about upcoming volunteer opportunities that match your interests?

10. Would you be more motivated to volunteer if an app connected you with like-minded peers or mentors to support and guide you through the volunteer process?

MOTIVATE YOUTH

Survey Questions "Reasons of decline in physical activity and sports participation among youth"

1. What motivates you to participate in physical activities or sports?

2. What are the main reasons you do not participate in physical activities or sports regularly?

3. Would you be more likely to participate in sports or physical activities if there were an app that made it easier to find local events or sports programs?

4. How helpful would it be for an app to offer personalized fitness challenges and goals based on your interests and fitness level?

5. Would you be motivated to exercise more if an app offered rewards (e.g., badges, points, discounts on sports equipment) for achieving your fitness goals?

6. What type of motivational content (e.g., workout tutorials, fitness tips, progress tracking) would make you more likely to engage in physical activity?

7. Would an app that connects you with other young people for group challenges or competitions increase your motivation to stay active?

8. How important would it be for an app to include features like reminders or notifications to help you stay on track with your physical activity goals?

9. Would you use an app that provides information and resources about the benefits of physical activity (e.g., mental health, physical health, stress reduction)?

10. Would access to virtual coaching or workout support (e.g., trainers, fitness groups) through an app make you more likely to participate in sports and physical activities?

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