Exploring new, appealing, inclusive and engaging practices for online services in digital youth work

REPORT

This report was prepared with the input and guidance of the National Agencies for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps from:

Country	Name of the organisation
Germany (Lead partner)	JUGEND für Europa
Belgium Flanders	JINT
Cyprus	Youth Board of Cyprus
Estonia	Harno
Finland	EDUFI
Hungary	Tempus Public Foundation
Iceland	Rannís
Ireland	Leargas
Latvia	JSPA
Lithuania	JTBA
Netherlands	Nederlands Jeugdinstituut
Romania	ANPCDEFP
Slovenia	Movit
Turkey	Turkish National Agency-Türkiye Ulusal Ajansı
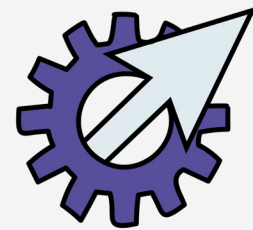
'Exploring new, appealing, inclusive and engaging practices for online services in digital youth work'
is the outcome of the Digital Youth Work Strategic National Agencies Cooperation, Work Package 4.

CONTENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European report titled 'Exploring Innovative, Inclusive, and Engaging Practices for Digital Youth Work Services' is based on a survey of practices adopted in 14 EU Member States under the guidance of Erasmus+ Youth National Agencies. This project was initiated to follow up on the recommendations of the EU Council Conclusions on Smart Youth Work (2017) and the EU Council Conclusions on Digital Youth Work (2019), which called on Member States to facilitate access to youth work services for young people, particularly those with limited opportunities or living in rural and remote areas where in-person access is challenging, by leveraging digital technologies.

The survey project specifically focused on the implementation and use of Online Youth Work Services. It aimed to get a picture of what platforms, tools and services exist in Europe, why they exist and how they work. It was a concern of the project to find out which criteria have to be considered in order to initiate, develop and implement an online youth work service. Based on the analysis of more than 200 collected services from 14 countries, findings were gathered and considerations made for Online Youth Work Service made in 12 thematic areas.

1	Inclusive Online Services
2	Reaching Young People
3	Co-creation with Young People
4	Developing Online Communities of Young People
5	Using Existing Online Tools and Platforms
6	Providing Safe Online Spaces A. Data Protection and Online Safety B. Trustworthy Online Environments
7	Research-Based Sustainable Services
8	Working in Partnership
9	Recognition of Online Youth Services
10	Blended Approaches: Face-to-Face Combined with Online Services
11	Adopting a Digital Mindset
12	Training, Peer Learning and Guidelines for Youth Workers

The European report is based on the mapping of online youth work services and concludes each theme in the following categories: findings, national examples, conclusions and questions for further considerations. In each thematic field, examples of online youth work services are listed, which were curated in advance by a group of experts and serve as good practices in the respective thematic field. Finally, reflections and further questions are formulated to serve as recommendations and suggestions for the youth sector.

Some of the thematic fields are also consistently found in others and can therefore rather be described as cross-cutting themes. These include the area of inclusive online youth work services, co-creation with young people and the adoption of a digital mindset.

The theme inclusive online youth work services discusses its importance and how to design them to create a safe and supportive environment for young people from diverse backgrounds. Findings confirm that it is essential to consider the diverse needs and experiences of young people, including accessibility, language barriers, cultural differences, and disabilities. The report provides considerations for online youth work services, including providing access to necessary technology, supporting the co-creation of services, providing training and support for digital literacy skills, and ensuring accessibility for young people with disabilities. It also highlights significant barriers to participation, such as the lack of access to technology and the digital divide. Online activities, counseling, and virtual youth centers have been created during the pandemic to provide a safer space for young people, which has proven effective and has been continued in some countries. Youth work organizations have developed safe online spaces that pay attention to the additional support structures needed for access and digital literacy. Consistent recognition and dissemination of examples of developing innovative online services for young people with a focus on inclusion can inspire colleagues and encourage experimentation and trial and error. Providing support and resources, such as access to mental health professionals or helpful resources, is crucial to ensuring that young people have access to the help they need. Strategies for promoting digital citizenship and responsible online behavior among young people are also important.

The theme of reaching young people emphasizes the importance of online youth work as a means of engaging with young people who may not be able to participate in traditional face-to-face activities. A target-oriented approach is necessary to reach and engage with specific groups, and communication and engagement strategies should be tailored to their unique circumstances and abilities. To ensure successful outreach of online youth services, a diversity of communication channels, content, and activities should be used, focusing on relevant topics for youth and using a peer approach. Youth workers should understand the developmental needs of young people and the specific challenges they face in an online environment, such as online safety, cyberbullying, and digital wellbeing. To engage young people who may be hard to reach or disengaged from traditional forms of youth work, initiatives can be tailored to their needs and interests, incorporating learning elements in activities such as gaming and using role models to provide information and counseling.

Co-creation in online youth work refers to the involvement of young people in the creation and development of online projects and initiatives designed to support and engage them. This approach involves young people in the design, planning, and content-creation stages of online services, ensuring that they are user-friendly, effective, and youth-relevant. Successful co-creation projects require a commitment to authentic youth engagement and empowerment, training and guidance for both young people and youth workers, and additional resources, including time and opportunities for young people's participation.

Online communities have become increasingly important for young people, and it is crucial to ensure that they are safe, inclusive, and respectful. This involves implementing policies and procedures to protect young people from online harm and ensuring ongoing learning and adaptation to meet young people's needs and expectations. Online communities should have a clear purpose and set of goals that are relevant and meaningful to young people. Developing online services that are based on young people's needs can support the creation and growth of communities for this age group. To ensure participation and sustainability of online communities, youth work organizations require a community building strategy, resources for online engagement and community development, and ongoing maintenance and monitoring.

The use of existing online tools and platforms has become a common practice for youth workers to engage with young people in various countries. While the use of commercial tools offers several benefits, it also presents challenges such as dependency on the provider and data protection policies. To effectively utilize commercial tools and platforms, it is important for youth workers to be aware of popular trends, have the necessary skills to use and adapt the tools, and be mindful of safety and data security. European level guidance and upskilling on commercial tools and platforms can enhance the capabilities of youth workers to use these tools effectively.

The development of safe online spaces for young people is crucial for their protection and well-being during online youth programs or activities. Youth workers need to consider data protection and online safety, and trustworthy online environments while using commercial online platforms to ensure they respect the rights and needs of young people and provide support for their digital rights. The report emphasizes the importance of creating a safe and trustworthy online environment for young people and youth workers, particularly in light of the growing prevalence of social media and digital platforms. Such environments are necessary to ensure that young people can use online platforms and tools safely and securely, which is especially important during the pandemic.

Another theme discussed in the report is the concept of sustainable online youth work services in Europe, which involve designing long-term and effective services that meet the needs of young people and involve them in the design process. Challenges faced by online youth work service providers include funding, resource allocation, digital access and literacy, and community engagement. Best practices for promoting sustainability include involving young people in the design and delivery of services, building partnerships and collaborations, fostering community engagement, and investing in ongoing research and evaluation.

Partnerships in online youth work involve collaborations between youth work organizations and other stakeholders, such as government agencies, non-profit organizations, and businesses like tech companies for example. Such partnerships can take different forms, such as joint projects, shared resources, or collaborative networks, and are increasingly important in Europe, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Partnerships have the potential to expand access to youth services and programs and better meet the needs of young people in a rapidly changing digital world.

Recognition of online youth work was one of the needs expressed by partners and to increase it the report points out that steps can be taken to clarify and increase its recognition as an equivalent practice to on-site work, and data can be collected to measure and evaluate the impact of online youth work programs. Successful recognition and validation efforts for online youth work programs can be studied to identify best practices, and international support for recognition of online youth work can be established.

Blended approaches in online youth work involve integrating face-to-face and online interactions in youth work practices. Blended approaches have become increasingly popular in Europe, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to their ability to increase access to services, provide greater flexibility, and engage young people in activities relevant to their interests. However, challenges include ensuring equal access to digital tools and addressing issues of digital exclusion. Blended approaches offer added value to the process, implementation, and overall activity goals of youth work by providing opportunities for innovation and engagement with young people in new ways. It is crucial to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of blended approaches to ensure that they meet the needs of young people and achieve the desired outcomes.

For being open to tackle these themes the report also discusses the importance of adopting a digital mindset in online youth work, which involves using technology to engage and support young people while embracing innovation and recognizing the potential of digital tools to complement traditional forms of youth work. Developing a digital mindset requires a willingness to learn and experiment with new digital tools and approaches, and a commitment to continuous learning and improvement. The report suggests that youth workers need a broader understanding of the implications of digital transformation in society and the youth field. It also underlines that digital literacy is a key skill that youth workers need to effectively engage and support young people online. Success stories of organizations that have successfully adopted a digital mindset in online youth work could provide valuable insights and inspiration for others.

Nearly all national reports highlighted the need for training, peer learning, and guidelines in online youth work. The lack of structured training makes it challenging for youth workers to develop the skills and knowledge needed to engage with young people in the digital age. Digital literacy skills are essential for youth workers and young people to participate fully in online youth work. Key themes that arise in the format of training, peer learning, and guidelines include digital competence development, positive dispositions towards digital transformation and digital literacy, capacity building, and sharing knowledge and good practices. The report also suggests that innovative initiatives

need to be consistently identified and disseminated for the youth work sector to learn from. The project takes a first step in this direction and publishes a curated list of 40 online youth work services that serve as good practices for one or more thematic areas. With the help of a concrete description of each service presented, the general findings become partly more descriptive. The overview of the selected Online Youth Work Services can be found in the online course Online Youth Work Services & Tools across Europe on the HOP Online Learning Platform.

1. CONTEXT OF THE REPORT

1.1. Background

The European report 'Exploring new, appealing, inclusive and engaging practices for online services in digital youth work' builds on mapping practices implemented in 14 Member States of the European Union (EU) steered by Erasmus+ Youth National Agencies. The survey project is a direct follow-up on the recommendations of the EU Council Conclusions on Smart Youth Work (2017) and the EU Council Conclusions on Digital Youth Work (2019) which invite the EU Member States to 'promote better access for young people, in particular those with fewer opportunities and those living in rural and remote areas, or where face-to-face access is not feasible, to youth work services through the use of digital technologies.'[1] The survey project focused on youth work services through digital means and their implementation and usage.

The European report also builds on the developments in the European youth sector between 2018 and 2022, new societal changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, where digital transformation has become an essential element of everyday lives, and youth policy processes like the EU Youth Strategy and the European Youth Work Agenda, demanding developments and future strategies in digital youth work.

The European report and survey were planned and implemented in the framework of the Strategic Partnership on Digital Youth Work (DYW SNAC) among National Agencies for the EU programmes Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps. It was led by JUGEND für Europa, the German National Agency for the EU programmes Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps.

The aim was to get an overview and develop peer learning activities about new, engaging methods for youth work services through the use of digital technologies and to provide inspiration based on the following questions:

- How to design online services and other formats for youth work that are appealing, inclusive and take into account local circumstances?
- What are existing approaches to reach young people through digital means in the different partner countries and/or beyond - at local, regional, national, European or global level?
- How can innovative/attractive/suitable offers help to ensure that the digital divide between those that can easily access and use online services/formats and those that have trouble doing so will not be narrowed even further?

Each National Agency was responsible for researching online youth work services, platforms and tools available at the national level and related to different areas of Information & Counselling and Learning & Training (non-formal educational activities) based on the three core questions.

The findings and conclusions provided in the European report are based on the results of the mapping process carried out in 14 countries: Belgium-Flanders, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia, the Netherlands and Turkey. The mapping results were analysed by a European Expert Group, which in addition identified new, appealing, inclusive and engaging good practices of online services in digital youth work as good practices to the 12 main findings that should be taken into account when designing, planning and implementing online youth work services.

1.2. Terms and Definitions

Digital youth work

The European Commission (EC) established the expert group called 'Risks, opportunities and implications of digitalization for youth, youth work and youth policy' in 2016, as part of the European Union Work Plan for Youth 2016-2018. The group produced policy recommendations on various aspects of digital youth work, such as defining digital youth work, developing it strategically, promoting youth participation and rights, and gathering knowledge and evidence.

In the report, digital youth work was defined as follows:

'Digital youth work means proactively using or addressing digital media and technology in youth work. Digital media and technology can be either a tool, an activity or a content in youth work. Digital youth work is not a youth work method. Digital youth work can be included in any youth work setting and it has the same goals as youth work in general. Digital youth work can happen

[1]   EU Council Conclusions on Digital Youth Work 2019/C 414/02

in face-to-face situations as well as in online environments, or in a mixture of the two. Digital youth work is underpinned by the same ethics, values and principles as youth work.'[2]

Data literacy

'Data literacy, being able to understand, use, and create data actively and critically, has become crucial to navigate our society. New data are continuously and rapidly created by numerous applications; think about our smartwatch counting our steps, healthcare professionals capturing our health data, and us constantly sharing and liking posts on social media. All these data are captured, stored, analysed, and used for multiple purposes. There is a tremendous need for citizens to be able to use and understand data to (pro)actively and safely participate in our society. Data literate citizens are proactive citizens, educated to think about data in a critical way, beyond a mere focus on becoming data-skilled workers and consumers.'[3]

1.3. Mapping Approach

The national mappings are based on a survey outline, which included a set of questions for respective stakeholders. Some countries used questionnaires, while others opted for questionnaire-based interviews, depending on the number of existing youth work services, platforms and tools.

For the purpose of the National Survey activity, each partner:

1. selected a national expert (group) to carry out the mapping exercise;
2. identified the existing digital youth work services, practices or tools;
3. contributed to the overall development of the survey outline/interview gui delines
4. carried out other potential support activities (depending on the resources and strategy agreed with the national expert):
   - organised focus groups or interviews with other experts, youth information providers, youth counselling services, communities of youth workers, organisations that have developed projects or frameworks for any of the purposes of the present mapping,

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[2]   Expert group on Digitalisation and Youth. (2018). Developing digital youth work: policy recommendations, training needs and good practice examples. European Commissio. https://op.europa.eu/s/yeLS

[3]   Vermeire, Lotte (2022). Policy Brief #65: The Databuzz 2.0 – Data literacy education for the metropolitan context. https://smit.vub.ac.be/policy-brief-65-the-databuzz-20

- engaged the community of practice or the national expert (group) to identify the practices that could be used by the expert and/or to offer feedback on the outcomes produced by the expert;
5. engaged the community of practice or the national expert (group) to identify the practices that could be used by the expert and/or to offer feedback on the outcomes produced by the expert;

For the purpose of the collaborative sense-making with all 14 countries involved:

6. Based on the national reports, the mapped online services, platforms and tools as well as the main findings and insights were collated and analysed at the European level.
7. In a 3-day partner meeting of National Agencies, officers and national experts/researchers explored the mapped online services, platforms and tools and collectively peer-reviewed the main findings and insights to develop 12 thematic conclusions.
8. These 12 main findings, insights and conclusions build the European report.
9. In addition, 40 online services, platforms and tools were created in the Online Gallery of Online Youth Work Services on the Online Learning Platform HOP.

1.4. Challenges Connected to the Mapping Approach

The national reports of participating partner countries cited various challenges they had faced. The majority noted that very little mapping, surveying or research with the focus on national youth work or youth had been conducted in the area of online youth services prior to this work package, especially for digital youth work. Moreover, there is an underdevelopment on the notion of online services for digital youth work at the European level, and for some research participants it was difficult to articulate and recognise inclusive innovations in their scope. For the purposes of this research report, the categorisation of online platforms and services provided a baseline, but many of the expert researchers cited the challenge in facilitating the recognition of digital youth work services in a non-formal learning environment. It resulted in the mapping and identification of innovative and inclusive online services for young people producing vast but varied content for each national context.

Challenges in the research design identified a need to outline online youth services as part of the wider digital youth work definition at the European level. Some country reports also provided fewer results than others, reflecting on the difficulty in reaching out to smaller local youth services within the given time frame and to capture all relevant stakeholders at the national level. This mapping exercise is not an exhaustive one, it will continue to grow and develop at a rapid speed in each national context. The process of mapping these tools for youth work highlighted the need for ongoing mapping research that captures the work of online digital youth work organisations across Europe.

2. MAIN FINDINGS

Overall, the national reports produced a vast and varied resource of good practices, insights and conclusions. Rigorous analysis of the texts and mappings has showcased common directions for all the countries involved. These directions can be grouped by 12 main themes pertaining to online youth work services, platforms and tools:

1	Inclusive Online Services
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The following chapter outlines relevant excerpts from the national reports in relation to the findings. Conclusions on these insights are based on the national reports and findings, compiled by two lead experts and collectively reviewed by the National Agencies involved and participating researchers. Each theme is structured along the following items: a summary of the findings, examples of the context and tools at the national level, conclusions, considerations and questions for future reflection and developments.

2.1. Inclusive Online Services
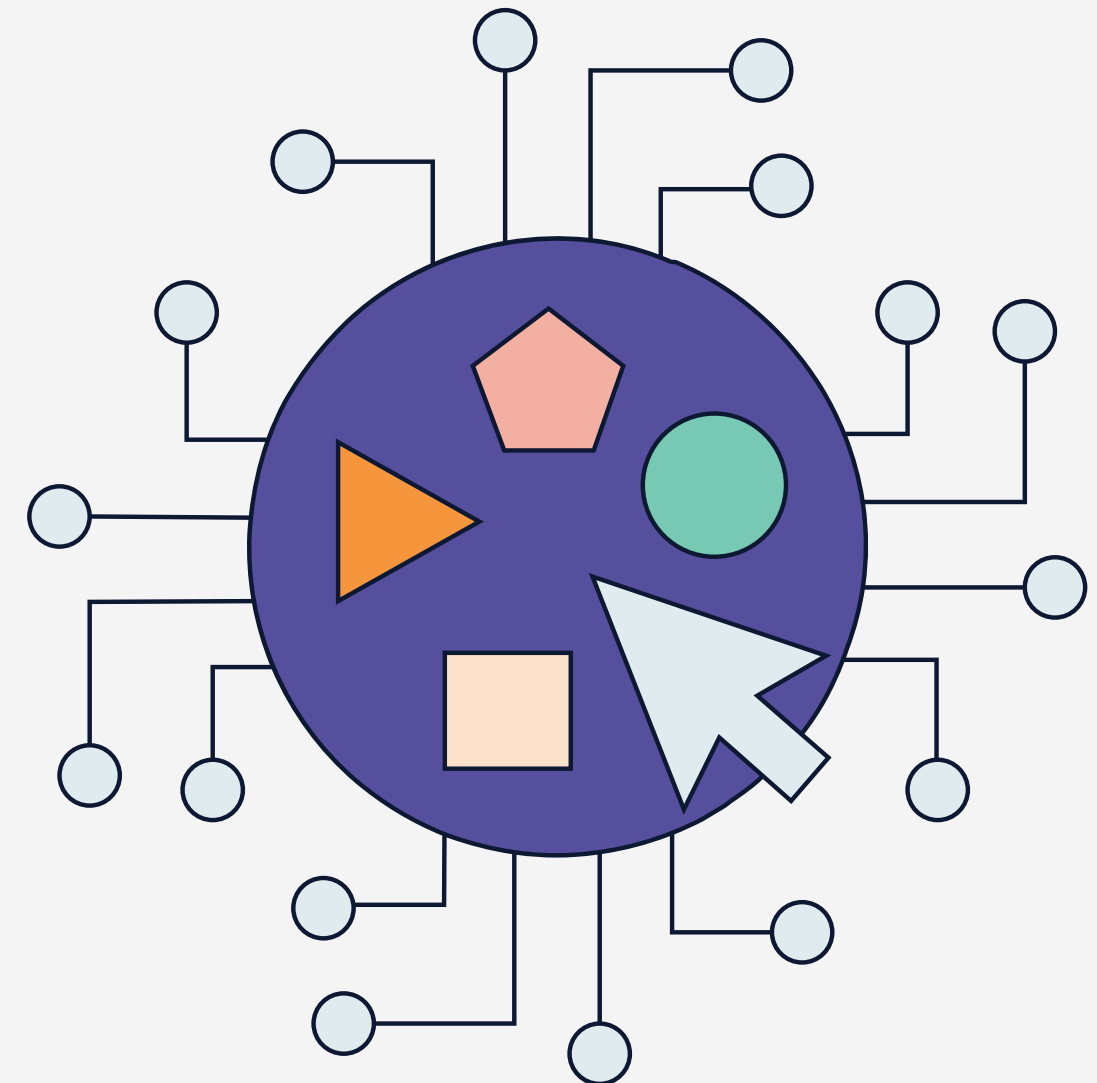
Findings

Inclusive online youth work services are those that are designed to be accessible and welcoming to all young people, regardless of their background or circumstances. Inclusive services aim to create a safe and supportive environment where young people feel valued and respected, and where they can participate fully in the activities and programmes offered.
To create inclusive online youth work services, it is essential to consider the diverse needs and experiences of young people. It may involve addressing issues such as accessibility, language barriers, cultural differences, and disabilities. It is important to ensure that online platforms and tools used in youth work are accessible and user-friendly for all young people.

Participants within this research were asked to note accessibility features of online services and platforms for young people with physical or cognitive special needs. Researchers focussed on including services in the mapped desk research that were directed at young people from disadvantaged or marginalised socioeconomic backgrounds. The mapped services focussed on websites, platforms and tools that provided online non-formal education youth services that supported vulnerable young people to engage in positive youth development. As such, a common theme of Inclusive Online Services highlights the reflections that are considered NEET young people, noting various approaches to language, accessibility features and functions of digital platforms and tools.

The national contexts

Romania
Accessibility and outreach towards youth with special needs is still a challenge. For example, even if some of the respondents consider accessibility of their initiatives towards special needs youth, a large majority of them (if not all) do not take into account inclusion for all categories of young people. It is important to reach more young people who are remote but willing to take part in digital youth work (many youth workers affirmed that the pandemic context contributed to a general increase in the number of beneficiaries for the activities, especially in 2020). There is a need for training on how to make learning accessible for youth with special needs.

Estonia
The demand is definitely covered for some target groups who are interested in a certain topic and who can find the information. Those who do not know what they want to do and who do not receive information should also be dealt with, including younger youth and youth with NEET status, as well as young parents. Various relevant and trending areas are covered.

- Most of the mapped activities are aimed at young people from the age of 13. One of the reasons for this is the fact that social media platforms are allowed from the age of 13, but that is not the main reason.
- Information dissemination channels and youth-oriented training are directly related to other areas such as health, education, employment, environment, etc.
- The platforms and tools are up-to-date because they are web-based, which ensures their adequacy and youth-friendliness.
- Not solved: Involvement of young people, efficient and effective information activities, dealing with information overload, and stopping/preventing the spread of fake news.
- Suggestion: Involvement of younger youth and offering them opportunities, because many problems appear at an early age, which can be supported and solved by youth work services. More focus on younger youth.

Ireland
Online platforms services and tools in Ireland for young people require support and strategies to develop accessibility functions. 100% of the interviewed respondents noted the need to improve the accessibility of their online platforms services and tools. The majority reported that their platforms were predominantly relying on text as a form of explaining visual platform resources. There were little considerations on their online tools for young people with literacy issues, hearing loss or for young people with special education needs. All noted that there was a need to develop their accessible technologies into the future. The desk research mapping exercise revealed the lack of accessible technologies available on online platforms, services and tools aimed at young people.

Lithuania
Youth workers stressed the importance of an updated content and style (appropriate and recognisable language for youth) of the content for youth, especially for sensitive content or topics (sexual education, equality, etc.). Vocabulary and situations should be adequate for today's youth. Language sometimes might be a barrier for youth to learn. Therefore, national tools or tools adapted to Lithuania (at least with a language support) would be beneficial.

Latvia
DYW reaches over geographical barriers, more access to young people from remote rural areas.

Germany
'Map the Gap' offers tours through towns and villages in the country and shows examples of young people from different backgrounds, cultures, religions, sexual orientations and with and without physical/mental disabilities living together. The tours also show examples of conscious or unconscious exclusion in everyday life or places where group-based misanthropy has terrible consequences. It is a game for the smartphone that guides young people to the places. There they solve tasks together, discuss and have fun. The 'Map the Gap' project raises awareness on the issue of group-based hostility in a playful way - both when the

tours are created by youth groups and when tours are played. The young people who developed the tours were enthusiastic: 'I took part in 'Map the Gap' because I want discrimination against people to be curbed in my neighbourhood as well.'

The campaign 'Bravel' (Be Brave and Travel) has demonstrated that influencer marketing is very successful in approaching the target groups and personal content of young people (personal experiences, peer-to-peer approach) works best in social media and on-site events. Target group of this campaign are young people in general, but with a focus on educationally alienated young people and young people with a migrant background.

Some counselling services on life crises and cyberbullying create safe online spaces to talk about crisis, bullying or abuse situations. They mainly use chat counselling, which is popular among young people who want to discuss sensitive issues that they might not dare to talk about on the phone. The counselling service 'Nummer gegen Kummer' reported that 10% of all consultations provided in 2021 were held online, with 75% of them to female counselling seekers. Telephone consultations made up about 45%. More than 60% of counselling seekers use the chat function for acute crisis. The main topics include psychosocial issues and health. Over the phone, counselling seekers mainly want to relieve themselves emotionally and would like suggestions on how to cope with their problems.

Finland
Services could be made more accessible merely by such means as providing them in simple language and using other methods besides text and images. We just have to keep talking about these issues even more, making them more visible. The work also requires resources.

Conclusions

The initiatives mapped within this research have showcased the abilities of online youth services to support vulnerable young people. Positive outcomes for marginalised and disadvantaged young people accessing online youth services have been highlighted in good practice examples. To ensure services reach the target group, direct collaboration between youth workers and specialised staff members is crucial. Nevertheless, some countries note challenges in accessing young people from marginalised backgrounds. Many did not consider the accessibility functions of their online websites, such as speech, text etc., but aimed to prioritise this into the future with support from those working directly with young people from marginalised and vulnerable backgrounds.

Nevertheless, accessibility for marginalised and disadvantaged youth is a high priority for the majority of respondents. Examples of innovative and technologically advanced digital youth work platforms and tools emphasise the need to develop their services to increase the accessibility functions of the online platforms. In some examples, countries showcase technology that lowers societal barriers for young people with disabilities, young people on the spectrum

or young people experiencing disadvantage in the formal education sector.

In Europe, inclusive online youth work services play a crucial role in promoting social inclusion, preventing marginalisation, and supporting the well-being of young people. Despite the potential of online youth work to engage with diverse groups of young people, there are still significant barriers to participation, including lack of access to technology and the digital divide. Addressing the needs of diverse groups of young people, such as those with disabilities, from minority ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, requires intentional efforts in the design and delivery of inclusive online youth work services. The involvement and participation of young people in the development of services, as well as engagement with a range of stakeholders, including youth workers, policymakers and community organisations, are key to effective service provision. Further research and evaluation are needed to better understand the impact of inclusive online youth work services and to identify effective strategies for their continued improvement.

Considerations

- Not all young people have access to the necessary technology or reliable internet connection, which could create a digital divide and exclude some youth from participating in online youth work services. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that all young people have access to the necessary technology and support to participate in online youth work.
- Online platforms, services and tools can provide access to those young people who would otherwise struggle to access youth work services.
- Increased accessibility. Online youth work services allow youth workers to reach a wider audience of young people, including those who may be geographically isolated, have limited access to transport or have disabilities that make it difficult to attend in-person sessions.
- Online tools and digital platforms provide greater flexibility, allowing youth workers to offer a range of activities that can be completed at any time or place, and at the individual's own pace.
- Specialist strategy, guidance and support are needed to improve digitally inclusive accessibility functions and/or practices for/in digital youth work.
- Youth workers and young people need to be supported to co-create and contribute to improve online services outreach and accessibility features for marginalised and vulnerable young people.
- Some young people may lack the digital skills needed to fully participate in online youth work. Therefore, it is important to provide training and support to young people to develop their digital literacy skills.

Follow-up questions

- What is the definition of 'inclusive' in the context of online youth work services?
- What are the key challenges and barriers faced by online youth work services in achieving social inclusion and promoting well-being, and how can these be addressed through innovative strategies and partnerships with other sectors?
- How can online youth work services ensure that their practices and functions are inclusive and respectful of the diversity of young people they serve, including gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion, and what training and resources are needed to support this?
- How do online youth work services use technology and digital platforms to foster social connections and networks among young people from diverse backgrounds, and what impact does this have on their sense of belonging and well-being?
- What are some examples of best practices in online youth work services that have successfully addressed issues of social exclusion and inequality among young people in Europe, and how can these be scaled up or replicated in other contexts?
- How can online youth work services ensure that their programming and activities are accessible and inclusive for young people with disabilities or other special needs, and what training or support is needed for staff and volunteers to provide this?
- What are some effective strategies for online youth work services to engage with marginalised or hard-to-reach young people who may not have access to technology or reliable internet, and how can these be adapted for different regions or communities in Europe?
- How can online youth work services evaluate their impact on social inclusion and well-being among young people, and what indicators or metrics should be used to measure success or identify areas for improvement?
- What are the barriers to participation in online youth work services, and how can they be overcome to ensure that all young people can access these services?
- What efforts need to be made to address the needs of diverse groups of young people in the design and delivery of online youth work services, such as those with disabilities, from minority ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds?
- How can young people be involved in the development and delivery of online youth work services, and what benefits does their involvement bring to the services?
- How can online youth work service providers ensure that their services are responsive to the needs of young people, and how can they continuously improve the quality of their services?
- How can online youth work service providers collaborate with other organisations and stakeholders to deliver more effective and inclusive services?

2.2. Reaching Young People

Findings

Online youth work can provide a way to engage with young people who may be unable to reach out and to participate in traditional face-to-face activities. The national reports have highlighted various approaches within local online youth services to demonstrate that.

These platforms and tools are used to deliver a range of online activities, including workshops, training sessions, peer support groups, consultation and mentoring.

Similar to in-person youth services, there is a need for different approaches to reach the target group of the service. A service should be based on the needs of young people, with clear goals and actions outlined in order to reach young people who need it most.

The national contexts

Belgium-Flanders

Before starting or implementing, it is important to decide on the goal (e.g. training, counselling, or both; working on digital competences or social skills, etc.). But when deciding on a certain goal, the target audience needs to be selected. Here, several questions should be addressed: What do they need, and how can we be of help in that certain area? Do we have the right expertise in-house, or do we need to involve others? Do our youngsters have access to hardware/software to join online, or do we need to provide them with these things? What is their digital competence level? Would it be more effective if the activity was blended and a trainer was present? What method do we use for online activity, e.g. slow learning, gamification, playful learning, feedback loop, self-sufficient learning, one-on-one, etc.?

Germany

The research found that target-oriented also means addressing the same needs in different channels or rather through diverse approaches. The online exhibition 'Verfolgung von Jugendlichen im Nationalsozialismus' can be used both for school lessons and for independent learning online, it can be explored both online and on-site. The online exhibition is part of an on-site exhibition in Berlin. This information service represents a pedagogical age-appropriate preparation of information and history in a digital project with a peer approach. They present biographies of young people who were persecuted under National Socialism. These individual biographies create personal reference and make the topic more tangible.

In the mapping we found an interesting online service called 'Digital Street Work', a new form of youth and youth social work. It is about offering young people help online. The concept is currently used mainly in Bavaria with the project 'Digital Streetwork Bavaria', where, trained persons (e.g. social educators) are online and take care of the fears and concerns that young people and young adults express there. Children and young people spend a lot of time online, exchanging information with others, researching information, presenting themselves in social media or playing games. In addition to positive experiences online and offline, there

may be experiences that cause fears or worries, for example, lovesickness, (school) stress or global crises. This is where competent contact persons are needed to tackle the challenges together with young people. This is exactly where the project 'Digital Streetwork Bayern' comes in. Young people who are confronted with fears and worries are offered the opportunity to contact a 'Digital Streetworker' in Bavaria free of charge and anonymously. They are bound to professional secrecy. Young people can also decide for themselves whether they want to remain anonymous or not. This is to create a pleasant atmosphere for young people to express their feelings and concerns.

Lithuania

Youth workers observe that it is easier to engage youth in training and learning when tools have different digital aspects, such as educational content or interactive activities (e.g. the Vilnius - City of Learning platform or the WomanLog app). WomanLog is a Latvian product but it supports the Lithuanian language. Users of the app can use a calendar to track their menstrual cycle, read educational content, choose characters and create a story by making choices and observing the results. Vilnius - City of Learning not only offers digital courses, open badges for recognition of learning and self-assessment tools, but also informs about the opportunities to join local activities where youth can get some practical skills.

Netherlands

It is difficult to grab the attention of young people, especially if they have the feeling that they are being educated. But there are people that do grab the attention of young people because they are well known or because they have a form of legitimacy. This can be a local youth worker, a football player, an ex-criminal or a musician (not influencers) that grew up in their city. Young people accept information or counselling more easily when it is provided by such people . For example, 'Live met AM' used a known kickboxer in one of their live sessions. From the research we concluded that it is effective to, when providing young people with information, focus on topics that are relevant for them (in general or in a specific period). For example, youth workers addressed sexual harassment at the time that there was a lot of attention for it due to a scandal at 'The Voice of Holland' (JOU030. Incorporate a learning element in activities that the youth like to spend their time on. In our research we saw many examples of youth workers providing the youth with training and learning through activities that the young people enjoy. One major activity is gaming that, for example, NextupTV uses for learning and training. Many young people enjoy gaming and spend a lot of their time on gaming platforms. By using these games and platforms for learning and training, it is easier to get the youth engaged. In our research we saw examples of using FIFA to talk about vandalism or 'Fortnite' to talk about gun violence.

Romania

The youth that needs these services most are the ones who are the least informed about

the existence of services and the information itself. Prioritising and encouraging outreach are crucial. Extracting and promoting the most impactful training and learning methods, as proved by impact analyses and youth's perceptions.

Finland

Services are available, but they do not always reach the young people who should be reached. Young people do not always understand that they are part of the target group. We need more marketing, we have to work together, communicate about the services and find new ways of reaching young people.

Estonia

The demand is higher than ever. This is a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning and remote work. Young people and adults have gotten used to more convenient and effective ways to get information and participate in training and activities. Information and communication activities should be enhanced so that the information actually reaches the target group and that there are activities for young people of different ages and that they are of high quality and reliable.

Iceland

Online digital platforms or tools are an added dimension to pre-existing learning, youth work or counselling. Two of the respondents represent platforms directly aimed at youth and they both report the online digital platform to be something that is added to their previous service. For example, one in-person counselling service has added an online platform to offer better service to those in need. In another instance, focusing on under 18-year-olds and specific benefits of the online sphere, such as the possibility for anonymity, the youth who attended an online school requested an online youth centre to add to their shared time together and to move into the leisure sphere. The third respondent is somewhat different as they are focused on youth workers and youth through them. They do, however, also report the same theme of an added dimension by using the properties possible in an online digital resource. Their digital online tool is meant both to gamify non-formal learning and to increase youth and youth workers' awareness on how youth work facilitates learning. It is something they feel is assisted by the properties of having their tool digital and online.

Ireland

Online digital platforms and tools can remove barriers for young people to access counselling services, youth information, and training and learning. The surveyed respondents in Ireland stated a high level of impact numbers for young people accessing their online platforms nationally across Ireland. A specific focus for youth services during COVID-19 to access those most vulnerable resulted in many innovations that are still being developed to improve the ability for youth workers to continue to reach young people from marginalised or vulnerable disadvantaged backgrounds. 'Digital access must be available to all who want it. Youth

workers can be powerful advocates for this at both a national and international level.' Spice Project Researcher, Irish Museum of Modern Art.

Slovenia

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when in-person events were not allowed, there was a high demand for online/digital forms of youth work. In some cases (e.g. events and workshops), the number of participants exceeded the number of participants from previous face-to-face events and workshops. Organisations that have developed and delivered online events and youth work in a digital environment report an increase in participation in events/virtual youth centres by young people from different regions (not only local youth, as is the case with youth work and events delivered in person rather than online). In this way, organisations have extended their reach to young people. In cases where face-to-face youth work and events are reinstated, this outreach has been reduced again to the local environment.

Hungary

The organisation (highlighted) is constantly short of financial and human resources, mainly because of the growing demand for services. Helpers can only be trained professionals and therefore the pool of potential volunteers is limited. 20% of the organisation's running costs are covered by public funding. The remaining 80% must be raised from other sources. There is always room for improvement as technologies become obsolete, but no major fundamental changes are planned. To increase reach, resources need to be increased to allow children who cannot easily access the platform because of their social environment.

Conclusions

In the national reports, experts have pointed out the importance of target-oriented and outreach services in the online world. Often, young people for whom the services have been created do not even know they exist. Online services and activities should be oriented according to the goal, which is defined in the first step and is closely linked to the needs of the target group like in any other youth work service. Based on this goal and the target group, the following aspects should be considered:

- What are the needs of the target group?
- What kind of support do they need?
- Is there a need to involve external specialists or cooperation partners?
- What level of digital competence do they have, including access to soft- and hardware?
- What kind of activities or offers are effective in achieving the goal?
- And finally, what pedagogical approaches need to be used for the service?

For this target-oriented and outreach approach, co-creation with young people in the development and design of services should be considered in any case, as it ensures thinking about the needs of young people from the beginning, as well as the appropriate approach to reach the youth community.

The aspect discussed here allows services to be developed for specific target groups with specific needs. The experts have emphasised the importance of this approach. Best practices that target disadvantaged young people can be named here explicitly. The good practice points out various aspects that the topic of outreach highlights, including:

- using a diverse range of means in channels to reach young people, e.g. via online approaches and offers that can be used both in the context of school lessons and independently as self-directed online learning;
- providing a diverse range of online activities and digital aspects within online tools or platforms like a mix of informative, educational and interactive content/ activities;
- focussing on topics that are relevant for young people (in general or in a specific period of time);
- incorporating learning elements in activities that reach young people, e.g. gaming;
- using peer approaches. Personalised content works in social media and on-site events;
- making use of people that can act as role models like influencers but also local youth workers, football players, a former criminal or musician who grew up in their local community. Information and counselling by those actors are usually more easily accepted by youth.

The initiatives presented have showcased, encouraged and supported vulnerable young people and advocated for youth workers to contribute to the creation of positive online services and experiences for young people.

Many country-based researchers have also highlighted the need for further data to showcase and improve the reach of services to targeted youth audiences.

Considerations

- Youth workers should have an understanding of the developmental needs of young people and the specific challenges they face in the online environment. It includes issues such as online safety, cyberbullying and digital wellbeing.
- It is essential to understand the needs, interests and preferences of young people in order to effectively reach them online. It includes factors such as their age, gender, cultural background, socioeconomic status and, of course, the pattern of discrimination.
- A target-oriented approach is closely tied to the needs, access and digital competence level of the target audience. It means that in order to effectively reach and engage with a particular group, it is important to tailor communication and engagement strategies to their unique circumstances and abilities.
- Online services should have clearly defined goals and target audiences, prioritising and encouraging outreach.
- It is important to ensure that online youth work activities are accessible to all young people, including those with disabilities or limited access to technology. It may involve using captioning or sign language interpreters, providing alternative text descriptions or offering offline alternatives.
- Successful outreach should consider a diverse range of communication channels, content and activities, a focus on relevant topics for youth and a peer approach.
- Effective online youth work requires collaboration with a range of stakeholders, including young people, parents, educators and other community members. This collaboration can help to ensure that online youth work activities are responsive to the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.

Follow-up questions

- How can youth work support young people and youth workers to advocate and contribute to the creation of online services?
- What does youth work need in order to ensure the development of needs-based aims for online youth services and follow these aims in developing and implementing the services?
- How can youth work ensure successful outreach of online youth services?
- What are the most effective strategies for reaching young people online, and how can these be tailored to different groups of young people?
- How can we engage young people who may be hard to reach or disengaged from
- traditional forms of youth work?
- How should collaboration with young people look like to co-design and co-create online youth work programmes that are relevant and meaningful to them?
- How to effectively use social media and other digital marketing tools to promote online youth work programmes to young people?
- What good practices and success stories can be shared and replicated across different organisations and contexts?

2.3. Co-creation with Young People
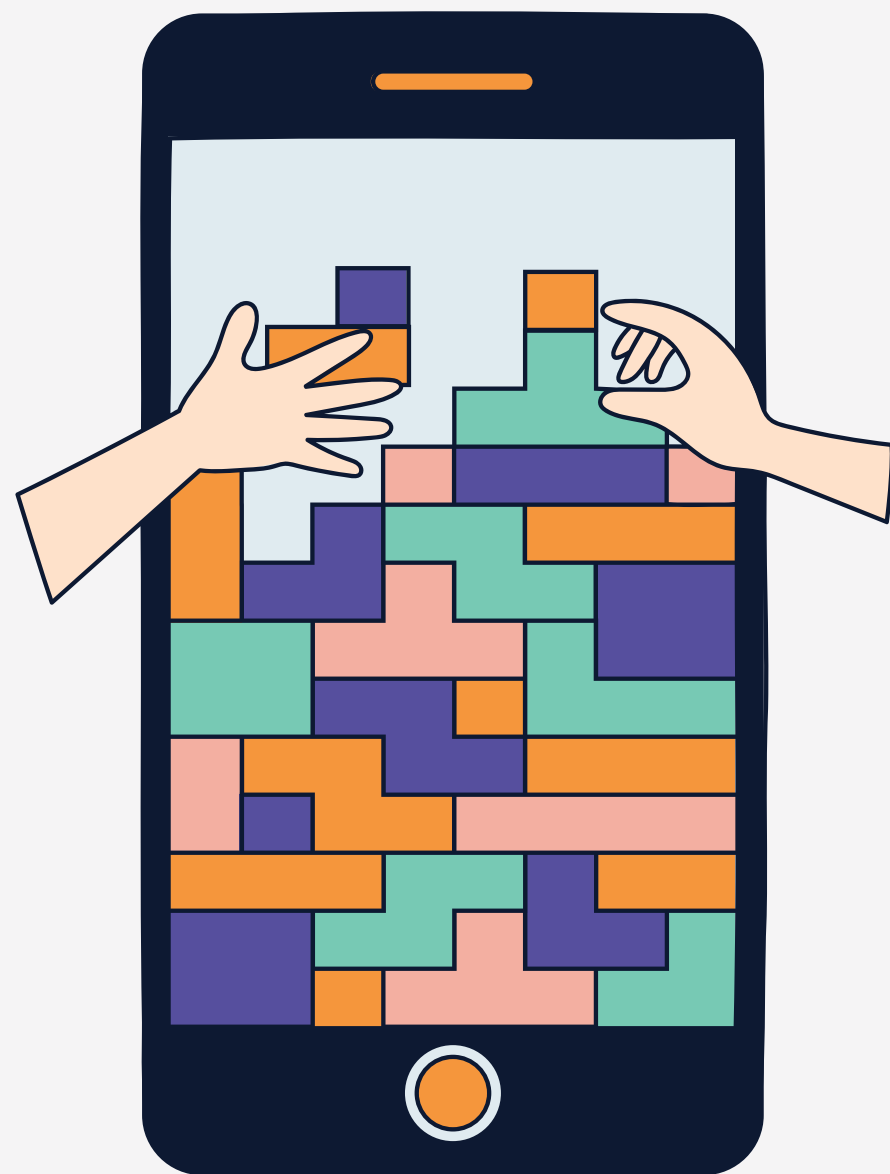
Co-creation in online youth work refers to the collaborative process of involving young people in the creation and development of online projects and initiatives that are designed to support and engage young people. This approach is based on the idea that young people have unique insights, experiences and perspectives that can be harnessed to create more effective and relevant programmes.

Co-creation can take many forms, from involving young people in the design and planning stages of a project to giving them the opportunity to co-facilitate workshops and events. Online platforms and tools, such as social media, video conferencing and collaborative software, have made it easier than ever to involve young people in the co-creation of online youth work.

The theme of co-creation with young people was referred to as an important aspect of successful online services, meaning that young people are involved in the development, design and implementation of online services. In some cases, this also refers to the involvement of young people in youth councils or youth editorial boards. Many reports mentioned the importance of co-designing and co-creating online services by including the voice of young people at the project design stage as well as the strategic planning and content creation.

The national contexts

Estonia
The better and deeper involvement of young people, more training and workshops for young people to develop their competencies, skills and attitudes to ensure that they are well prepared to work with digital solutions, platforms, etc. By the involvement of young people, we mean that young people do not have digital training, read the information on a website or enter an e-youth centre. All opportunities and services should be designed and accomplished together with young people. That ensures user-friendliness, understanding of services and actions such as campaigns, training, workshops, etc., including for young people with special needs. It is challenging as it takes significantly more time and resources, so many service teams and youth work organisations would need to recruit new employees or change their management, tasks, etc.

Belgium-Flanders
All respondents affirm the importance of the participation of youngsters in creating digital experiences. Being demand-driven and listening to their perspective seems to be crucial in creating something truly meaningful and effective. Further, it remains crucial to clearly delineate the target group. An activity specifically designed for youngsters without, for example, a stable home situation/parental figure might not be as appealing to other youngsters.

This highlights the importance of motivating youth workers and providing them with easily comprehensible tools to organise and establish co-creation and participation discussions. In addition, strengthening knowledge-sharing with stakeholders experienced with co-creation (with vulnerable youth) would be useful, taking the time to properly work out all aspects and do beta-testing and preliminary research into the target group forges a strong base for future participation.

Germany

The research found that there was a youth advisory board in some app developments, as well as youth editorial boards in many youth information sites and magazines. The 'klicksafe' initiative has a youth panel that helped develop the Cyberbullying First Aid App. The app 'Map the Gap' develops tours in workshops together with young people from the respective region. Young people who were involved in developing the tours were enthusiastic: 'I took part in 'Map the Gap' because I want discrimination against people to be curbed in my neighbourhood as well.' The online magazines 'aROund' and 'CTRL' work with youth editorial teams. Here, youths and young adults post on topics that are relevant to young people.

Ireland

High quality online tools, platforms and services consider youth voice and implement research activities to develop a User Centred (UX) design to ensure young people are getting a service that they want. As noted by Ireland's leading successful youth information developers Community Creations CLG, on the recent success of 50808.ie (an online counselling chat service), the investment in research and listening to the needs of young people is imperative. It takes time and research to ensure that we are truly listening to young people and creating online platforms that are user-friendly. They also highlighted that some young people prefer to have a digital service rather than an in-person service. Quite often there is a presumption of what young people want. We are making sure that the service fits what the service users want. We do that at scale, we are a digital first platform, we have a digital team, we do thousands of testing activities, we are well grounded in academia and there is a high degree of clinical input in the 50808.ie (counselling) services as well as research around how young people want to engage in youth services. We are listening to young people who prefer to have a digital service rather than an in-person or phone line as well.' Head of Digital, Community Creations CLG.Digital.

Finland

Young people's participation in the services is essential and should be built into services from the start. Young people's involvement in planning and developing the service and producing content are key to its effectiveness. This, too, requires resources that would enable the workers to have time and opportunities to genuinely take young people into account as part of developing the work.

Latvia

The involvement of young people in strategic planning and content-creation of online services (on decision-making level, peer-to-peer approach) promotes youth motivation to engage, provides youth-relevant content and engages other young people, increasing the involvement of the youth community.

Conclusions

Innovative examples within the reports have mechanisms in place that allow for consistent review and insights from young people to maintain the relevance of online platforms. Listening to or collecting young people's opinions can be a feature of online platforms, but some good practices involve young people at idea generating stage, board review level or throughout the user design process. Some online services – especially online information services or online magazines – continuously involve young people in youth editorials for content creation.

Involving young people in designing, planning or content-creation of online services would assure needs-based, user-friendly and effective online youth services, youth-relevant content as well as an online service that engages with other young people and therefore increase the involvement of the youth community. Successful services are based on preliminary research, listening to the needs of young people and a clear definition of the target group the service aims to engage.

It is emphasised that the participation process of young people requires training and guidance on both sides – young people and youth workers. Young people need training to develop competences, skills and attitudes that prepare them for participation processes as well as working on digital solutions. And youth workers need (on top of motivation) easily comprehensible tools to organise and establish co-creation and participation processes with young people. In addition, knowledge sharing with actors who already have experience with participation processes in the field of co-creation of online services is needed. Besides the training, additional resources are needed, especially time and opportunities to genuinely include young people, as well as structural changes in organisations, for example, integrating a youth advisory board into management and decision-making processes.

Considerations

- Digital services for young people - when possible - should be co-designed and co-created with the actual target group of services in order to provide youth-relevant, needs-based and quality online youth services.
- Benefits of co-creation in online youth work include increased engagement and ownership among young people, improved relevance and effectiveness of initiatives.

tiatives, and the development of valuable skills and experiences for young people involved in the co-creation process.

- Co-creation requires a commitment to authentic youth engagement and empowerment and must be approached with a willingness to listen to and act on the insights and feedback of young people.
- It is important to provide support for youth workers and young people to co-create and contribute to the improvement of online services, as well as to understand the various access points available to young people in these areas.
- Young people need training to develop attitudes and skills to participate in and work on projects which develop and implement online youth services.
- Youth work organisations require knowledge-sharing, training and policy on best practice for incorporating youth voice within the design and planning of online services for young people.

Follow-up questions

- How can young people be involved in co-creating online youth work programmes and activities?
- What are some examples of successful co-creation projects in online youth work?
- What are the benefits of co-creating with young people in online youth work, and what are challenges of co-creation processes?
- How can we ensure that online co-creation activities are accessible and inclusive for all young people?
- How can young people be engaged and motivated to participate in co-creation activities online?
- What mindset and what competencies are needed to develop a participatory and co-creative working style?
- How can it be ensured that the contributions of young people are valued and incorporated in the final outcome of co-creation activities online?
- How can we measure the impact of co-creation in online youth work?

2.4. Developing Online Communities for Young People
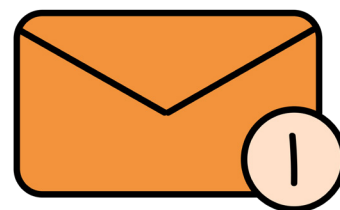
Findings

Online communities for young people have become increasingly important as many young people spend a significant amount of their time online. These communities provide a safe and supportive space for young people to connect, share and collaborate with others who share their interests, passions and concerns. The significance of online communities for young people has been highlighted by the national reports, which examined the success of various platforms and services in engaging young people within a community context. The reports have shown that services which are specifically designed to build and maintain communities of young people tend to be more successful and relevant to young people. Researchers emphasise the importance of understanding the needs and interests of young people in developing these platforms and services to ensure they are effective and appealing to their target audience.

The national contexts

Slovenia
The organisations carried out a variety of activities online, depending on the needs of their users, ranging from general youth centre activities (e.g. counselling, a place to meet and talk) to workshops and events. The areas covered relate to information, advice, health and well-being, sustainability, entrepreneurship, careers and employment, etc.

Ireland
Youth work traditionally tackled the notion of access for all, including young people within our civic spaces and community. Youth workers are in a unique position to influence online spaces with young people to ensure that they are truly providing a safe de-propertised version of the online digital community.

Finland
Some of the interviewees' organisations are filling a gap in municipal services, providing some services which municipal youth work does not provide in all municipalities for various reasons. Online youth centre Loiste also offers a national online service to the LGBT+ target group, partly because municipal youth work does not offer separate activities to rainbow young people for various reasons, and the existing services have deteriorated during the coronavirus pandemic.Online youth centre Loiste is an important provider of support, especially in small municipalities and for young people living in sparsely populated areas, enabling them to reach other rainbow youth safely. The youth work website produced by the Sámi Parliament provides information and counselling not offered by the youth work services of the relevant region's municipalities for minorities in their mother tongues. The services offered by

Sekasin Kollektiivi and Nuortennetti also support municipal mental health services by providing young people with an adult's presence at a time of crisis with a short delay.

Germany
In any case, tools are needed to connect young people with each other or within their community. A good example is the Everyone needs a Lee App - LEE-App for short. It is designed to bring together LGTBIQ+ teenagers and more experienced adults from the community or allies to accompany them on their journey. The mentors can help young people with words and deeds and provide assistance with their biographical experience if the mentees need help in certain areas of life. Another one is the Jugend-App, a DSGVO-compliant platform for cities, municipalities and independent youth work organisations. It serves as a template and can be used depending on the municipality, information provision, chat function, participation tools, integration of youth editorial teams through role management.

Netherlands
There are many online activities, but most activities we identified were not of a structural recurring nature. Some services, platforms and tools that stood out in terms of reaching and engaging the target group were those that managed to create a community. Creating a community is difficult at first because youth workers must develop content and put a lot of time in keeping the community active and relevant. But when succeeded, the community takes part of the work of the youth workers away by the rise of peer-to-peer education.

Conclusions

The national reports have listed platforms and services that are successful in engaging young people within a community context and platforms that are not. They have highlighted examples of youth organisations creating innovative spaces for young people to develop safe online communities for connecting, sharing and (peer) learning. Within a successful service, the community of young people communicate, share and learn more self-managed. These online communities take place in virtual reality spaces, online forums, community building apps, social media channels and groups, online gaming environments and youth information websites.
Successful platforms work well within the existing (youth work) communities, e.g. local communities or LGTBIQ+ communities.

Some of the services build on the existing platforms and tools available for developing online communities for young people, including social media platforms, as well as specialised platforms like Discord, Twitch and Reddit. These platforms offer a range of features and

functionalities that can be tailored to meet the specific needs of different online communities. In terms of good practices, it is essential to ensure that online communities for young people are safe, inclusive and respectful. It involves implementing robust policies and procedures to protect young people from online harm, including cyberbullying, grooming and other forms of abuse. It is also essential to provide adequate support and guidance for young people, including trained moderators, facilitators and mentors who can provide advice and support when needed.

Overall, developing online communities for young people requires a commitment to ongoing learning and adaptation, as the needs and expectations of young people continue to evolve in response to changing social and technological trends. It is an important part of providing a successful online youth service but also requires resources (time, energy) for content (co-) creation and keeping the community active and relevant. If young people are going to engage in an online community, the same youth work goals and principles of community development must be adhered to. In good practice examples existing and newly built tools developed it is evident that youth workers competences are needs-based youth interventions.

Considerations

- The development of online services that are based on the needs of young people can support the creation and growth of communities for this age group.
  - Online communities should have a clear purpose and set of goals that are relevant and meaningful to young people. This may involve co-creating with young people themselves to ensure that their needs and interests are reflected in the community's design and activities.
  - To ensure participation in and sustainability of online communities, youth work organisations require a community building strategy, resources for online engagement and community development as well as ongoing maintenance and monitoring.
  - A community building strategy includes the following aspects.
    - Online communities should be safe and secure spaces for young people to participate in. This includes implementing robust privacy policies, moderating content to prevent cyberbullying and other forms of abuse, and providing support and resources for young people who may be experiencing online harm.
    - Online communities should be effectively managed to ensure that they remain active, engaging and relevant over time. This may involve recruiting and training moderators and mentors, establishing rules and guidelines for participation, and providing ongoing support and guidance for community members.
    - Online communities should be developed using appropriate technology and platforms that are easy to use and navigate for young people. This may involve choosing a platform that is already popular among young people or de-

veloping a custom platform that meets the specific needs of the community.
    - Online communities should be accessible and inclusive for all young people, regardless of their background, abilities or interests. This may involve providing multiple ways to participate, such as text-based and video-based communication, and ensuring that content and activities are designed to be inclusive and welcoming for all.
  - Involving young people in developing online communities of young people supports reaching and engaging the target group.
  - Online communities should be regularly evaluated to ensure that they are meeting the needs of young people and achieving their goals. This may involve collecting feedback from community members, analysing engagement metrics, and assessing the community's impact on young people's well-being and development.

Follow-up questions

- How can civic societies utilise digital youth work to create communities of young people for more engagement as well as better inclusion and participation?
- What are the goals and objectives of developing online communities for young people, and how can they be aligned with the needs and expectations of young people?
- What platforms and tools are best suited for developing online communities of young people, and what are their strengths and limitations, especially in terms of safety and inclusiveness?
- How can we ensure that online communities for young people are safe, inclusive and respectful, and what policies and procedures should be in place to achieve this?
- What are the most effective strategies for engaging young people and encouraging them to participate in online communities, including guidance and support, and how can we measure the impact of these strategies?
- How can young people be encouraged and supported to take on leadership roles within online communities, and what are the benefits of doing so?
- What are the potential risks and challenges associated with developing online communities for young people, and how can these be mitigated?
- How can the online communities be sustainable and resilient over the long term, and what strategies can be put in place to achieve this?
- What are the best practices and success stories for developing online communities for young people, and how can these be shared and disseminated to others working in this field?

2.5. Using Existing Online Tools and Platforms

Findings

Many national reports have emphasised the utilisation of a wide range of commercial communication services and online tools by youth workers when engaging with young people. The partner countries have mapped out the integration of various commercial and privatised online communication tools and platforms into youth work practices. Youth organisations are providing safe online spaces for young people to participate in youth work by using already existing tools and platforms. Many youth work practices rely on pre-existing online services, including popular platforms developed and managed primarily by commercial providers. This presents several opportunities, such as easier access, outreach work, and access to existing features that do not require programming. However, it also poses challenges, such as dependency on the provider and their policies regarding data protection, as well as the general reliance on a commercial provider for support.

The national contexts

Netherlands
Using existing platforms for the benefit of youth work: In my research I saw that most Dutch youth workers use existing platforms to their advantage when exercising digital youth work. This has a powerful strength because it lowers the obstacles in reaching the youth. Young people are already active on these platforms and therefore it is easier to reach them instead of convincing them to download a whole new app that is not part of their daily routine.

Slovenia
Youth workers mostly trained themselves online to transfer activities to the digital environment. Some reported being involved in informal networks of youth workers, where they shared knowledge, experience and information on online tools and tested them with each other. Online tools used in their work include Zoom, Google Drive, Mentimeter, Jamboard, Kahoot, Padlet, Canva and the Discord platform.

Finland
Discord lends itself to providing a wide range of services. Discord was clearly the most common platform used by the services. It could be used both for workshop activities and as a place for spending your free time. It is a platform where young people are comfortable and that they are familiar with, and they can use it quite anonymously if they wish. It can be used either on a phone or a computer. On Discord, you can have private one-to-one chats by voice and text. It also has a general voice channel and a general text channel, and you can create channels to meet your needs with different content. A young person may follow the activities from a distance or join in directly. Servers can be public or private, and various bots enable

different means of monitoring and controlling what is going on. One interviewee brought up the need to organise a larger streaming event, but Discord is not flexible enough to meet their needs. Otherwise, the interviewees found Discord adequate, even though many also mentioned that you have to continuously keep an eye out for where young people are spending their time. The online world changes so fast that every actor seemed to be continuously monitoring the next move regarding platforms.

Latvia

Most of the digital tools and platforms are not specifically designed for youth work – they use the ones that are publicly available and then are adapted for their need and activity design. In general, we conclude that there are quite many different ready-to-use platforms available, but the lack of funding does not allow them to use these tools fully (limited functions in free or cheaper versions). Another conclusion is that very often less is more – the platforms that are already familiar to people are the ones that work because people are already there, feel safe and comfortable to use them, so there is no need to develop anything new from scratch. Instead there should be a clear plan and purpose on how to use these platforms for certain purposes, and also there is a need to develop skills of youth workers to use them fully.

Lithuania

During the interviews, youth workers stressed that they mainly used international digital tools to work with youth. There is a huge need for digital tools, though youth workers identified some international digital tools they were using in their work quite often. These tools help to engage, educate youth, communicate and collaborate digitally. They include canva.com, piktochart.com, justdancenow.com, teachersway.eu, actionbound.com, gather.town, Seterra, Miro, Trello, Slido, Kahoot, Woman Log, Cam Scanner, Wombo, Pinterest, Woman Log App, etc.

Germany

Youth work organisations work with existing platforms and tools, such as social media platforms, video conferencing software, gamification tools, etc., mainly because young people are already on these platforms and connected, but also because of their usability and design. Attracting them to new platforms is often a challenge because the usability and appealing design of existing platforms from large tech companies can hardly be achieved with the financial resources in the youth sector. Nevertheless, the aspect of data security and privacy should not be underestimated. Open-source software offers the possibility to design specific online services for the youth sector to make sure they are consistent with GDPR requirements.

Conclusions

All national reports have highlighted innovative cases where youth workers utilise well-known and commercial online tools and platforms creatively to lower barriers for participation in

youth work to reach young people through digital means. Young people feel safe on existing platforms, know how to use these tools and platforms, are familiar with them and use them in their daily routine. Activities and services that run through or are linked to these tools and platforms reduce the barriers and obstacles to reaching young people. A number of positive results and outcomes have been cited, including empathy, anonymity, access and engagement. The fact that the usual attractive design and user-friendliness of commercial tools and platforms can hardly be achieved with budgets from the youth sector was also highlighted.

Most commercial tools and platforms are not specifically developed for youth work. Youth workers adapt them to their needs. To do this, it is important to know what tools and platforms are popular among young people. The online world is changing fast and constantly, so it needs continuous monitoring of future developments and trends of tools and platforms. On the other hand, youth workers also need some skills to use and adapt the tools and platforms. Some of them learn tools and platforms through self-study and peer learning. Nevertheless, the findings also suggest the need for further European level guidance and upskilling on commercial tools and platforms to understand the full capability of them to enhance youth work, as well as reviewing the highlighted appropriateness and data rights of each platform for use in a youth work setting.

Considerations & questions

- Intensive use during COVID-19. The use of commercial online tools and platforms was rapidly implemented throughout the youth work sector in Europe during the last three years (the COVID-19 period) to deliver youth work services to young people online.
- Lower barriers. Using existing and well-known online tools and platforms lower barriers for participation of young people in youth work services, increases efficiency and creates cooperative relationships with young people and other sectors/areas.
- Following trends. The online world and therefore tools and platforms are constantly changing - it is a necessity, but also a challenge for youth workers to follow trends to keep track of the most relevant existing tools and platforms available.
- Awareness about safety. Using existing and well-known online tools and platforms can raise awareness about security challenges.
- Purpose, critical thinking & guidelines. To ensure that youth workers are

equipped with the necessary digital skills to effectively evaluate the appropriateness of commercial online tools and platforms, it is essential to establish a consistent process that emphasises clear purpose, critical thinking and planning guidelines. This process is crucial for the safe and effective use of commercial online tools and platforms in the provision of youth work services for young people, and it helps to future-proof the digital agility of youth workers.

- How can online safety and data security of young people be ensured when using existing and well-known online tools and platforms for youth work?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of using existing online tools and platforms for youth work?
- How to use and tailor online tools and platforms to meet the specific needs and interests of young people?
- How to collaborate with young people to co-create and co-design online youth work programmes using existing tools and platforms?
- Does the youth work sector need to invest in youth-led development and implementation/maintenance of (existing) platforms and tools?

2.6. Providing Safe Online Spaces

Findings

Developing safe online spaces for young people has been a common theme in national reports. Providing safe spaces in online youth work is essential to ensure the well-being and protection of young people who engage in online youth programmes or activities.

It has been further outlined in some of the good practice examples offered by partner countries. Due to the complexity of the subject, this summary distinguishes between two main topics that arose for considerations in reference to the provision of online services:

(a) data protection and online safety;

(b) trustworthy online environments

(A) Data protection and online safety

Although the use of privatised and commercial tools and platforms has been widely highlighted throughout the reports, many national reports also stated the need to consider the rights of young people and youth workers as protected by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). To create safe spaces for online youth work, it is necessary to respect not only the needs, but also the rights of the target group. A concern has been raised over young people's safety when accessing privatised communication platforms in a youth work setting. Data protection and online safety are considered important aspects in the national reports when it comes to providing safe online spaces. Data protection is defined in this case as the protection of personal data of the participants.

The national contexts

Finland
Privacy issues cause concern. Using a platform where user data protection issues are managed by a third party was a cause for concern for the interviewees. However, all of them said that the benefits of operating on these platforms outweighed those of staying away. Young people will spend their time on platforms run by third parties anyway, and having safe adults present is better than young people spending all their time on the platform without adult supervision. While working with young people, organisations can teach them some aspects of media education and show them how to stay safe on platforms.

Germany
To create spaces for meeting, exchange, learning and cooperation that are outside of commercial offers, the youth organisations in cooperation with IJAB in Germany have developed the platform DINA.international. It is an online platform offering organisational and communi-

cation tools for international projects in the youth work sector. DINA stands for Digital International Networking Activities. The German Federal Youth Council is currently developing a similar platform called LAB for regional and national offers.

There were many information and counselling services on topics related to the internet, including internet security, protection of personal rights and data. The national service klicksafe (Implementation of the European initiative at the national level) offers services for professionals in child and youth work, but has also developed websites and apps for children and young people themselves. In addition, there are some regional offers, such as Handysektor or Frag Zebra. These offers support youth workers and young people so that they could deal with these issues, have a better understanding of the facts and find help.

Nevertheless, from discussions with the interviewees, it is clear that they need knowledge about the legal framework of data protection, so that tools are selected taking in consideration the applicable data protection laws. Support for the implementation of online services should be provided in the form of knowledge resources (especially with regard to relevant data protection standards and advice on suitable consent forms, constantly changing legal requirements for the use of various tools, etc.) and in the form of procedural suggestions (which questions should be clarified when and how), which are necessary for quality development and assurance.

Netherlands
Providing a safe platform and maintaining strict frames to keep it safe: Working with young people with special needs, it is important to maintain a safe and secure platform. Young people can often be vulnerable and therefore be harmed by others. It is important that a platform is well moderated by professionals and volunteers and that there are clear frames that need to be kept when moderating.

Latvia
Data safety (GDPR) is another challenge in digital youth work. Not all youth workers are fully aware of the rules or how to apply them in practice, which limits some activities or puts youth workers or young people at risk.

Ireland
The youth work sector can support digital citizenship for youth focused online platforms to provide safe spaces for young people to access digital environments outside of private industry-led platforms. There is mass privatisation and monetisation of the digital space across the internet. Offering your data and paying for the subscriptions to platforms gives rise to some critical thinking on how we as society support young people to consume online platforms. It also challenges us to consider how and why we facilitate our young people to engage in a private digital platform, offering their data and sometimes money in return for the use of an online experience. For some of the youth work respondents in our interviews, developing a

digital strategy for their youth organisation was important before introducing private online platforms such as Gathertown, Altspace or Google Jamboard. There was a need to assess the safety and appropriateness of the platforms for young people first and foremost. Youth work traditionally tackled the notion of access for all, including young people within our civic spaces and community. Youth workers are in a unique position to influence online spaces with young people to ensure that they are truly providing a safe de-propertised version of the online digital community. There was a focus on equipping young people with the ability to think critically about the platform they are using and how their data is being used.

Conclusions

Youth workers recognise the advantages of commercial online platforms since young people already spend their time there. It provides an opportunity to educate young people about media literacy, online safety and critical thinking when using online tools and platforms. However, young people require support in understanding their digital rights when accessing online services geared towards them.

The mapping research exercise has revealed that most partner countries are concerned about the capacity of youth work organisations to protect the personal data of all the stakeholders involved. The development of big data related to commercial and privatised online spaces have been identified as areas of concern when introducing online tools and platforms in a youth work setting. The development of big data refers to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of large amounts of data generated by young people when accessing online youth work services. This data can include personal information, usage patterns and behaviours, which can be used to gain insights into the needs and interests of young people. The use of big data in online youth work services can enable youth workers to tailor their services to the specific needs and preferences of young people. However, it also raises concerns over privacy, data protection and the potential for discrimination or exploitation of vulnerable young people. It is therefore important for youth work organisations to consider the ethical implications of using big data in online youth work services and to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place to protect the privacy and rights of young people. Guidance on this topic was recognised as an urgent need for youth workers, who require knowledge resources and procedural suggestions on the legal framework and data protection regulations to ensure quality in youth work projects.

The development of tools and platforms for the youth sector that can be adapted and used by several actors is a welcome opportunity. Open-source tools can fulfil all needs in terms of function, but sometimes sacrifice user-friendliness and design. Several reports have also stressed the importance of consistent monitoring of purpose-built platforms to ensure a secure environment.

Considerations

- Rights and needs of young people. To create safe spaces for online youth work, it is necessary to respect the rights and needs of the target group.
- Internet safety and data protection. Knowledge resources and procedural suggestions regarding the legal framework of online safety and data protection regulations are necessary for quality development and assurance.
- Support. Youth work organisations require support to develop safe spaces online, with careful consideration for the data rights and online rights of young users.
- Establishing specialised online platforms for young people can help mitigate the risks posed by privately-owned platforms. Nevertheless, it is crucial to consistently monitor and regulate these platforms to ensure their effectiveness and safety.
- Reflecting on what you use. When using online tools and platforms, youth workers should use the opportunity to teach important aspects of media education and safe use of the internet as well as critical thinking when using online tools and platforms.
- Data literacy. Youth workers need to be more data literate to support young people navigating in the online world that is constantly trying to monetise their private data.
- Privacy and online safety. Online youth work raises concerns over privacy and online safety. Youth workers must ensure that all online communication is secure and that young people's personal information is protected.
- Using secure platforms. Platforms used for online youth work must be encrypted and password-protected to ensure that only authorised participants have access and all personal information and data are protected.

Follow-up questions

- What are the key principles of data protection and online safety that should be followed in online youth work?
- What types of personal data are typically collected during online youth work, and how is this information stored and protected?
- How can youth work ensure that youth workers as well as young people are informed and aware of the data protection and online safety measures in place during online youth work? What is the scope of data literacy?
- What should training and support of youth workers look like to effectively manage and protect young people's data during online youth work?
- How to ensure the needed data literacy of youth workers?

(B) Trustworthy online environments

The national reports have emphasised the importance of establishing a safe environment for young people and youth workers to engage in, in addition to data protection and online safety. Trustworthy online environments are crucial in youth work to ensure that young people can use online platforms and tools safely and securely, particularly with the growing prevalence of social media and digital platforms. A safe space is the foundation for effective youth work, providing a sense of physical safety and fostering confidence within a group.

Slovenia
One case involves a digital youth centre (Young Dragons - DigiMC) being set up as a stand-alone unit (a youth centre), which is still in operation. In another case (MC ZOS - the 'Kua bi u lajfi' event, where professions are presented to secondary and upper primary school students), they plan to keep the event online, as they have identified an interest in it from young people from different cities and regions who would not otherwise come to a face-to-face event (and the guests presenting professions do not have to travel to the event). In some cases (e.g. Lojtra Association), events could potentially be organised online in the future for sustainability reasons (reducing carbon footprint).

Romania
Innovative information and counselling services need visibility across regions and fields (just as a random example: online participatory budgeting for youth could be an initiative that can be promoted across countries and even across municipalities in one country). Specific apps for information and counselling could serve as models across countries. The pandemic constituted an opportunity for fast innovation and development of online tools; however, some models were built long before the pandemic.

Ireland
Online digital platforms and tools can remove barriers for young people to access counselling services, youth information, and training and learning. The surveyed respondents in Ireland stated a high level of impact numbers for young people accessing their online platforms nationally across Ireland. A specific focus for youth services during COVID-19 to access those most vulnerable resulted in many innovations that are still being developed to improve the ability for youth workers to continue to reach young people from marginalised or vulnerable disadvantaged backgrounds.

Germany
Some counselling services on life crises and cyberbullying create safe online spaces to talk about crisis, bullying or abuse situations. They mainly use chat counselling, which is popular among young people who want to discuss sensitive issues that they might not dare to talk about on the phone. The counselling service 'Nummer gegen Kummer' reported that 10% of all consultations in 2021 were held online, with 75% of them provided to female counselling seekers. Telephone consultations made up about 45%. More than 60% of counselling seekers use the chat function for acute crisis. The main topics include psychosocial issues and health. Over the phone, counselling seekers mainly want to relieve themselves emotionally and would like suggestions on how to cope with their problems.

In the mapping we found an interesting online service called 'Digital Street Work', a new form of youth and youth social work. It is about offering young people help online. The concept is currently used mainly in Bavaria with the project 'Digital Streetwork Bavaria', where trained persons (e.g. social educators) are online and take care of the fears and concerns that young people and young adults express there. Children and young people spend a lot of time online, exchanging information with others, researching information, presenting themselves in social media or playing games. In addition to positive experiences online and offline, there may be experiences that cause fears or worries, for example, lovesickness, (school) stress or global crises. This is where competent contact persons are needed to tackle the challenges together with young people. This is exactly where the project 'Digital Streetwork Bayern' comes in. Young people who are confronted with fears and worries are offered the opportunity to contact a 'Digital Streetworker' in Bavaria free of charge and anonymously. They are bound to professional secrecy. Young people can also decide for themselves whether they want to remain anonymous or not. This is to create a pleasant atmosphere for young people to express their feelings and concerns.

Belgium-Flanders
It is often assumed that youngsters know their way around technology, but it is not only age that determines digital exclusion or inclusion. Van Deursen (2018) mentions disability and (lack of) education as risk factors. However, Asmar et al. (2022, p. 306) notes that 'while social demographics continue to play a role, the extent to which they lead to digital exclusion is influenced by additional factors. [...] The impact of COVID-19 in Flanders (Belgium) points at the importance of social support as a crucial indicator of mechanisms of exclusion.' These results are backed up by our analysis, 't Salon and JD Appelsien mentioning isolation and need for support/structure during COVID-19, and Brake-Out checking if their target audience had proper support at home to participate. Apart from support in access (devices, internet connection, tools), as this requires a certain financial budget depending on your target audience, attention should also be paid to digital literacy. Due to the playful nature of youth work, a trustworthy environment is created where youngsters are free to experiment and participate without specific/pre-defined learning targets. This could have a positive influence on vulnerable youth. It is important to stress that youth workers can also pay attention to digital literacy in different ways, e.g. differentiating the type (online, blended, physical) and focus of digital youth work (instrument, content, activity).

Conclusions

During the pandemic, it was important to create safer spaces where young people could spend their time, share, experiment and learn in virtual space. Online activities, online counselling or entire virtual youth centres were created. Some of these online activities continue to operate or are still offered, mainly because they have a lower threshold for young people to get help, e.g. via a chat instead of making an appointment in a youth centre. Some other reasons are that young people who do not participate in on-site activities take advantage of them, but also for sustainability reasons (reducing carbon footprints). Online counselling services in particular are primarily and increasingly used by young people seeking advice and help on sensitive issues.

In some countries, such as Germany and Finland, the concept of a full-time online or digital youth worker has become a funded reality. Full-time youth workers have been given the role of engaging with youth specifically online to improve support available to young people to navigate online services, platforms and tools. In other examples, such as Belgium-Flanders, youth work organisations have developed safe online spaces that pay attention to the additional support structures needed for access (devices, internet connection, tools) and digital literacy, which can be about distinguishing types of digital youth work (online, blended, physical) but also different focuses (instrument, content, activity).

All the reports submitted to the research have showcased innovative online initiatives with a high impact number of responsive engagements from young people within their national contexts. These initiatives have demonstrated the ability for online services, platforms and tools to provide inclusive opportunity for young people to access counselling, non-formal learning and expert guidance in a youth friendly environment.

Considerations

- COVID-19 & innovation. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated innovation in the provision of online youth services, platforms and tools that offered safe spaces for (vulnerable or marginalised) young people to access information, advice, sharing and learning opportunities.
- Ongoing services. Online services developed and provided during the COVID-19 pandemic keep on running in adjusted ways due to the observation that young people joining these services usually do not join on-site activities or offline services.
- Lower barriers. Online services lower barriers for young people to access youth information, learning environments and especially counselling services.
- New forms of outreach. Digital Streetwork presents new forms of outreach social work on the net, where digital street workers play video games with clients, write DMs on Twitter or exchange and advise in Discord.
- Team and organisational structures in youth work need rethinking to include the new needs for target group-oriented services, considering the observation that the creation of online and virtual spaces, platforms and applications for young people often require IT specialists and/or sustainable knowledge within the youth organisation to maintain.
- Consistent recognition and dissemination of examples of developing innovative online services for young people with a focus on inclusion inspires colleagues and encourages experimentation and trial and error.
- Providing support and resources. Young people must have access to support and resources if they need it. This could include providing access to a mental health professional, offering peer support or sharing helpful resources and information.

Follow-up questions

- What are the key elements of a trustworthy online environment in youth work?
- How can youth work maintain the facilitation of providing learning spaces online?
- What are some best practices for ensuring a safe space for young people in online environments?
- What strategies can youth workers use to promote digital citizenship and responsible online behaviour among young people?

2.7. Research-Based Sustainable Services

Research-based sustainable online youth work services refer to online services that have been developed and implemented with the intention of meeting the needs of young people in a sustainable and long-term manner. These services are informed by research and evidence-based practices to ensure that they are effective and relevant to the needs of the target population.

Research is a critical component of sustainable online youth work services, as it provides evidence of what works, what doesn't work, and what needs to be improved. Research can help to identify the needs of young people, the barriers to accessing services, and the most effective strategies for delivering services. It can also provide insights into the impact of online youth work services on young people's lives, enabling service providers to continuously improve and adapt their services to better meet the needs of young people.

The theme of Research-Based Sustainable Services includes references to sustainable practices for those delivering online services for young people such as involving the target audience at design level, incorporating young people's voices and facilitating the review of online campaigns and the impact of engagement in these services.

The national contexts

Belgium-Flanders
Setting up tenable practices: It is important that developed practices are tenable/sustainable and can have a long-term impact. It requires several aspects. Namely, there is a need for more preliminary and subsequent research regarding the implementation of a service. Looking into and involving the target audience is of equal importance as setting up an easy-to-use practice. To make it attractive and useful for youngsters in the long run, make sure to investigate their needs beforehand and afterwards research how the users feel about the service and how it could be improved to reach and support as many people as possible. This is especially the case for online youth work, to make sure the target audience is actually being reached and the desired goals are at least partly attained.

Ireland
High quality online tools, platforms and services that consider youth voice and implement research activities to develop a User Centred (UX) design to ensure young people are getting a service that they want. As noted by Ireland's leading successful youth information developers Community Creations CLG, on the recent success of 50808.ie, an online counselling chat

service, is down to the investment in research and listening to the needs of young people. It takes time and research to ensure that we are truly listening to young people and creating online platforms that are user-friendly. They also highlighted that some young people prefer to have a digital service rather than an in-person service.

Romania

A mapping of missing (respectively, existing) services at local and regional level, based on youth's needs and with the involvement of youth and relevant stakeholders, would be necessary, because information and counselling services do not cover all relevant domains for youth's lives.
Extracting and promoting the most impactful training and learning methods, as proved by impact analyses and youth's perceptions.

Germany

Online youth work providers are increasingly recognising the importance of using research to inform their work and are integrating research findings into their service delivery models. Youth participation is a key element of sustainable online youth work services in Germany, with providers involving young people in the design and delivery of services and promoting their active participation in the service delivery process. At the same time, the research has shown that the youth work community does not feel prepared for the future, so there is a need for analysis of future challenges in the youth sector.

Conclusions

The use of strategic and participatory research adds value to the creation of sustainable and long-term online youth work practices that are based on the needs of users. It is crucial to support the development of frameworks and guidelines for carrying out participatory research in developing practices during the implementation of an online service to ensure its sustainability and relevance to young people and youth work practitioners. By providing such frameworks and guidelines throughout the development and implementation of online practices, practitioners can create sustainable and long-term functioning services that meet the needs of users.

The national mappings have brought out the need for accompanied research of running services. Some national reports showcase examples of innovative safe spaces and tools developed by online youth work practices to provide vulnerable or marginalised young people with access to services. These practices can serve as spaces and tools for long-term studies to determine their success.

The sustainability of online youth work services in Europe depends on several factors, including digital access and literacy, partnership working, community engagement, and responsiveness to the needs and interests of young people. It is essential to continue investing in research and evaluation and maintaining a commitment to social justice and equality to ensure the ongoing development and delivery of sustainable online youth work services in Europe.

Considerations

- Strategic and participatory research adds value to create sustainable and long-term functioning practices related to user's needs.
- The provision of a framework and guidelines to support practitioners to carry out participatory research in developing practices throughout the development and implementation of the practice will create sustainable and long-term functioning online practices related to user's needs.
- Sustainable online youth work services require a long-term approach to planning and delivery, with a focus on developing partnerships, building capacity, and fostering community engagement.
- Digital literacy and access to technology are essential for sustainable online youth work services. Efforts must be made to bridge the digital divide and ensure that all young people have equitable access to technology and digital skills.
- Collaborative approaches to service delivery, involving partnerships between youth work providers, policymakers and other stakeholders, are critical for the sustainability of online youth work services.
- Sustainable online youth work services must be responsive to the needs and interests of young people, as well as to the changing social, economic and technological landscape.
- There is a need for ongoing research and evaluation of online youth work services to identify effective strategies for sustainable service provision, as well as to understand the impact of these services on the well-being and development of young people.

Follow-up questions

- What is the definition of 'sustainable' in the context of online youth work services?
- How should frameworks and guidelines support practitioners to carry out participatory research in developing practices throughout the development and implementation of the practice be designed?
- What are the benefits of sustainable online youth work services, both for young

people and for society as a whole?

- What challenges do online youth work service providers face in terms of sustainability, and how can these challenges be overcome?
- What factors contribute to the sustainability of online youth work services, such as partnerships, networks and collaborations?
- How can online youth work services be made sustainable in terms of funding and resource allocation?
- How can research be used to inform the development and delivery of sustainable online youth work services?
- What are the best practices for promoting sustainability in online youth work services, based on research and evidence?
- How can the impact of sustainable online youth work services on young people and communities be measured, and what evaluation methods are being used to assess their effectiveness?
- How can policymakers and funders support the development and delivery of sustainable online youth work services, and what policy recommendations have emerged from research in this area?
- What are the emerging trends and innovations in sustainable online youth work services in Europe, and how can they be leveraged to improve service provision and support the well-being of young people?
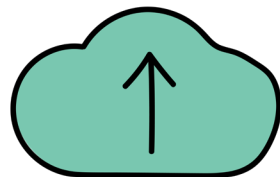
2.8. Working in Partnership

Findings

Partnerships in online youth work refer to collaborations between youth work organisations and other stakeholders, such as government agencies, non-profit organisations and businesses, to deliver online youth services and programmes as well as improve recognition and develop guidelines and frameworks among others. These partnerships can take different forms, such as joint projects, shared resources or collaborative networks. In Europe, the state of play in online youth work partnerships varies across different countries and regions. However, there has been an increasing recognition of the potential of partnerships in online youth work to expand the reach and impact of youth services and programmes, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants in the national research reports have frequently mentioned the need to work in partnership with local youth organisations and noted how youth work organisations were using online platforms within their youth work context, quite often reaching out to experts in the field of delivering online youth services. The theme of Working in Partnership has been identified as a common thread amongst reports as a result. It is evident through research that in many cases of the mapped services youth work organisations have sought to work with experts in the field of digital or that experts have sought to work with youth work organisations. Some youth work organisations in Europe have formed partnerships with tech companies to develop and deliver online youth services and programmes.

The national contexts

Ireland
Working in partnership with youth work and social support organisations enables young people from marginalised communities to access online platforms. There are many platforms available directly for young people. Working in partnership with youth organisations and education providers is key to ensuring that content is curated appropriately and is speaking to young people that are availing services in the youth work sector. 'I use current content and then ask for resources on it. I need to be opportunistic and work with partners where possible. It's a niche space to be operating in and I need to make sure I am going at an angle that is allowing young people to engage in content through fun articles.' Youth Researcher, RTE Learn platform.

Netherlands
Using different sources of knowledge to provide correct and well receivable information: Young people with special needs often need specific information. For example, young people that suffer from mental health issues need information on these issues and what to do when experiencing these issues. This is not information that the youth workers alone possess and can provide. Therefore, youth workers must make use of the different sources of knowledge, such as cooperating with a university (scientific knowledge), people that have had the same experience (experience knowledge) and professionals that work with the topic (practical knowledge). JOIN-US is a great example of a platform that uses these different sources of knowledge when providing information to their target group.

Belgium-Flanders
Setting up tenable/sustainable partnershipsf: In addition to training opportunities for youth workers, it is also important to focus on knowledge-sharing and partnerships: 'Through knowledge sharing, organisations get to know other tools, platforms and even target groups, which ultimately strengthens their practice' (Vermeire et al., 2022, p. 68). This way, the partnerships meet possible shortcomings, and the institutions can complement each other's expertise. This is an opportunity also mentioned by the respondents. As mentioned in previous recommendations, European networking should provide support and interesting future partners, but it is also important to create a qualitative partnership from the start, setting up clear expectations and learning to understand the other's work method and jargon before undertaking action.

Conclusions

The youth field requires support to facilitate sustainable and trustful partnerships with other sectors (such as social sector, health sector, tech industry) on a strategic level. Collaborating with partners can improve the quality of online youth work through the integration of diverse skills, knowledge and resources. In addition, the issue of the digital divide presents a significant challenge in online youth work, which can be tackled by pooling resources together to ensure fair access to technology. Furthermore, partnering with others can stimulate innovative approaches to online youth work, as different perspectives and ideas are brought to the table.

Many of the cases and examples presented within the research report highlight successful projects whereby digital technology experts such as software engineers and UX designers worked in partnership with youth work experts such as youth information officers and youth workers to develop youth work informed online services to increase access for young people in local and national areas.

Overall, partnerships in online youth work are an increasingly important area of focus in Europe, as youth work organisations and other stakeholders seek to leverage the power of technology to expand access to youth services and programmes and better meet the needs of young people in a rapidly changing digital world.

Considerations

- Sustainable partnerships between youth work and other fields can help to reach wider youth audiences and provide youth with more specific support and professional services that are out of scope of youth work.
- Partnership working can enhance the quality of online youth work by bringing together diverse skills, knowledge and resources.
- The digital divide remains a significant challenge in online youth work, and partnership working can help to address this issue by pooling resources to provide equitable access to technology.
- Partnership can lead to innovative approaches to online youth work, as partners bring new ideas and perspectives to the table.
- Youth workers cannot possess all of the expertise needed to respond to young people's needs as such, so it is imperative that youth agencies work in partnership.

Follow-up questions

- How can the youth field establish and sustain partnerships with specific sectors such as the social sector, health sector or tech industry, and what are the best practices for developing strategic partnerships that address the needs of young people in Europe?
- How can online youth work organisations effectively identify and engage potential technology partners, and what criteria should be used to assess their suitability and alignment with youth work values and objectives?
- What are some best practices for establishing and maintaining trustful and mutually beneficial partnerships between online youth work organisations and technology companies, and how can conflicts or disagreements be managed and resolved?
- What are some examples of successful partnerships between technology companies and online youth work organisations that have resulted in innovative and engaging programming for young people, and how can these be adapted or scaled up in different contexts?
- What are some of the key challenges and obstacles to partnership working in online youth work services, and how can these be mitigated through effective communication, collaboration and shared decision-making?
- How can online youth work partnerships help to bridge the digital divide for young people in Europe, and what specific strategies can be used to ensure equitable access to technology and digital resources, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds?
- How can online youth work partnerships facilitate cross-border collaboration and

learning among organisations and young people across different European countries, and what role can digital platforms and networks play in this process?
- How can partnerships between online youth work services and other sectors, such as the arts or sports, be leveraged to provide more holistic and engaging programming for young people, and what are the key success factors for such collaborations?
- What are the best practices for effective partnership working in online youth work, and how can they be implemented?
- How can online youth work partnerships encourage innovative approaches to youth work, and what are the potential benefits of these approaches?
- What are the key considerations when developing and maintaining partnerships in online youth work, such as communication, role clarity, and accountability?
- How can we enable digital experts and youth work organisations to collaboratively create and implement online platforms tailored to the specific needs and preferences of young people?
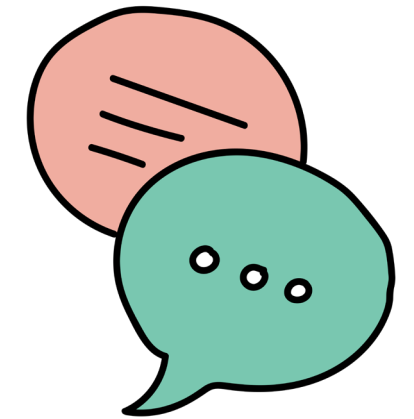
2.9. Recognition of Online Youth Services
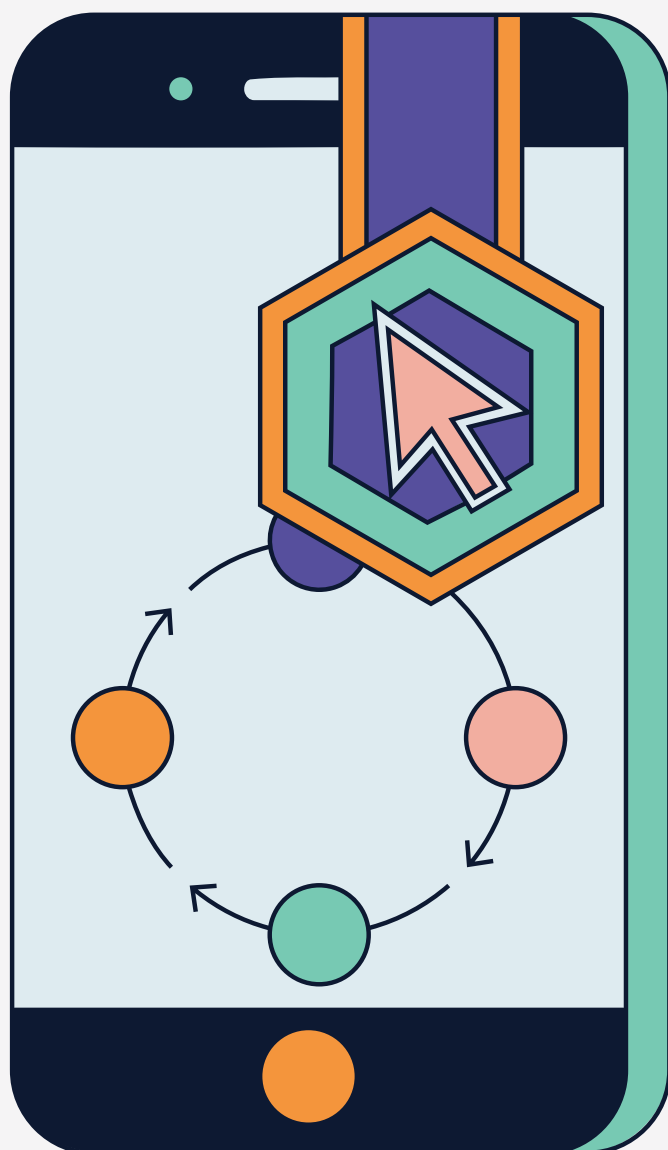
Online youth work, as part of digital youth work, is a relatively new area of practice that involves using digital online technologies and a developed digital mindset of active youth workers to engage with young people and deliver appropriate youth work activities and services. The recognition of online youth work varies depending on the context and country. The recognition of online youth work refers to the widespread promotion and recognition of the benefits and positive outcomes that can occur by providing online youth work services for young people to avail of at a national and a European level.

The recognition of online youth work is an important aspect of ensuring that young people's engagement and contributions in online spaces are valued and acknowledged. Recognition can help to build young people's confidence, sense of belonging and motivation to participate in online youth work activities. It can also help to highlight the positive impact that online youth work can have on young people's personal and social development.

The national contexts

Netherlands

During the pandemic, most youth workers were forced to work online and, in that way, discovered the opportunities that digital youth work brings them in terms of reaching youth that they normally do not reach, providing content online, promoting activities, etc. But, in some cases, funders of youth work organisations, mostly municipalities, do not see the benefit of digital youth work in the post-pandemic times and want them only to work in youth centres and on the street. Some youth workers have trouble explaining to policymakers the effect and relevance of digital youth work. It would help them to have some scientific studies supporting the positive effects of digital youth work. In that way, they can have a higher chance of getting long-term financing from municipalities and create digital services, platforms and tools.

Ireland

National government structures within Ireland should visibly recognise the value of out-of-school online services for young people. Online digital platforms and tools should be recognised on the international stage as a powerful way to break barriers for young people to access counselling services, youth information, training and learning. Funding streams and reporting structures in youth work should consider the cost of the ongoing development and maintenance of online youth services, platforms and tools. Youth work organisations and funding streams in Ireland struggle to fund realistic timelines for the ongoing activities of site maintenance, community support and updates when realising online platforms, tools and services for young people. The energy required for site maintenance and ongoing funding was cited by the majority of respondents during interviews as something that is often overlooked

and under-considered in youth funding applications. The majority of the services and tools were being driven by one person working full-time or often updating online services was developed as an added part of someone's day to day role within a youth work structure.

Finland

Finland already has plenty of services, although they are still not sufficient. Young people find the services easily, but they are forced to wait for access to one-to-one services.

Lithuania

Digital youth work is not yet a natural part of youth work. Digital youth work in Lithuania has taken its first steps during the last few years and is not perceived as a clear priority in youth policy. That being said, some strategic steps have been taken to support its implementation. At the end of 2020, the Department of Youth Affairs (DYA) published its vision for the future of Youth Policy 2030, which consists of six main strands, one of which is digital youth work methods. Youth work organisations lack financial resources to develop digital tools. Some tools or platforms are developed by the private sector. Therefore those tools firstly reflect their needs (even though they are also useful for youth). International projects are the biggest support for youth organisations for developing such tools in Lithuania. DYA is organising innovation funding projects where youth work organisations can apply addressing their needs in digital youth work as well (development of competences, tools, development of resources, infrastructure and other).

Germany

It was noted within the national mapping that there is a lack of recognition of pedagogical work and participatory media literacy teaching. Recognition is needed to ensure adequate funding for follow-up activities or projects in order to achieve the sustainability and dissemination of project outcomes.

Conclusions

Online youth work is a relatively new form of youth work, and its recognition and support by government funding and policy vary from country to country. However, some countries have recognised online youth work as a legitimate form of youth work and have taken steps to support it.

The national reports have pointed out that online youth work should be better recognised as part of youth work and included in the definition of digital youth work. This definition would help organisations articulate the need for the ongoing development and maintenance of online youth service provision. Highlighting key roles and areas of work that are needed to successfully deliver quality youth work through online service provision formed part of the findings in this research on European online services, platforms and tools. Long-term research

studying the effects of online digital youth work and impacts of online youth work services could also equip the European youth work sector with recognisable statistics to inform innovative projects.

Considerations

- Online youth work services should be recognised as a means and a process of youth work at a national and European level.
- Online youth work requires different approaches than face-to-face work, and youth workers need to be able to build rapport and establish trust with young people through digital means.
- Online youth work services are able to identify and respond to signs of social isolation and to provide opportunities for young people to connect with others and participate in activities and projects that interest them.

Follow-up questions

- What steps can be taken to clarify and increase recognition of online youth work as an equivalent practice to on-site work, and how can this recognition benefit both young people and the organisations that deliver these programmes?
- What are effective ways to measure and evaluate the impact of online youth work programmes, and how can this data be used to inform recognition and validation efforts?
- How can organisations work collaboratively with schools, universities and employers to ensure that recognition and validation of online youth work programmes is recognised and valued outside the youth work sector?
- What are examples of successful recognition and validation efforts for online youth work programmes, and what can we learn from these examples?
- How might recognition of (online) youth work be supported at international level?
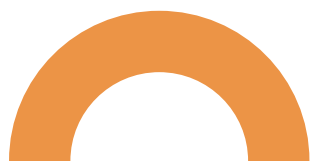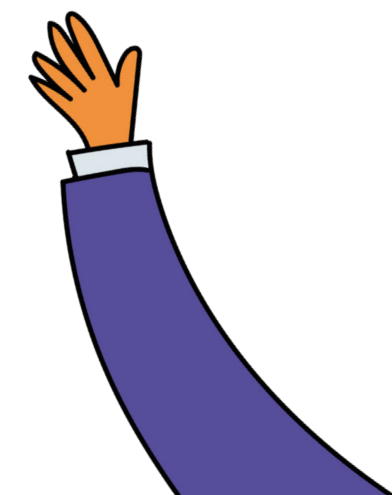
2.10. Blended Approaches - Face-to-Face Combined with Online

Blended approaches in online youth work refer to the integration of both face-to-face and online interactions in youth work practices. This approach combines traditional offline youth work activities with digital tools and platforms, allowing youth workers to reach young people where they are and engage them in activities that are relevant to their interests. This means that in a blended format there can be analogue, digital or/and hybrid elements, e.g. chat-counselling combined with face-to-face counselling. In Europe, the use of blended approaches in online youth work has become increasingly popular in recent years, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital tools and platforms, and many youth organisations have had to quickly adapt their programmes and services to meet the needs of young people online. Many national reports underline that the combination of face-to-face and online offers in blended learning/counselling makes it possible to use the advantages of the respective approaches.

The national contexts

Netherlands
Online counselling is a great gateway, but never sufficient: digital youth work can be very useful in reaching youth with special needs that otherwise wouldn't be reached. Online contact is often experienced as having a lower barrier than physical contact. That said, the research suggests that online counselling, when dealing with young people with special needs, is never sufficient and therefore should always be followed up or supplemented by offline contact.

Hungary
'Very, very early on, when the secondary school programme was launched, it was suggested that we should implement blended learning. So, there should be a digital underpinning for this whole training system, which I think was rare in Hungary at the time. We started to think about these a good 10-15 years ago, and finally we built an e-learning platform that could support the high school and university programmes.'

Germany
Digital street workers of Digital Streetwork Bavaria connect directly with the young people's lives and pick them up where they often spend their time and where worries and fears often arise. As soon as street workers reach their limits and can no longer help, they refer the young people to the appropriate specialised agencies. It is important for their work that the digital street workers themselves do not act anonymously on the internet, but instead clearly identify themselves as such. For example, in their gaming account they refer to the website where they can officially be found. However, digital street workers are often not only to be

found online. If it is possible and necessary, they are also available for personal contact.

Ireland
Online digital platforms and tools can remove barriers for young people to access counselling services, youth information, training and learning. The surveyed respondents in Ireland stated a high level of impact numbers for young people accessing their online platforms nationally across Ireland. A specific focus for youth services during COVID-19 to access those most vulnerable resulted in many innovations that are still being developed to improve the ability for youth workers to continue to reach young people from marginalised or vulnerable disadvantaged backgrounds. 'Our service is an integrated youth service model, we have staff trained with counselling techniques, iscoil education and two massive employability projects, supporting young people under 16+ to progress to employment, and also mutually beneficial relationships and communities, making sure everyone has a place in their communities, for example, young people from Ukrainian families. No matter the location of young people it made the agility side of it as the big thing. It would have been a lot slower - you're more efficient when you have a blended approach to your youth service.' (Service Manager, Youth Work Ireland Midlands)

Conclusions

Blended approaches in online youth work have several benefits, including increased access to services, greater flexibility and the ability to reach young people who may be difficult to engage through traditional face-to-face methods. However, there are also challenges to be addressed, such as ensuring equal access to digital tools and addressing issues of digital exclusion.

The national reports have put an emphasis on online services, particularly in the field of youth counselling, that remove barriers for young people to access in-person support. Good practice examples include scenarios where-by young people engage in online services as a way of reaching out or accessing youth work services before being ready to be included in face-to-face approaches or interventions. Many of the youth organisations that expressed concern over young people who did not have access to online services, found that a combined approach where in-person training was offered to onboard young people to a platform service served greater access.

Overall, the state of the play in Europe regarding blended approaches in online youth work is positive, with many youth organisations embracing digital tools and platforms to engage young people. However, there is still work to be done to ensure that all young people have equal access to digital resources and that the benefits of blended approaches are maximised.

Considerations

- Added value. Online services combined with onsite youth work can bring an added value to the process, implementation and overall activity goals. It provides opportunities to engage with young people in new and innovative ways.
- Increased learning opportunities. Youth workers can offer a wider range of learning opportunities through blended approaches, including the use of multimedia resources, online training and peer-to-peer support.
- Diversity of channels. Online services combined with onsite youth work provides different channels of support for young people.
- Limited impact on certain outcomes. Blended approaches may be less effective than traditional face-to-face youth work in certain areas, such as building social skills or promoting physical activity.
- Balancing online and offline engagement. While online youth work can offer benefits such as increased flexibility and access, it is essential to balance online and offline engagement. Face-to-face interactions are crucial in building and maintaining meaningful relationships with young people.
- Access to technology. Not all young people have access to the necessary technology or reliable internet connections, which could create a digital divide and exclude some youth from participating fully in blended youth work services. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that all young people have access to the necessary technology and support to participate in online youth work.
- Monitoring and evaluation. It is crucial to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of blended approaches to ensure that they meet the needs of young people and achieve the desired outcomes.

Follow-up questions

- How to strengthen the added value to the process, implementation and overall activity goals by combining online services with onsite youth work?
- What are the benefits of using blended approaches in online youth work?
- What are challenges youth workers may face when using blended approaches in online youth work, and how can they address these challenges?
- What role do technology and digital tools play in blended approaches to youth work, and how can youth workers effectively incorporate them into their practice?
- How can youth workers ensure that blended approaches to youth work are inclusive and accessible to all young people, including those who may face barriers to accessing online resources?
- How can youth workers collaborate with other professionals and stakeholders in developing and implementing effective blended approaches to youth work?
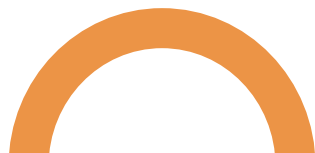
2.11. Adopting a Digital Mindset

A digital mindset in online youth work involves, among other things, adopting a proactive and innovative approach to using technology to engage and support young people. It means embracing technology as a tool for creating new and meaningful experiences for young people, and recognising the potential of digital tools to enhance and complement traditional forms of youth work. But a digital mindset in online youth work goes beyond technological proficiency. It also requires openness to alternative learning environments and a willingness to accept and adapt to new ways of engaging with young people.

The concept of digital mindset pertains to the challenges faced by local youth work organisations in adopting and utilising digital online services. Some youth workers may be hesitant to move away from traditional in-person methods, while others may resist engaging with new forms of technology-based online services. Adopting a digital mindset involves overcoming these barriers and taking a proactive and innovative approach to utilising technology to engage and support young people. It means embracing technology as a tool to create new and meaningful experiences for young people while recognising the potential of digital tools to complement traditional forms of youth work and provide added value.

The national contexts

Germany
Some youth workers do not directly see the added value of digitalisation and think it is a hype. They mainly work analogue and are open to new ideas but need convincing. They often lack knowledge about new, digital forms of community and thus have problems reaching (new) young people. They need a reference person in the organisation who can communicate both opportunities and risks to them. Training is needed only as a second step. It also needs exchange with other organisations and associations, opportunities where new approaches are presented in a practical way. They could also learn from the target group, for example, by teaching them how to use digital tools. A practical guide for new participation formats that includes all contemporary formats is also helpful. For a scout association, this could be, for example, a repair café, a digital scavenger hunt, geocaching or creating a post about their scout group on Wikipedia.

Lithuania
Many youth work organisations lack the right attitude towards digital youth work. As digital youth work is a relatively new area in Lithuania (more widely adopted after COVID-19), there is a huge need not only to support youth workers with resources, but also to develop their positive attitude towards digital youth work.

Estonia

Most of the mapped activities are aimed at young people from the age of 13. Certainly, one of the reasons for this is the fact that social media platforms are allowed from the age of 13, but that is not the main reason. Information dissemination channels and youth-oriented training are directly related to other areas such as health, education, employment, environment, etc.

Ireland

There is consistent recognition throughout Ireland that youth work needs to respond to 'where young people are at' from local youth services and digital youth work organisations in the design of online services for young people. If you are not online, you are not serving a large cohort of the young people in your local area. From respondents working in Ireland's leading national digital youth work organisations, 90% that were surveyed noted that the need for the adaptation of youth services to be available both online and offline was now pressing. We no longer have the right to say that consideration for technology is not part of youth work when developing services for young people.

Considerations

The research reports have cited challenges in reaching young people where youth workers are inexperienced or not well equipped to engage in online platforms. Researchers have noted reluctant attitudes towards embracing online youth services as a possible high-quality form of engagement for young people. Youth workers need a broader understanding of the implications of digital transformation in society and therefore also in the youth field. There is a lack of knowledge about new, digital forms of community and thus problems reaching (new) young people.

Developing a digital mindset requires a willingness to learn and experiment with new digital tools and approaches and a commitment to continuous learning and improvement. It involves training staff and volunteers in digital skills and competencies, including digital literacy, online communication skills and the ability to use digital tools effectively to engage and support young people.

To counteract this tendency, offers and support are needed in the development of positive dispositions (norms, motivation, attitudes, values) towards digital transformation as well as in knowledge transfer. Attitudes towards digital youth work are developed through sharing examples, experiencing, practising and reflection. A reference person at the organisation could support in reflecting opportunities as well as risks. Frequent exchange opportunities with the target group or other organisations where new approaches are presented and could be tried out would support the experiencing and practising for youth workers.

Adopting a digital mindset in online youth work is essential for organisations to remain relevant and effective in engaging and supporting young people in a rapidly changing digital landscape. It requires a willingness to embrace change and innovation and a commitment to creating safe and supportive digital spaces for young people to connect, collaborate and thrive.

Considerations

- Youth workers need a broader understanding of the implications of digital transformation in society and therefore also in the youth field.
- A digital mindset involves digital literacy and in general being open to new ideas and approaches, while constantly exploring new ways to engage and support young people online. It may involve experimenting with new tools and platforms or adapting existing tools to better meet the needs of young people.
- Youth work needs to foster positive critical dispositions (norms, motivation, attitudes, values) towards digital transformation by:
  - helping practitioners see connections within the field and the societal implications of digitalisation;
  - providing experiences, examples and stories of impact in a central location.
- A digital mindset involves recognising the importance of digital literacy for youth workers as well as young people, and providing them with the skills and competencies they need to navigate the online world safely and effectively.
- Attitudes toward digital youth work could be developed, among other things, through sharing examples, experiencing, practising and reflection.
- A digital mindset requires a commitment to ongoing learning and development, and recognising that the digital landscape is constantly evolving. It means staying up to date with new technologies and tools, while continually exploring new ways to engage and support young people online.

Follow-up questions

- How might the youth sector in Europe support fostering positive dispositions (norms, motivation, attitudes, values) towards digital transformation by helping practitioners see connections within the field and the societal implications of digitalisation?
- What are the key digital skills and competencies that youth workers need to have in order to effectively engage and support young people online?
- How can organisations create a culture of continuous learning and innovation that encourages youth workers to experiment with new digital tools and ap-

proaches?
- What are success stories of organisations that have successfully adopted a digital mindset in online youth work, and what can we learn from these examples?
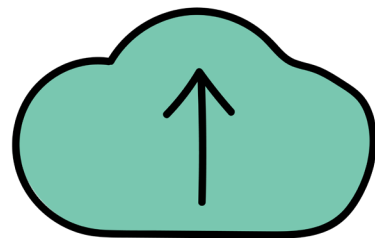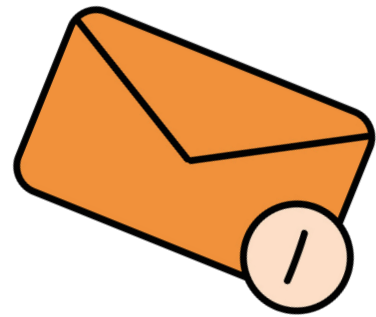
2.12. Training, Peer Learning & Guidelines for Youth Workers

Findings

Training, peer learning and guidelines are all important components of effective online youth work. Training can help youth workers develop the competencies needed to engage and support young people online, while peer learning can enable youth workers to share their experiences and learn from one another. Guidelines can provide a framework for safe and effective online youth work practices.

All national reports have pointed out the need for further training and peer learning activities aimed at digital competences, sharing good practice and ways to use and facilitate online services. Some have also mentioned the need for guidelines on online services in the youth field and information for youth work policymakers.

The national contexts

Lithuania

Youth workers reflected the need to have one database for all digital youth work methods, tools and other resources available (not necessarily only national resources). All international projects where Lithuanian youth work organisations participated and their results could be also recorded there. There is a need to share good practices of digital youth work among youth work organisations and youth workers. As suggested by youth work trainers in SNAC DIGI 2, DYA or any other national institution could financially encourage youth work organisations to share good practices of digital youth work. It would also support adapting digital youth work to the Lithuanian context. Youth workers noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had highlighted the need for digital youth work and that youth organisations were not prepared for it. Limited digital skills among youth workers has become apparent, therefore, DYA organised some training sessions for youth workers. There is a lack of national resources or resources in the Lithuanian language dedicated to digital youth work.

Romania

There is a continuous need for building expertise of youth workers to use digital tools, facilitate online training services and build specific online tools tackling personal development for youth. There is a need for training on how to make learning accessible for young people with special needs. Some training providers are advanced in terms of training models (online or blended); lessons could be extracted from the way they have built their programmes year after year, making them more complex, and from the way they ensure their funding. Practices identified in different European countries could be disseminated in learning events targeting stakeholders acting in similar domains to pass knowledge and build expertise.

Netherlands

Providing 'hands-on' training to youth workers on the possibilities of digital youth work: Although there are many examples of youth workers that take advantage of the opportunities of digital youth work, there are still many youth workers that do not have the skills and knowledge to do so. Very often a large organisation of youth workers has a small group of youth workers who work digitally (this group has grown a lot during the pandemic out of necessity). Youth workers that still are not taking advantage of the possibilities should be trained on digital youth work in a hands-on manner. There is no need for long training with lots of theory or text, but there is a great need for training where youth workers get hands-on tips and tricks and go to work with different platforms and tools of digital youth work and see examples of how to work with them. All youth workers, including those who have limited online skills, should be trained on how to recognise the needs of youth that result from their participation in the online world (Youth Spot, forthcoming).

Belgium-Flanders

Setting up tenable/sustainable partnerships: In addition to training opportunities for youth workers, it is also important to focus on knowledge-sharing and partnerships: 'Through knowledge sharing, organisations get to know other tools, platforms and even target groups, which ultimately strengthens their practice' (Vermeire et al., 2022, p. 68). This way, the partnerships meet possible shortcomings, and the institutions can complement each other's expertise. This is an opportunity also mentioned by the respondents. As mentioned in previous recommendations, European networking should provide support and interesting future partners, but it is also important to create a qualitative partnership from the start, setting up clear expectations and learning to understand the other's work method and jargon before undertaking action.

Flanders

Organising train-the-trainer sessions: In Belgium-Flanders, youth workers and other non-formal educators are encouraged to pay attention to digital/media literacy in their activities via, for example, the renewed youth and child rights policy plan 2020-2024 (De Vries & Van Roelen, 2021). Nonetheless, it is not necessarily easy for youth workers to cope with digital youth work as they do not always have the right competences or resources. In Belgium-Flanders, preliminary training is not generally required for youth workers, while the training for volunteers does not focus on digital literacy (Vermeire et al., Nijs, 2021). Nijs (2021) mentions the need for a general framework. This framework should include digital literacy as a category, as there should be room for capacity building of youth workers (train-the-trainer activities) (see 'Pay attention to digital inclusion and digital literacy of participants and youth workers'). Several respondents ponder on the unclarity of regulations for setting up online practices. There is a European definition of digital youth work, as well as inspiration by providing good practice examples; however, there are no clear guidelines. Transparency is essential, especially in online youth work.

Germany

The national mapping pointed out that current curricula in vocational training and studies could not ensure that competences that are needed for future developments and environments are taught. There is a permanent learning process that is not finished after the initial professional training. Accordingly, parts of the training must be transferred to further training. Niels Brüggen from JFF underlines: According to feedback from professionals we interviewed, there needs to be a place for networking and exchange, learning from the others in order to develop further in exchange with the others. A continuous working and learning process is necessary because learning is an aspect of working. In addition, there is also a need for a support structure for issues such as technology, law, data protection, etc. He is not aware of a nationwide network for digital youth work in Germany or any organised overarching structure. There are competence teams of different organisations. Support institutions and youth organisations make specific offers, for example, in Bavaria there is a media advisory service that can offer support. There is also a video series on YouTube.

In the areas of information and data literacy, communication, digital creativity and safety, changes can be observed in the lifeworld, so professionals need to have insights into which processes of change these are and then have concepts for action to be able to integrate something like this into respective offers in different settings (online and/or face-to-face).

Understanding the digitalisation of society requires understanding how digitalisation is shaping societies, including its impact on youth work and young people, being able to take young people's digital cultures into account in youth work practices and being able to encourage young people to shape the process of digitalisation themselves. In the existing training programmes so far, the focus is often on the use of digital tools and not at all or less on reflecting on the social dimension.

Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic brought up and highlighted the need for digital youth work and online services for young people and that youth work organisations and youth workers were to a large extent not prepared. Already in 2018, the expert group on digital youth work collected training needs of youth workers and recorded them in their report.[4] Based on the national mappings, the needs are still well classifiable into three dimensions proposed by the expert group:

1. digitalisation of society,
2. organisational digital development, and
3. youth work competences.

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[4] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Developing digital youth work : policy recommendations, training needs and good practice examples for youth workers and decision-makers : expert group set up under the European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2016-2018, Publications Office, 2018, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/782183

The national mappings have revealed a lack of digital competences and resources. In many national realities, there is no standard or mandatory training for youth workers on digital youth work. This lack of structured training can make it challenging for youth workers to develop the skills and knowledge needed to effectively engage with young people in the digital age. The gap of designing and delivering needs-based training and peer learning activities that focus on online services in the youth field for youth workers on local, national and European level has been widely noted for youth work across Europe. Digital competences of youth workers have been identified as an area that must consider the various needs of youth target groups. However, there are various resources and opportunities available, such as online courses, workshops and peer-to-peer learning, that can help youth workers acquire the necessary digital competences. It is essential for organisations and policymakers to recognise the importance of digital youth work and invest in training and development opportunities for youth workers to ensure they can effectively support young people in today's digital world.

Key themes related to the format of training:

- Digital competence development (knowledge, skills, attitudes)
- Positive dispositions (norms, motivation, attitudes, values, …), understanding and sensitivity towards digital transformation
- Digital/media literacy
- Hands-on approach:
  - How to use and facilitate online tools and services?
  - How to build and create online tools and services?
- Digital inclusion: How to make online learning accessible for youth with specific needs?
- Capacity building

Key themes related to the format of peer learning:

- Database of available digital youth work methods, tools and resources
- Sharing knowledge and good practices
- National resources in mother tongue
- Learning events for practitioners
- Qualitative partnerships

Key themes related to guidelines for youth workers:

- Guidelines for digital and online youth work in general
- Guidelines on regularities to consider when setting up an online service

In addition to the demands for specific offers in the fields of training, peer learning and guidelines, it has been also emphasised that there is a need for a general framework in which these different components are embedded.

The use and development of online youth services should focus on the accessibility of online youth services for young people with special consideration to those with specific needs for accessibility (socioeconomic marginalised youth, youth with disabilities, ...).

Considerations

- There is a need for training and peer learning activities on digital competences for youth workers to consider and reach the needs of different target groups. It should include European guidelines on online services in the youth field and information for youth work policymakers.
- There is a need for training on digital competences with a special emphasis on positive dispositions towards digital transformation and digital literacy as well as hands-on training on how to build, use and facilitate online tools and services.
- There is a need for peer learning activities (peer learning events, partnerships, …) and resources (a database with available digital youth work methods, tools and resources).
- There is a need for a general framework in which these different components (training, capacity building, peer learning, guidelines as well as topics, priorities, approaches) are embedded and further explained.
- Innovative initiatives need to be consistently identified and disseminated for the youth work sector to learn from.
- Digital literacy. Youth workers and young people may lack the digital skills needed to participate fully in online youth work. Therefore, it is important to provide training and support for them to develop their digital literacy skills.

Follow-up questions

- What are the most important skills and competences for youth workers in online youth work, and how can these be developed through training and professional development?
- How can organisations share their experiences and learning related to training, peer learning and guidelines in online youth work with other organisations and stakeholders in the field?
- How might we inform policymakers what the youth field needs?
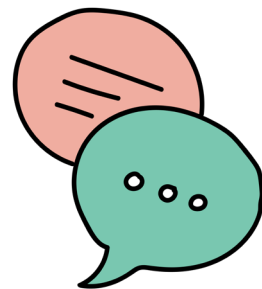
OUTLOOK

It is likely that online youth work services and the use of digital environments will continue to expand and diversify in the coming years. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital tools and platforms in many sectors, including youth work, and this trend is expected to continue even after the pandemic subsides. The use of digital services and platforms also offers opportunities for youth workers to reach out to diverse groups of young people who may otherwise have limited access to traditional youth work services. This can include young people in rural or remote areas, those with disabilities, or those from marginalized communities. Additionally, digital youth work can enable more personalized and flexible support for young people, as well as provide new avenues for engagement and participation.

The importance of co-creation processes in online youth work services will continue to grow in the future. Co-creation allows for a more collaborative and inclusive approach to developing digital services and tools, and can ensure that the needs and interests of young people are effectively addressed. Young people are often experts in the ways in which they use digital environments and tools, and their insights and feedback can be invaluable in developing high-quality, relevant, and sustainable online youth work services. By involving young people in co-creation processes, youth work practitioners can also foster greater engagement and ownership among young people, and create services and tools that are more responsive to their needs and interests. In addition, the use of co-creation processes can also contribute to the sustainability of online youth work services. By involving young people in the development and implementation of digital services and tools, youth work practitioners can help to ensure that these services are more likely to be used and valued by young people over the long term.

However, there are also potential challenges and risks associated with digital youth work. These include issues of privacy and data protection, online safety and security, and the potential for unequal access to technology and resources. It will be important for youth work practitioners and stakeholders to address these challenges and develop appropriate policies and practices to ensure safe and effective digital youth work.

Overall, the importance of co-creation processes in online youth work services is likely to continue to grow in the future, and youth work practitioners should invest more in making this practice a routine. The investment in exploring and using digital services, platforms and tools can help to maximize the potential benefits for young people. By involving young people in co-creation processes, youth work practitioners can help to create more relevant, high-quality, and sustainable digital services and tools for young people.

It is likely that in the future, digital technology will continue to play an increasingly important role in youth work. As a result, investing in competence development and capacity building in digital youth work will become even more crucial. Youth work organizations and stakeholders will increasingly focus on developing a digital mindset, building capacity and strengthening digital competences of youth workers. This will enable youth workers to use technology

more effectively to engage and empower young people. Additionally, there may be a greater emphasis on developing strategies that are future-oriented, incorporating emerging technologies and anticipating how they may impact youth work in the coming years. This could involve building partnerships with tech companies or exploring new ways of using technology to support young people's development.

One potential trend is that youth work organizations and stakeholders will increasingly use VR and AR to create immersive experiences that support young people's development. For example, they may use VR to create simulations that allow young people to explore different careers or environments, or AR to overlay educational information onto real-world objects. Gaming is also likely to become an increasingly important tool for youth work. Games can be used to teach important skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, and communication, as well as to create a sense of community and engagement among young people. There may be a growing focus on using these technologies to reach and engage with young people who are otherwise difficult to reach. For example, VR and AR could be used to provide educational opportunities to young people in remote areas, or to engage with young people who are disengaged from traditional education or social activities.