

Achieving Youth Goal #9 Target 7

Findings from the 8th Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue Qualitative Consultation



Youth Goal #9: Space and Participation for all: Strengthen young people's democratic participation and autonomy as well as provide dedicated youth spaces in all areas of society.

Young people are underrepresented in decision-making processes which affect them although their engagement is crucial to democracy. They need access to physical spaces in their communities to support their personal, cultural and political development

YG#9 Target 7: Provide youth-friendly, relevant, comprehensive information, also developed by and with young people, in order to enable youth participation.

Guiding question used in the EUYD8 consultation: What actions/ measures can be implemented to ensure young people have access to youth-friendly, relevant and comprehensive information to participate in decision making processes and society at large?

Key topics in this report: *co-production of information, fake news, hate speech, media literacy, critical thinking, centralised information, youth-friendly information, transparency.*

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Target 7: Providing youth-friendly, relevant information

The Youth Dialogue activities asked participants what actions/ measures can be implemented to ensure young people have access to youth-friendly, relevant and comprehensive information to participate in decision making processes and society at large.

Wider context, new developments

Participants argue they have a wide access to information, but find much of it unreliable and have an insufficient capacity to assess its quality. Who produces information and what is left out, based on what/ whose criteria/ agenda, for whom etc. became pertinent dilemmas during activities. The emerging challenges are thus, to create enabling circumstances for increasingly younger age groups to filter the information they are bombarded with, to report inappropriate content and to **(co)produce** friendly and reliable information.

Youth Dialogue activities demonstrated high **awareness** that **fake news and online propaganda** became more sophisticated and that social media is targeted for circulating inaccurate information. Indeed, research shows that unlike older generation, young people are more sceptical and critical when exposed to fake news and they share it less¹. Even so, participants stressed that often, young people have insufficient skills to access, retrieve and use the information. In these situations, they may feel confused and inclined to access obscure sources of information.

Participants called for information that is **reliable, clear and concise** on a range of issues they find relevant: from local consultations, to climate change, mental health, career choices, volunteering, leisure, housing, urban planning, curriculum and much more. One could link young people's demands for information that is clear, concise, accessible, yet comprehensive and fun, to the expectations created in other online environments they are exposed to. Definitely, '**relevance**' is highly subjective, dynamic, context-specific and diverse. Thus, decision-makers need increased awareness at how *their* arguments on '**youth relevance**' are, indeed, aligned with what young people find important.

What matters about this topic to young people?

A major cross-cutting theme was the high level of **confusion** experienced by young people when searching for information on public matters. Some reports conveyed the idea that many young people are politically disengaged because of being insufficiently aware of the complex ways in which politics influence their lives. According to them, a discussion of young people's relationship with the world of information should start from asking **why information of quality**

¹ Brashier, N.M. and Schacter, D. L. (2020) 'Aging in an Era of Fake News', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 29(3): 316-323.

matters to the young people and how they can be persuaded that ‘**it is important to care about politics**’:

Youth-friendly information can therefore help people to understand how you can cast your vote or how you can participate in your community, on a national level or within the EU. However, first one should make it clear why it is important to care about politics, only then you can share substantive information.

Dutch Working Group Report.

As emphasised in the The International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations (INGYO) roundtable, the insufficient political preparedness was a concern also in relation to young people with representative roles. A general consensus built around the idea that there are **not enough channels that are trustful and youth friendly**, from where they could draw reliable and updated **information on politics**. Schools fear allegations of political partisanship and thus, have limited possibilities for passing information on political issues and even less for authentic debates. Youth work may also, prioritize a less controversial stance in relation to politics². Occasionally, the idea that political parties are insufficiently proactive in reaching unaffiliated young people, emerged. According to several participants from a minority background, the weak parental support may be a major deterrent to public participation, as well. A void of political preparedness among young people was a frequent concern:

One of the major obstacles for young people in Slovakia to enter decision-making processes is a lack of civic preparedness. The formal education system fails; civic education is too theoretical in focus; it does not allow the effective development of civic competencies. Schools are, by definition apolitical [...]. This causes a fundamental problem when debating political and civic issues with pupils and youth.

Slovakian Working Group Report.

Who is not getting useful information was a major concern. Several young people argued that ‘**schools are not equal**’ and they can deepen the socio-economic divides. One example was the limited citizenship education (including media literacy) in **initial vocational education and training** (VET) as compared with general education. According to several participants, this hinders the capacity of the young people in VET to fully engage as citizens, whilst enabling the participation of others:

Also, socio-economic background can hinder participation. As an example, a student of a vocational school said that they have much less information about active citizenship in their studies compared to high school students.

Finnish Working Group Report.

The ability to process information does not depend on age: There is no reason why a young person should understand less than an adult. It depends more on socio-economic background. So, we need to fight against socio-economic inequalities that are at work at every level of society.

French Working Group Report.

² For more on the tension between political socialisation and political neutrality in youth organisations/ centres/ clubs, see the *Report on Target 4: Ensuring physical youth spaces*.

Participants also recalled coming across **hate speech** on social networks, mostly on Facebook, in the news on refugees and in the public comments on ethnic minorities and the LGBTQ+ community. Many were aware of some ‘tips and tricks’ on how to detect fake news, but they were also concerned that their peers may not have the opportunity to learn about this. In addition, discussions unfolded a sense of unease in relation to the **(miss)use of personal data** from social media:

Everyone considers their privacy endangered, especially because of social networks and various internet portals that seek consent for the processing of private data. They are most worried about Facebook and Instagram. They think that it is very easy to hack a mobile phone and turn on the camera or microphone on the mobile phone.

Croatian Working Group Report.

Many participants suggested young people do not need other kinds of information than adults, but a **friendlier format**. Participants considered that the information on public matters generated by authorities at all levels, is overly technical, instead of being easy, fast, clear, ‘snackable and with humour’. They were concerned about the insufficient accessibility of public information in multiple languages for ethnic minorities or with audio/ video transcripts for young people having sensory impairments³. The poor access to information on their rights among the **vulnerable young people in alternative care** settings or among **those leaving care**, was highlighted.

Possible Actions and Measures

A key proposal was for the **state institutions** (especially those dealing primarily with young people, such as social welfare agencies), to allocate on their websites a **separate section to the vulnerable young people**. This section should contain information on the services available, the way of accessing them autonomously and contact data for persons able to assist further. According to participants, the **format of information should be creative and diversified** to include visuals, factsheets, videos or podcasts.

One of the most recurrent demands was for a **single-entry-point** to access reliable information about the political decisions and ‘all opportunities for participation’. The need for a ‘centralised’ source of information emerged as a reaction to an increasing state of confusion experienced online by young people when accessing information on civic and political participation, on employment, education, volunteering and training opportunities. A technical configuration in the form of a ‘button of the young person’, to help in crisis situations, was proposed. Portuguese participants were in favour of a virtual platform, connected to national and European sources and accompanied by a ‘traditional source of information’ such as a youth centre. Other participants proposed the **co-management** of such centralised websites/ channels/ services by **(local) authorities and youth councils**, and the introduction of a ‘quality label’.

³ The Report on Target 2: Ensuring equal access to participation, also covers issues related to accessibility of information in minority languages.

Still, participants did not deeply engage with the **technical and political dilemmas** attached to a centralised information source in a world where ‘relevance’ is highly subjective, where online information is inherently de-centralised, bottom-up and any selection, prone to bias and redundancy. The risks of further disengagement was noticed, however:

The main issue with this is that they [the centralised sites/ pages/ platforms] would need to be constantly updated. Finding information that is not up to date will discourage young people and would make them look elsewhere to obtain their information, increasing the risk that they encounter fake or mis-information.

Maltese Working Group Report.

To participants, information is necessary for influencing change. Activities demonstrated an ethos that is **solution focused** and based on co-participation. A frequent proposal was for **unmediated information exchange with decision-makers**, from local to European level:

... how useful could be developing an app to collect and respond to the doubts, worries and inquiries from European youth. This way, it could help decision takers to know in a more direct communication what Young people want without any interference. Later, this information could be used to publish in the media or networks to aware the population about the situations that Young people face nowadays.

Spanish Working Group Report.

Many participants emphasised the role of **youth work** as enabler of **critical thinking and media literacy**. However, as organisations have, inevitably, a limited outreach, mainstreaming critical thinking within the **school curricula**, was considered necessary. Young participants also called for classes of critical media education in all schools (including VET). The proposed content would include, besides detecting and reporting fake news and hate speech, also advocacy issues on media ownership, algorithms and post-truth politics.

Young participants called for **bolder legislation** to ensure that the content produced for enhancing youth democratic participation is reliable, that fake news and hate speech is filtered out; that perpetrators are stopped and the victims are supported. An important mission of these legal mechanisms would be to hold social media companies accountable, as, to the young people, the root causes are the business models prioritizing the number of visualisations at the expense of accuracy. Many participants demanded stronger European and national legislation, able to protect young people from the dangers of fake news, propaganda, hate speech, online violence and violent radicalisation, threats to privacy, including unauthorised use and misuse of data.

To participants, information needs not only to be made available, but **co-produced** with young people and **proactively disseminated**. A more intense promotion of EU politics on social media and a wider dissemination of the EU Youth Dialogue and EU Youth conferences were proposed. More inclusive information campaigns, especially in rural areas, with the help of town halls, though civic organisations were suggested by Romanian participants. Increased **transparency** of the information on internal activities and decisions of the **National Youth**

Councils was proposed⁴. To participants, this would increase the sense of representation and belonging among young people from a range of different backgrounds.

⁴ For more information on this, see the *Report on Target 1: Ensuring young people have influence*.