SNAC Digital Youth Work

Work Package 4 "New practices for online youth work"

National report – Belgium, Flanders

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4. **Which steps did you undertake in this process?**
   ☒ desk review
   ☒ survey
   ☒ interviews
   ☐ focus groups if the case
   ☒ consultation/expert group
   ☒ other (in case you used a different approach, please describe it):
      Follow-up interviews

5. **In case you have carried out interviews, focus groups, or any other form of meeting, please describe the profile of the participants in detail (by ticking the according boxes and using the comment field below):**

- Qualification/role:

☒ Youth worker

☒ Project manager

☒ Coordinator

☐ Teacher

☒ Researcher

☐ Decision maker

☒ Designer

☐ Programmer

☒ Other (in case of other roles, please describe it):

After careful consideration, the Flemish online youth work practices provided by the researcher were selected. Most of these practices focussed on at least one vulnerable target group. National agency JINT analysed the list and selected 20 practices. Afterward, a discussion between the NA and the researcher followed, narrowing the list down to 10 practices based on the goals of this research project. We looked for a variety of practices regarding target groups, aims, and methods used.

Eight in-depth interviews were conducted with the following organisations/projects:

- Jeugddienst Appelsien;
- Waddist project at De Ambrassade;
- Link in de Kabel, responsible for Smart-e game;
- Quindo's medialab and the #Kolle initiative;
- GameWise, responsibe for Lockdown Minds;
- VLESP from Ghent University, responsible for Silver;
- Child Focus, responsible for Girl Power Squad;
- Salon-line initiative from 't Salon (linked to the CAW Noord-West-Vlaanderen, centre for general welfare).

Two follow-up interviews were conducted with the following organisations, after they filled in the survey:

- Brake-Out project from Konekt;

- MerhabaPhone project from Merhaba

Several online consultations with stakeholders and/or experts were also carried out for a complete first mapping of the Flemish online initiatives.

- **Profile of the organisation**/institution they work in (e.g., social inclusion; health; leisure time activities):
  Following the order of the abovementioned respondents:
  - JD Appelsien is a small-scale youth work organisation for youngsters (16+) from the Belgian, Flemish regions Antwerp and East Flanders. The target group are youngsters aged 16+ with a cognitive disability. They provide both leisure activities and one-on-one counselling and training. During the first COVID-19 Belgian lockdown (March 2020), JD Appelsien created a social media application for their target group.
  - De Ambrassade is an intermediary organisation of 'superstructure' with several tasks. Those tasks are legally enshrined in legislation, namely in the Flemish Children's Rights and Youth Decree. Firstly, De Ambrassade is a centre of expertise for everything relating to youth work, youth information and youth policy. Secondly, they are a support organisation for Flemish youth workers. Thirdly, they are the Flemish bureau for youth information coordination. Lastly, they are the link between accredited, national Flemish youth work and youth work policymakers, as well as being the support office for the Flemish Youth Council. For the Waddist e-participation project they work together with the university college Arteveldehogeschool, that is interested in doing research with the Waddist-results. Arteveldehogeschool already had a similar tool aimed at teachers and wanted to translate this to target youngsters. De Ambrassade wanted to strengthen the voice of youngsters due to COVID-19, but also because this is something they pay great attention to. Due to this mutual goal the organisations set up a collaboration.
  - Link in de Kabel is a small youth work organisation focussing on digital inclusion. Their target group includes socially vulnerable youngsters. Their focus is working on improving youngsters' digital and media literacy competences, often working with partners to develop the correct tools/ platforms or being able to support other organisations in setting up e-inclusion initiatives. In collaboration with the Flemish Knowledge Centre Digital and Media Literacy (Mediawijs), LidK developed the Smart-e application game.
  - #Kolle is a regional collaboration in the Southern part of West-Flanders between 6 small youth work organisations, mainly youth centres. Together they focus on accessible competence and social development for their target groups. The six organisations all bring a different focus and expertise to the table. First, Quindo is an inclusive medialab where youngsters from different backgrounds come together to experiment with media. Second, Krak offers a sculpture and construction workshop, a makerspace, and stage. Third, Bolwerk is an atelier, public house, and production house. Fourth, Jakkedoe gives

youngsters the chance to develop their entrepreneurial competences as well as their artistic talent. Fifth, JC Ten Goudberge has artistic expression and entrepreneurship as its pillars. Last, De Stroate is a hip hop centre.

For Kollap, one of their projects and one of the practices we focus on in this study, #Kolle works together with different partners, like Formaat and HoWest. Formaat mainly supports open youth work initiatives. University college Hogeschool West-Vlaanderen (HoWest), uses the Innowiz research method to support them during innovation and help them think creatively. Lastly, #Kolle contacted The Craft to support them with the program and design of the service.

- GameWise is a small Flemish youth organisation focussing on information and participation. Through Serious Games (urban and online) and game-based learning, GameWise wishes to develop youngsters' competences to be active and critical citizens in the 21st century. They have several building blocks, namely empowerment, mutation (continual change), co-creation, participation, social innovation, local impact, and digitalisation related to the digital gap. They worked together with youth/ knowledge organisations to adhere to the needs of the target group. During the COVID-19 pandemic they created the Lockdown Minds game focussed on teens' wellbeing.

- VLESP is the Flemish expertise centre for suicide prevention. They mainly offer information and advice related to suicide. The centre contributes to the implementation of the Flemish Suicide Prevention Action Plan. They focus both on society as a whole and on at-risk groups, such as vulnerable youngsters. They collaborated with CREATE.eu to program the online game Silver, as well as worked with storywriters, clinical psychologists, and a child psychiatrist.

- Child Focus is the Belgian foundation for missing or sexually exploited children. The organisation has several missions. The mission focussed on here is 'sexual exploitation'. They have several target groups, such as parents and professionals, but also have specific target groups depending on the theme. Related to the theme of 'tienerpooiers' (groomers/ loverboys), Child Focus mainly focusses on young girls in residential facilities. Child Focus often collaborates with organisations that are knowledgeable on a specific topic/ target group. Child Focus set up a partnership with Mediaraven, a youth organisation focussing on digital media/ technology. They helped create, design, and program GPS (Girl Power Squad).

- 't Salon is a small youth centre related to the Flemish CAW (centre for general welfare). They are established in the city of Bruges and focus on vulnerable youngsters between 12 and 25 years old. They offer leisure activities as well as counselling and guidance tailored to each person's needs. During COVID-19, 't Salon set up online counselling opportunities for their target group via several well-known platforms, such as YouTube, PlayStation, and Discord.

- Brake-Out is a small-scale project that is part of the organisation Konekt. Konekt wishes to create and inclusive society and environment for young and new adults with a disability. Brake-Out offers youngsters between 18-30 years old with a cognitive disability, ASD (autism spectrum disorder), or ABI (acquired brain injury) opportunities to discover their interests and talents after graduating through a three-year track. Due to COVID-19 the organisation decided to set up and online version of this trajectory to stay connected and to keep empowering and developing their youngsters. It goes by the name of 'Breek uit uw kot!'.

- [Merhaba](#) is a small organisation for the LGBT+ community in Flanders and Brussels. Merhaba unites and empowers LGBTQI+ people with a migrant background. The organisation mainly focusses on the wellbeing of their target group, but also works on co-creating and teaching about inclusivity and identity in our society. They have established a safe community where youngsters can grow and learn about themselves. Through the MerhabaPhone (WhatsApp) the organisation is available for all who need a sympathetic, supportive ear.

6. Please share your overall key findings from the mapping and the survey (please provide a general description of your research results, summarise your findings):

A. Short outline of the Flemish youth work landscape

Whereas Flanders mainly focusses on recreation, emancipation, and empowerment (related to non-formal learning), other European member states often focus more on youth welfare work/ open youth work, e.g. focussing on prevention or counsel (Van der Eecken, Caluwaerts & Bradt, 2017). Flanders specifically separates youth work and youth welfare, seeing them as two different categories in the sector. And within 'traditional' Flemish youth work, welfare and a focus on vulnerable youngsters is a smaller subdivision. The Flemish government defines, accredits, subsidises, and supports its youth work via decree and created seven youth work categories:

1. Nationally organised youth association;
2. Associations information and participation;
3. Culturally educational youth work associations;
4. Supra-local youth work with children and young people with disabilities;
5. Professionalised youth work with socially vulnerable youth;
6. Professionalised youth centres;
7. Experimental projects (Vlaamse Overheid, 2012; Vermeire et al., 2022).

Accredited youth work organisations and subsidised initiatives can count on large financial government support, and have support structures to call upon, e.g. De Ambrassade. Flemish youth work also has a high degree of volunteers compared to other European member states, as other European youth work is much more professionalised (Coussée, 2009; Vermeire et al., 2022).

B. General mapping of Flemish online youth work for vulnerable youngsters

Online initiatives focussing on youth (welfare) work are on the rise, especially since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many youth organisations set up online or blended practices to reach their target groups, and most seemed successful in engaging them. Relating to these socially vulnerable youth, Flemish practices mainly focus on counselling and welfare, although counselling/ information and training/ learning are often overlapping, for example, online (serious) games that offer youngsters support relating to mental health topics. Practices that focus on informing vulnerable youngsters, which are less common, often also have a module focussed on training/ learning. However, in Flanders, online youth (welfare) work often remains focussed on youngsters in general. Socially vulnerable youngsters are not always

considered and are most often only a target group for organisations that already have experience and expertise surrounding their needs and wishes (Vermeire et al., 2022; Vermeire et al., 2022). If this is not the case, youth workers often request advice or support from other knowledgeable institutions.

Relating to youngsters' needs, most practices share common ground or even a common focus, with mental wellbeing (alcohol abuse, help after a suicide attempt or after sexual abuse, etc.) and digital/ media literacy (mainly online privacy & identity matters) being prevalent. Even though these themes are most frequent, attention is also paid to informing youth, creating digital space/ community, physical health, adulthood, talent development, and participation. Seemingly, the five EU youth goals least present in Flemish online youth work for vulnerable youth are #1 Connecting EU with Youth, #2 Equality of All Genders, #7 Quality Employment for All (however this is much more present for youngsters with a cognitive and/or physical disability), #10 Sustainable Green Europe, and #11 Youth Organisations & European Programmes. Most present youth goals are #4 Information & Constructive Dialogue, #5 Mental Health & Wellbeing, #8 Quality Learning, and #9 Space and Participation for All.

When we analyse how youth organisations go about setting up their activities, we see that the most common initiatives are grounded in applications, websites, or a combination of tools/ platforms that the target audience is already familiar with. Many of the counselling activities provide support via chat or have set up an informative website. Learning and training online are mainly provided through playful learning, e.g. online games, but even counselling and informative activities sometimes turn to gamification to attract and engage participants, like the Waddist application where youngsters can get bonus points or badges, e.g. by sharing on social media or logging in every day. Desk research teaches us that most of these practices wish to be tenable/ sustainable (referring to a continual process), especially the initiatives targeting vulnerable youth but not set up due to COVID-19. Nonetheless, the qualitative research shows that this is quite dependent on financing opportunities and finding/ keeping the right partnerships.

C. Introduction of the initiatives

Based on Arkorful & Abaidoo (2014) e-learning model, Vermeire et al. (2022) distinguished four main types of Flemish digital youth work based on in what way the activity is organised. Based upon the mapping and analysis of youth welfare work/ open youth work, the digital initiatives related to this type of youth work, can also be distinguished in the four following types.

Types of digital youth work:
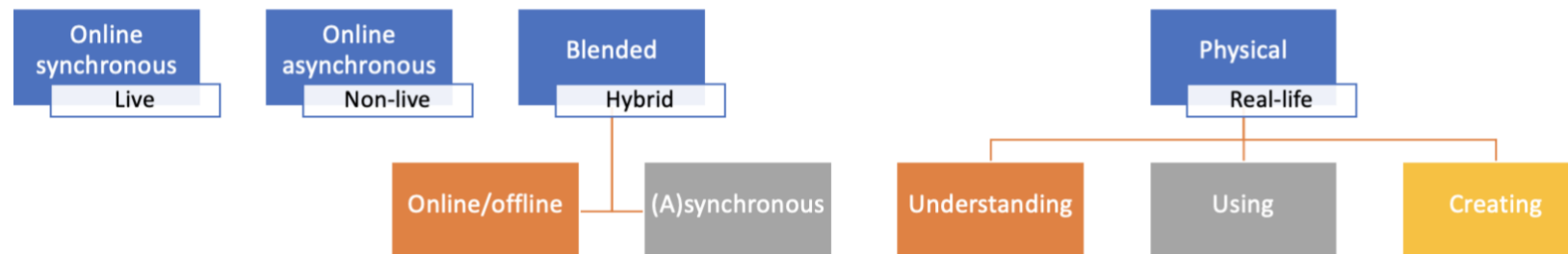
(Vermeire et al., 2022)

- Online synchronous - 'Live' practice; participants and facilitators are online at the same time
E.g. online live game; livestream;
- Online asynchronous - 'Non-live'; participants and facilitators are not online at the same time
E.g. online forum; prerecorded webinar;
- Blended - Hybrid; activities have both an online and offline component and/or have a live and non-live component
E.g. Discord-channel with live activities and non-live elements, Physical training with an online module
- Physical practices involving digital media/technology - where participants...
     (1) use digital media/technology
     E.g. Medialab,
     (2) create digital media/technology themselves
     E.g. Coding game,
     (3) take a critical look at digital media and focus on understanding it
        E.g. Media literacy card game (Vermeire et al., 2022).

In this report, only the three first types will be addressed, relating to the focus on online initiatives aimed at vulnerable youth, requiring that at least one part of the activity, preferably the main module, takes place in an online setting. The activities have first been distinguished by type. Vermeire et al. (2022) also developed several classifications to summarise and differentiate digital youth work. This is based on the European definition and goals of digital youth work. The initiatives' differentiation has been summarised in the table below.

Adapted classification model for digital youth work (Vermeire et al., 2022, p.13-14):

1/ Classification according to the objectives of youth work in general:
- Ensuring equal opportunities;
- Ensuring broad development opportunities for every young person;
- Creating (digital) space for young people;
- Achieving formal and informal involvement in society.

2/ Classification according to the focus of digital youth work:
- Focus on youth work as such;
- Focus on youth work as information and/or participation;
- Focus on youth welfare and inclusion;
- Focus on digital development (cf. digital inclusion, digital literacy);
- Focus on media literacy;
- Focus on experimental experience;
- Focus on cultural education;
- Focus on youth workers.

3/ Classification based on the role of digital media in youth work:
- Digital media as a tool for youth work;
- Digital media as an activity in youth work;
- Digital media as the content of youth work activities.

4/ Classification based on the objectives of digital youth work:
- More opportunities for information;
- More participation;
- More non-formal and informal learning;
- New forms of youth work;
- Strengthening motivation, capacities, and competences of youth workers for applying digital youth work;
- Strengthening the quality of youth work.

Youth work practice	Type	Classification				SNAC classification
		The objectives of youth work in general	*The focus of digital youth work*	*The role of digital media in youth work*	*The objectives of digital youth work*	*Learning/ training & information/ counselling*
Smart-e (LidK, Mediawijs)	Blended	Ensuring broad development opportunities for every young person	Focus on digital development; Focus on media literacy	Content	More non-formal and informal learning; New forms of youth work	Learning/ training
Lockdown Minds (GameWise)	Blended	Ensuring broad development opportunities for every young person	Focus on youth welfare and inclusion	Activity	More non-formal and informal learning; New forms of youth work	Learning/ training & information/ counselling
Silver (VLESP, CREATE.eu)	Blended	Ensuring broad development opportunities for every young person	Focus on youth welfare and inclusion	Activity	More non-formal and informal learning; New forms of youth work	Learning/ training & information/ counselling
GPS (Girl Power Squad) (Child Focus, Mediaraven)	Blended	Ensuring broad development opportunities for every young person	Focus on youth welfare and inclusion	Activity	More non-formal and informal learning; New forms of youth work	Learning/ training & information/ counselling
Salon-line ('t Salon)	Online blended	Creating (digital) space for young people	Focus on youth welfare and inclusion	Tool	New forms of youth work	Information/ counselling
JD Appelsien (Appelsien)	Online blended	Creating (digital) space for young people; Ensuring equal opportunities	Focus on digital development	Tool; Content	More non-formal and informal learning; New forms of youth work	Learning/ training & information/ counselling
Kollap (#Kolle, Formaat)	Online asynchronous	Creating (digital) space for young people; Ensuring	Focus on youth work as such	Tool	More opportunities for information	Information/ counselling

		broad development opportunities for every young person				
Brake Out: Breek uit uw kot! (Konekt)	Online blended	Ensuring equal opportunities	Focus on youth work as such	Tool	More non-formal and informal learning	Learning/ training
Waddist (De Ambrassade, Artevelde-hogeschool)	Online asynchronous	Achieving formal and informal involvement in society	Focus on youth work as information and/or participation	Tool	More opportunities for information; More participation; New forms of youth work	Information/ counselling
MerhabaPhone (Merhaba)	Online synchronous	Creating (digital) space for young people	Focus on youth welfare and inclusion	Tool	More opportunities for information	Information/ counselling

Table 1: Classification of online youth work practices

D. Featured topics

The results note several themes that Flemish youth workers find of considerable importance or found challenging while setting up their practices. In this section, the following themes will be discussed relating to these results:

- Online youth work and digital inclusion;
- Need for expertise
- Collaboration with other organisations;
- Collaboration with youngsters;
- Tenability (or sustainability[2]);
- Non-formal learning and low-threshold counselling.

It is important to note that these topics are intertwined and will thus not only be referenced in the specific chapter focussing on said topic but also be mentioned throughout the entire discussion.

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[2] "The quality of being able to continue over a period of time" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

Online youth work and digital inclusion

As seen in the abovementioned matrix, most of the (online) initiatives we mapped use digital media as a tool. This shows that digital media is most often used to make a certain practice possible. However, online/ blended youth work offers a wide range of opportunities for the youth sector, such as bridging distances, reaching a broader audience, offering the possibility of anonymous/low-threshold counselling, creating another dimension to an activity, as the Smart-e game does, etc. Digital youth work also offers possibilities of experimentation, for both youngsters and youth workers. It allows youth workers to test which tools/ platforms work best for what target audience and it allows youngsters to play with media/ technology, while learning e.g. through gamification. In addition, online or blended approaches seem to be quite successful as a preventative measure, the initiatives Silver, Lockdown Minds and 't Salon all earning positive feedback from participants, and GPS, receiving positive reactions from the target group's coaches. Likewise, e-participation is a successful method to engage youngsters, as it is anonymous and does not require much effort to share one's opinion. However, current Waddist-participants are mainly young women with a higher socio-economic status, which is not representative for the entire population in this age group. This demonstrates that, depending on the target group, activities need to be updated/ reconsidered.

The Konekt respondent mentioned their organisation will continue to organise blended activities as it has an added value, creates more diverse activities than physical ones, and can tackle boundaries (e.g. distance). Due to COVID-19, many youth workers discovered these same opportunities, realising digital media can help them reach their target audience or broaden their scope (see also Vermeire et al., 2022). This is the case for all organisations that set up an online initiative during the pandemic. Not only 't Salon, Konekt (Brake-Out) and JD Appelsien see a strong future for a blended approach in the future, but the other practices touch upon the future of digital youth work as well. Most see a need for an innovative blended approach that tackles their target groups' needs and signals. Nonetheless, there are questions/ fears: online youth work should not replace 'regular' youth work but strengthen it, meaning that it should provide an additional dimension to the youth work. There needs to be more clarity on what digital youth work pertains to and where it stands in relation to 'regular' youth work. Several respondents see a need to discuss the online 'rules' and see a need for proper guidelines, such as who moderates an online practice, how can youngsters be properly coached remotely, and how reachable/ available are online counsellors.

Although these aspects need clarification, most respondents agree that digital youth work needs to be (inter)active and include youngsters in its creation (see 'Collaboration with youngsters'.)

Respondents note a few 'dangers' as well. Organisation 't Salon warns for the possibility of digital exclusion. As their target group encompasses vulnerable youth, they have first-hand experience with their participants' exclusion during the Belgian COVID-19 lockdown, needing to distribute internet vouchers and (refurbished) laptops via digital inclusion initiatives. Digital in-/exclusion is an important aspect related to digital youth work and will require input from all stakeholders involved, making sure youth work reflects on these digital inequalities and works towards being more inclusive, via for example collaborations. The ten analysed initiatives all focus on vulnerable target groups, however, even these practices most often require a certain degree of digital competences and access to hard-, software and internet to participate. Activities are often blended due to organisations' struggle pertaining to digital inclusion. This way organisations make sure that their participants have access to trainers who can support them and offer possible solutions, e.g. setting up asynchronous activities and contacting a parent/ guardian to provide guidance. Due to these initiatives' experience with vulnerable groups, almost all of them set up certain solutions or considered alternatives.

The 't Salon respondent raised the importance of questioning how to meet certain needs, such as access to hardware, and to always keep in mind the target groups' possible lack of digital competences. However, this is not always taken into account. Vermeire et al. (2022) notes that youngsters are too often considered to be *digital natives*[3] (Prensky, 2001). Youngsters do not always have the proper competences to use digital media/ technology: "We have a lot of participants who don't know how to install the app. [...] Some are very technically savvy, but the majority are not" (Respondent Jeugddienst Appelsien). They usually have very strong button knowledge, i.e., the ability to use digital media (Mariën & Brotcorne, 2020), but they are generally less skilled in understanding digital media, including reflecting on their own online behaviours (Mariën & Brotcorne, 2020; Vandenbussche et al., 2022). However, the problem is not only one of competences, but also access. Many youngsters are digitally excluded due to the latter, something that was confirmed during the COVID-19 pandemic (Van den Broeck & De Bonte, 2021; Mariën & Brotcorne, 2020). Digital inclusion remains a major concern at the level of 1/ access, 2/ competence, and 3/ support in the youth sector.

Need for expertise

It is noted that the initiatives focusing on a specific target group put a stronger emphasis on the need for expertise. Creating an activity for e.g. youngsters with a cognitive disability requires different facets than for a different or more general target group. Taking the example of GPS; the organisation Child Focus decided to focus on a specific vulnerable target group, namely young girls (11-14) in assisted living groups in childcare. GPS is a prevention tool targeting girls susceptible to groomers. GPS guides them in setting boundaries and shows the consequences of their choices without immediate real-life risks. Because the game distances itself from possible personal experiences -

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[3] "Native speakers of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet" (Prensky, 2001, p. 1).

which would otherwise create a barrier for the target group - and works with a fictional character the participants need to 'help', it makes the theme more accessible and open for discussion, because it first focusses on the underlying issues and aspects that make these girls more vulnerable and only afterwards delves deeper into personal experiences.

Lockdown Minds from GameWise wishes to avoid possible triggers and to develop a useful game for a broader group. The goal of the game is to strengthen young people's mental resilience and increase their ability to help themselves as well as others. The focus is on vulnerable youngsters, however, it is quite important to avoid certain triggers, as it can be used as a prevention tool, but likewise, a tool to learn coping strategies. Thus, GameWise offers the participants to (de)select the themes, giving them the autonomy to leave out topics that could be pernicious for their mental health. This also gives the youngsters' a feeling of autonomy, which relates positively to motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Hence, a youth institution needs a clear concept of its goals and target group, basing themselves on their signals. Lockdown Minds, for example, was set up because youngsters' mental health strongly deteriorated due to COVID-19, and 't Salon felt a strong need for online work to support youngsters during lockdown: "Working online was important to remain signal-oriented. [...] We were going to represent the voice of the young people, 'how many laptops are missing? How many internet vouchers should we hand out?" (Respondent 't Salon).

Collaboration with other organisations

Most organisations set up collaborations with other organisations to make sure the service/ product is well-developed, tenable, and relevant. This is a matter that gets touched upon during several interviews and strongly relates to the themes of collaboration, youngsters' living environment, and the abovementioned (digital) inclusion and expertise. Something that was also noted during a broader analysis of the Flemish youth work field, is the importance of collaboration to complement one another (Vermeire et al., 2022). However, there are several aspects to take into consideration when entering a partnership. Youth workers work differently than e.g. a technical provider/ programmer. It is important to try to understand the other organisation's think- and development process and realise that this can create a future obstacle. Therefore, it is important to make sure that the partners communicate clearly, thoroughly, and often. Other than that, it is important to have ownership over one's platform/ tool. A technical partner understands the platform as they created it, however, for several reasons, the partnership could come to an end. Hence it is important to understand the service and create an option of transferability: "You must have sufficient ownership of your platform in case your technical partner drops out. Make sure you understand how it works, how you have to do updates. [...] We knew our partner Mediaraven well and they helped us look for solutions, but you might as well have a partner that says, 'bye bye'" (Respondent Child Focus).

Collaboration with youngsters

Collaborating with youngsters is another aspect touched upon by most respondents, either underlining the importance of co-creation or reiterating the need for expertise relating to the target groups' needs. And who knows their needs better than the youngsters themselves? De Ambrassade and their partners set up Waddist to ask for youngsters' input, to talk to them instead of about them. Because youngsters

not only answer the questions put forth by Waddist but are also able to easily provide the organisation with feedback and questions themselves, Waddist offers a keen insight into what youngsters struggle with or want/ need more information about. Youngsters not only enjoy the application due to its format and gamification set-up, but they are mainly interested in the information provided to them, the ability to share and compare, and see the social impact of their participation: "The researchers of Arteveldehogeschool saw how powerful it is to give people a voice. They wanted to do the same for young people, a group that was often forgotten during the corona crisis" (Waddist respondent). De Ambrassade wishes to strengthen the voice of youngsters. Due to this mutual goal the organisations found each other.

Waddist is a good example of offering youngsters a community, the space to be vulnerable, while also giving them a tool to participate and possibly positively influence society by sharing their opinions. It is important here to adhere to three main principles regarding youngsters' participation: 1/ participation should be tailored (adapt to the target audience), 2/ listen to their needs, and wishes, and 3/ be signal-oriented and demand-driven. The #Kolle ecosystem, for example, set up Kollap to match youngsters with initiatives that adhere to their needs, considering aspects of the youngsters' lives and not only their interests: what keeps a person from pursuing an interest or talent? Not only is this something the Kollap initiative considers, but youngsters' input was also greatly valued during the setup of this web platform, creating something that caters to their needs through research and feedback. All initiatives involved youngsters in its creation in one way or another and respondents feel that the activity was better adjusted to the target audience because of this, although most respondents still see challenges relating to the sustainability and inclusivity of their project/ practice.

Tenability (sustainability)

As mentioned above, the respondents see several opportunities for digital youth work, specifically a blended approach. This is made even clearer in the respondents' focus on the future improvement of their service/ product. All respondents look for opportunities to change and update their initiatives/ new practices to better address their youngsters' needs. For example, Merhaba wishes to set up an online chat via their website, Child Focus wishes to create a GPS-alternative for a broader target audience and adapt GPS for girls with a hearing disability, etc. Nevertheless, more than half of the respondents note financing as the main challenge to a tenable/ sustainable and inclusive practice. GameWise, for example, mentions that their online serious game is free and was made on a low budget, however, resulting in something well-made and qualitative, but in need of updates relating to digital inclusivity (e.g. they wanted to include voice-over software), but also operability.

However, it seems that the organisations are very much aware of their services/ products' drawbacks, being tuned into a vulnerable target group with more specific needs than other youngsters'. Hence, most organisations made sure that their initiative was adaptable. Not all tools are inclusive for every target group, but the respondents work toward making this the case and toward remaining relevant, e.g. by being able to adapt the setting and adding voice-over.

As mentioned above, several criteria need to be met to be able to set up a durable/ sustainable and accessible initiative. Firstly, it requires expertise in the theme, target group, and digital competences to create an online initiative. And these initiatives are often successful due to fruitful partnerships with organisations that complement each other's deficiencies. Secondly, research before rolling out the final service/ product is advisable. It is important to make sure the initiative takes into account the user needs, as well as possible challenges/ drawbacks of a certain focus or approach. Ergo, it is e.g. recommended to analyse previous, similar activities and learn from them. It is a long-term process to create an online activity, one that needs to be properly supervised through clear process, preliminary research, effectiveness measurement, etc. Thirdly, it is important to always have in mind the target group. Not only is it necessary to be aware of their needs, but one also needs to consider their living environment and context. As noted by researchers, an activity that feels useful and close to the target audience's life experiences will be better received and create a greater impact (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Several respondents noted for example that their target group needs a structured and safe space to grow, be themselves and even feel empowered/ part of a community. Here, low-threshold initiatives, such as anonymous online counselling or short, clear minigames, are most likely to have a positive influence on youngsters' welfare and competences. These last aspects relate strongly to the theme of non-formal learning, discussed below.

Non-formal learning & accessible counselling

Youth work and digital youth work are often considered as an environment of non-formal learning. With non-formal learning, young people do not necessarily receive a certificate, but the activities can still have a strong influence on the participants' competence, something the European Union also mentions in official documents:

> "[…] achieving the two interrelated overall objectives implies a dual approach involving the development and promotion of both: (i) specific initiatives in the youth field - i.e. policies and actions specifically targeted at young people in areas such as non-formal learning, participation, voluntary activities, youth work, mobility and information; and (ii) mainstreaming initiatives" (The Council of the European Union, 2009);

> "The validation of learning outcomes, namely knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning can play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning, particularly in the case of the socio-economically disadvantaged or the low-qualified […] The 'EU Strategy for Youth — Investing and Empowering; a renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities' of 2009 called for better recognition of skills acquired through non-formal education for young people" (The Council of the European Union, 2012).

Hence, youth work is in a strong position to work on (digital) competences through recreational leisure activities. This is particularly the case for youngsters in a socially vulnerable situation who have little opportunity to improve their (digital) competences at home, often due to a lack of resources. Accessibility and digital literacy pose a considerable challenge for the youth sector. Because digital youth work is a form of non-formal learning, it offers the opportunity to work on these challenges in a low-threshold, recreational/ fun way where

participants can work on their skills and knowledge at their own pace, learning with and from peers. It allows for youngsters to touch upon and learn more about complex topics without making it too dense, arduous, or personal, like with Smart-e and Silvers gamification elements.

Nevertheless, this research notes a few aspects to take into consideration when looking at online/ blended training initiatives in Flanders/ Brussels. The challenges relating to accessibility and literacy of the so-called digital natives have already been discussed above in 'Online youth work and digital inclusion', however, a few other facets need to be touched upon. Many of the analysed practices fit both within counselling and training. Those initiatives often focus on the more challenging aspects of youngsters' lives, such as providing them with the coping mechanisms/ emotional regulation skills to care for their own mental health. However, the respondents noted that those types of initiatives need to be properly developed, needing to avoid possible emotional triggers[4] and decide upon the target group. A prevention tool aimed at vulnerable girls might not be as effective for a more general audience, just like tools developed for a more general audience need to find a middle ground. This requires expertise and research.

it has been part of the routine practices to offer a blended approach when focussing on a vulnerable target audience, to provide proper guidance, nuance, and provide the youngsters with proper guidance to reflect in a safe environment. Hence, the respondents added that it is necessary to provide the trainers with a guide and possibly offer (free) training sessions. Other than that, the respondents find it important to not only provide youngsters with their own coping strategies, but also provide them with information on where to seek future help, like by providing a codex or embedding websites. These last two aspects are likewise touched upon by a few other respondents. Smart-e, for example, focusses on aspects related to media literacy and online privacy, something youth workers/ teachers/ … are not always proficient in themselves, as this has only recently caught the attention of policymakers. Hence, Link in de Kabel and their partner Mediawijs find it important to provide youth workers/ trainers with a source of support. Most youth work organisations currently have insufficient knowledge about digital youth work (Vermeire et al., 2022). Therefore, it is necessary to provide qualitative capacity building about digital media/technology and youngsters' digital world.

Appertaining to welfare, respondents mention the importance of accessible, preventative, affordable, and accessible aid due to their socially vulnerable target group, e.g. counselling through familiar platforms like Discord and PlayStation. However, two organisations raised the question of impact measurement[5] and effectiveness, like the opportunity to first organise a pilot study and after a positive outcome, implement the activity, but after a neutral or negative outcome (not achieving the goals and/or even having a negative effect on participants, like trauma triggering) adapt the practice. To make sure a tool has a positive effect on the target audience, it might be important to not only ask for feedback but research the effectiveness of a certain service, as VLESP does for Silver. This also makes it easier to improve the initiative, as most activities do not set up a thorough, evidence-based impact measurement, but only a brief evaluation of the activity.

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[4] A trauma trigger is "something that causes someone to feel upset and frightened because they are made to remember something bad that has happened in the past" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

[5] "The impact of a corporation on society on the economic, environmental and social dimension" (Maas & Liket, 2011, p.172).

Preliminary research could also prove to be quite fruitful. GPS is based on research and expertise within Child Focus and accordingly works on themes that make the girls vulnerable to groomers, e.g. low self-esteem, and a distorted idea of love- and friendship-relationships, instead of just warning them about the dangers.

7. Detailed findings
(1) Information and Counselling

Name/Title of the service, platform, tool	Categorisation of the information / counselling service/platform/tool*	Short description	Challenges, detailed findings, or questions to discuss in the peer learning activity	Promoter, developer	Target group (users)	Available in (language)	Link to the service, platform, or tool (or to more information)
Appelsien	Generalist	Social media app for youngsters with a cognitive disability, ASD or acquired a brain injury (safety online)	- The importance of involving yougsters' feedback - The usefulness of one application for the target audience - The need for time, both during setting up and afterwards	JD Appelsien	Youngsters with a cognitive disability	Dutch	Appelsien
Girl Power Squad	Relationships and sexuality; Mental health matters	GPS is a preventive, empowering pedagogical webplatform	- The importance of listening and involving the target group - The importance of staying close to youngsters' living environment	Child Focus; Mediaraven	Girls living in residential facilities between 11-14 years old	Dutch French	Girl Power Squad

			(recognisability & national/ regional context) - The importance of transferability and ownership of a tool				
Lockdown Minds	Mental health matters	Online serious game on wellbeing during COVID-19 lockdowns	- The importance of (interactive) co-creation with youngsters - The possibilities that (online) serious games can offer - The need for online/ blended working methods - Paying attention to mental health	GameWise	Youngsters in general; youngsters struggling with their mental health during COVID-19	Dutch Swedish	Lockdown Minds
Silver	Mental health matters	Online serious game on mental health	- The importance of co-creation with youngsters - The possibilities that (online) serious games can offer - The possibilities that a strong, diverse partnership offers to the quality of youth work	VLESP; CREATE.eu	Youngsters in general; Youngsters at risk	Dutch	Silver

			- The importance of proper effectiveness research/ impact assessment for online youth work				
Salon-line	Generalist	Online platform through Discord, PlayStation, to offer guidance, structure, and leisure activities during COVID-19 lockdowns	- The possibilities of and innovation through experimentation - The importance of co-creation with youngsters - The importance of digital inclusion (competences youth & youth workers) - The opportunities of blended/ online youth work (versatility)	't Salon; CAW Noord-West-Vlaanderen	Socially vulnerable youth from region around Bruges	Dutch	Salon-line
Kollapp	Youth activities and exchanges	Webplatform for connecting youngsters and youth centres	- The possibilities that a strong, diverse partnership offers to the quality of youth work - The importance of co-creation with youngsters	#Kolle; Formaat	Youngsters from South-West Flanders	Dutch	Beta version Kollapp

			(consider user needs) - How can online/ digital strengthen youth work and how do we define online 'rules' / the role of the youth worker?				
Waddist	Youth participation	Application to promote youth participation and create impact	- The importance of sufficient preliminary research - The importance of inclusive practices (accessibility) - The opportunities of low-threshold, anonymous initiatives, and meaningfulness of initiatives (participation & information)	De Ambrassade; Artevelde-hogeschool	Youngsters between 12-30 years old	Dutch	Waddist
MerhabaPhone	Relationships and sexuality; Generalist	WhatsApp for counselling of LGBTQI+ youngsters	- The importance of being reachable and accessible, as well as defining the boundaries of reachability - The importance of safe space/	Merhaba	LGBTQI+ community with a migration background	Dutch French English	MerhabaPhone

			community for vulnerable youngsters - Working towards inclusion and understanding exclusion of your target group				

Table 2: Online/ blended counselling and information practices

* According to the categories used in the survey based on the categorisation by the ERYICA network:
  - *Generalist*
  - *Specialised*
    - *careers guidance*
    - *studies and scholarships*
    - *jobs and training*
    - *general health matters*
    - *relationships and sexuality*
    - *social security benefits*
    - *rights of young people*
    - *consumer rights*
    - *legal advice*
    - *European opportunities for young people*
    - *youth activities and exchanges*

(2) Training and Learning activities

Name/Title of the service, platform, tool	Contribution to one of the European Youth Goals? Which one? Just indicate the number!**	Short description	Challenges, detailed findings, or questions to discuss in the peer learning activity	Promoter, developer	Target group (users)	Available in (language)	Link to the service, platform, or tool (or more information)
Smart-e	#3, #4, #8	Online game application to promote media literacy skills	- The importance of co-creation with youngsters - Playfully tackling and paying attention to media literacy in youth work - The importance of relevance and sustainability of a practice	Link in de Kabel; Mediawijs	Youngsters in general; socially vulnerable youngsters	Dutch	Smart-e
Breek uit uw kot![6]	#3, #7, #8	Online Brake-Out edition (online activities and guidance) during the COVID-19 lockdowns for youngsters with a disability	- The importance of adapting an initiative to its target group (demand-driven) - The possibilities of blended youth work	Brake Out (Konekt)	Youngsters between 18-30 years old with a cognitive disability	Dutch	Brake Out Kot Edition
Girl Power Squad	#2, #4, #8	GPS is a preventive, empowering pedagogical webplatform	- The importance of listening and involving the target group - The importance of staying close to	Child Focus; Mediaraven	Girls living in residential facilities between 11-14 years old	Dutch French	Girl Power Squad

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[6] Translation: Break out of your room!

			youngsters' living environment (recognisability & national/ regional context) - The importance of transferability and ownership of a tool				
Lockdown Minds	#4, #5, #8	Online serious game on wellbeing during COVID-19 lockdowns	- The importance of (interactive) co-creation with youngsters - The possibilities that (online) serious games can offer - The need for online/ blended working methods - Paying attention to mental health	GameWise	Youngsters in general; youngsters struggling with their mental health during COVID-19	Dutch Swedish	Lockdown Minds
Appelsien	#3, #5, #9	Social media app for youngsters with a cognitive disability, ASD or acquired a brain injury (safety online)	- The importance of involving yougsters' feedback - The usefulness of one application for the target audience - The need for time, both during setting up and afterwards	JD Appelsien	Youngsters with a cognitive disability	Dutch	Appelsien
Silver	#4, #5, #8	Online serious game on mental health	- The importance of co-creation with youngsters - The possibilities that (online) serious games can offer	VLESP; CREATE.eu	Youngsters in general; at-risk youth	Dutch	Silver

			- The possibilities that a strong, diverse partnership offers to the quality of youth work - The importance of proper effectiveness research/ impact assessment for online youth work				

Table 3: Online/ blended training and learning practices

** European Youth Goals:

- *#1 Connecting EU with Youth*
- *#2 Equality of all Genders*
- *#3 Inclusive Societies*
- *#4 Information & Constructive Dialogue*
- *#5 Mental Health & Wellbeing*
- *#6 Moving Rural Youth Forward*
- *#7 Quality Employment for All*
- *#8 Quality Learning*
- *#9 Space and Participation for All*
- *#10 Sustainable Green Europe*
- *#11 Youth Organisations & European Programmes*

8. What were the main challenges in carrying out the mapping & the limitations of the mapping exercise (research)?

Not much research on Flemish, Belgian digital youth work has been conducted or published. The first extensive, general mapping of the field was published this same year (Vermeire et al., 2022). As this study purely focussed on accredited Flemish youth work organisations receiving public funding, not all youth initiatives were included. In that regard, this study is broader; all local organisations and online initiatives focussing on (vulnerable) youth were qualified. However, there is no database of existing practices, initiatives are often ad-hoc, and target groups are not always shared. Accordingly, it was necessary to contact stakeholders and experts in the field of youngsters' welfare, training, and in the field of digital inclusion. Through desk research and contacts within the researchers' network a database of 55 practices was formatted. Subsequently, we encountered challenges with contacting the organisations for participation in this research project. Due to the timing, the Flemish youth organisations were often busy planning the summer events for their target groups. Not all participating institutions are youth organisations, however. Those who are not often responded faster.

Online initiatives in Flanders seem to mainly focus on counselling/ information and less on learning/ training. As stated in Vermeire et al. (2022), online training mainly got a boost during the COVID-19 lockdown. Other than that, activities focussing on vulnerable youth are most often blended, having, for example, an online and offline aspect or is best carried out in a group. This demonstrates that organisers are aware of the importance of digital inclusion and take steps to prevent exclusion via providing hardware and a WiFi-connection: "We looked at 'which needs do young people have at the moment?' [...] We saw a shortage of laptops and a shortage of internet, but we were able to respond to that quite easily." (Respondent 't Salon). This finding might also be linked to the general pedagogy in Flemish youth work, namely that it is more experience-oriented and where it is assumed that you mainly learn by participating and actively doing things (in a group), as well as by experiencing things (personally). Then the digital possibilities are rather used to distribute information more effectively, and to make other forms of participation and assistance possible.

Due to the ad-hoc nature of many youth work activities, several foci on the same aspect, such as online behaviours and privacy or mental health and resilience. The activities selected for analysis both represent the offer available in Flanders as well as provide a broad type of initiatives, divided between online and blended, counselling and training, theme, et cetera. In the abovementioned point 6, a mapping based on the criteria developed by Vermeire et al. (2022) is provided.

Additionally, the difference between youth work in Flanders and youth work in other European countries needs to be considered, as explained above. Hence, the scope in Flanders was broadened to include the welfare sector and then specifically investigated the activities aimed at (vulnerable) youth, meaning not all interviewed organisations would identify themselves as 'youth work' or would be classified as such from a policy perspective in Flanders.

9. What recommendations for European / International Digital Youth Work can be drawn from the research you conducted?

More than one respondent was confronted with challenges related to digital inclusion, sustainability, participation, collaboration, professionalisation, and regulation, resulting in six themes. Almost all the initiatives asked for feedback from their target audience and (future) trainers. Via this feedback they were consequently able to identify challenges and create solutions for these challenges, on which the suggestions below are based. In this section, we mention aspects that require the most attention in Flemish youth work, which might not correspond with those in other EU member states.

We propose formulating European/ international recommendations with specific tasks and tips and tricks for both policymakers and the youth sector at the peer learning events, gaining insight from researchers, national agency staff, and youth workers. Interesting topics to include are digital citizenship and agency related to 21st century competences.

Set up tenable practices

It is important that developed practices are tenable/ sustainable and can have a long-term impact. This 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, as well as afterwards researching 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.

Ergo, to make the practice more tenable, it is a good idea to execute preliminary research (needs target group, stakeholders, previous services with a similar focus, etc.), e.g. what can a new e-participation platform learn from a previous one? After the implementation, impact measurement and effectiveness research should be performed for each of the goals set out to attain. Youth workers already often ask for feedback from their participants, which creates a great starting point, but we recommend the organisation of a pilot study or beta-test with a small part of the target audience. This can be done by involving youngsters via schools, youth work organisations, etc. A pilot (small-scale preliminary) study can help to define the validity of the practice. It not only tests the effectiveness of the service/ tool but can also give an idea on how feasible the activity is, e.g. relating to cost and man-hours.

Providing youth workers with a practical how-to guide or an overview of whom they could partner with on a European and a national/ regional level, would be advantageous. In addition, financial support tends to be an obstacle to working more sustainably, e.g. providing enough hardware. Creating European or even international financial possibilities, an overview, and even bringing stakeholders together could prove to be effective in Flanders due to the ad-hoc and standalone nature of some of the activities.

Pertaining to tenability/ sustainability is also digital literacy among youth workers/ trainers, which will be discussed in the paragraph below.

Pay attention to digital inclusion and digital literacy of participants and youth workers

For both counselling and learning, there needs to be a strong emphasis on digital inclusion and digital literacy. It is often assumed that youngsters know their way around technology, but it is not only age that determines digital ex- or inclusion. Van Deursen (2018) mentions disability and (lack of) education as risk factors. Asmar et al. (2022, p.306), notes, however, that "while socio-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 the 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 youth works' playful nature, a trustworthy environment is created where youngsters are free to experiment and participate without specific/ set 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 in the type of digital youth work (online, blended, physical), but also the focus (instrument, content, activity).

But also, for youth workers who facilitate the digital activities, additional support to sharpen their digital skills might be required, as they are not all digital experts. Hence, the concrete recommendations are: 1/ to provide youngsters with the means to participate, like access to hardware and software, when needed, 2/ to inform and involve youth workers about digital inclusion and how they can increase digital literacy amongst participants, as youth workers are often in a perfect position to support youngsters on these matters, and 3/ to provide youth workers with the information and means to seek help from stakeholders working on (digital) inclusion.

Organise train-the-trainer sessions

In Flanders, youth workers and other non-formal educators are encouraged to pay attention to digital/ media literacy in their activities via e.g. the renewed youth and children's' 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 Flanders there is no generally required preliminary training for youth workers and 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'). It is important that youth workers are aware of youngsters' environment and cultural context. Therefore, they should be given the opportunity to take part in a flexible, accessible training.

Training youth workers is not only about informing them about inclusion strategies, but also needs to focus on their digital competences. Most respondents were already familiar with working at least partly online, such as using social media to reach their target audience. Nevertheless, the organisations that had one-on-one contact with their target audience (facilitators, not second-line providers), mentioned the importance of their own skill/ knowledge. This is also noted in Vermeire et al. (2022), that mainly studied and interviewed frontline

workers. Respondents also mention obstacles like busy schedules and a lack of financing (as previously mentioned in the recommendation 'Sustainability'). This makes it difficult to find accessible training adapted to their needs. Organisations made up for their lack of knowledge/ skill by setting up collaborations, something that should be encouraged due to the knowledge-sharing opportunities. A good example to encourage this, are the peer learning events set up by SNAC DIGI.

Set 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.

Provide guidelines for online youth work

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. Especially relating to online youth work there is a need for transparency. It could prove fruitful to create understandable and feasible guidelines/ tips and tricks for setting up an internal protocol for online spaces on a European level. Member states could then translate and adapt the document to adapt it to their national/ regional context. The guidelines should include the need for a code of ethics for online practices to provide both youngsters and youth workers clarity on the boundaries of online spaces (e.g. what can and cannot be said), importance of structure as well as autonomy, the rules in an online environment, like how available and active youth workers should be online, the option of online peer-to-peer counselling or counselling from professionals, do youngsters provide their own hardware or does the organisation take care of that for them, etc. Tips could include the importance of the involvement of youngsters with setting up the online space and asking for their input regarding to the code of conduct, e.g. what would make them feel safe? Would they want people their age to moderate or leave that up to the youth workers?

Therefore, provide a framework as a starting point. The framework should at least include the definition and goals of digital youth work, the types of digital youth work, criteria that should be met for the different types of digital youth work relating to training and counselling practices, what digital competences youth workers should possess, and good practices and interesting stakeholders (listed by expertise), as well as tips on setting up digital activities.

Have a clearly defined goal and target audience

Related to the previous recommendation, is the need for clearly defined practices, especially relating to the target audiences and the goal(s) that a practice wishes to reach. By using the framework on digital (or online) youth work, youth workers have a starting point. However,

before starting or implementing, it is important to decide on the goal (e.g. train, counsel, or both?, work on digital competences or social skills? Etc.). But when deciding on a certain goal, the target audience needs to be selected. Here, several questions need to be asked: 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 there was a trainer present? What method do we use for the online activity, e.g. slow learning, gamification, playful learning, feedback loop, self-sufficient learning, one-on-one, …?

Include youngsters in participation & co-creation trajectories

The last recommendation pertaining to Flanders, focusses on youngsters' involvement. 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 key to clearly delineate the target group. An activity specifically designed for youngsters without e.g. a stable home situation/ parental figure might not be as appealing to other youngsters. This highlights that motivating youth workers and providing them with easily comprehendible tools to organise and establish co-creation and participation discussions, is crucial. In addition, strengthening knowledge-sharing with stakeholders experienced with co-creation (with vulnerable youth) would provide 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.

10. Are there any other inputs and reflections you would like to share with us?

Due to this study focussing on the youth sector in general and not merely on accredited Flemish youth work, half of the respondents are not youth workers, but work with youngsters, they can be defined as social workers. This is mainly the case for the counselling initiatives, as mentioned in point 8 (challenges and limitations). This provides an interesting perspective and experience relating to the abovementioned results, as social workers mention the importance of approachability (low-threshold), demand-driven and need-focussed work, as well as the significance of prevention.

Gamification is an attractive working method for both youngsters and youth workers, however, one respondent noted the importance of properly defining the goals of a practice, as gamification helps with learning/ motivation, but should not be the main focus. This is something interesting to discuss during the peer learning events.

The analysed online initiatives are often focussed on prevention, playful/ unconscious/ active learning, learner-centred and equipping youngsters with coping strategies. These practices received good feedback. It could be interesting to see what form the other EU member states' online initiatives take (e.g. preventative, playful, research- and expertise-based, blended or online, with(out) trainer, partnerships, …).

As mentioned above, Flemish practices are often free, especially for vulnerable youth, which seems critical when focussing on the most vulnerable. Is this the same case in other EU member states? What aspects are there that could go against this way of working?

A lot of the analysed tools focussed on challenging the youngsters through active learning and reflecting on certain decisions throughout the activity. The respondents find this a successful working method to get youngsters thinking on the topics and consider their behaviours.

Online youth work can create a safe space and counteract social isolation.

Not many very innovative practices were found, for instance using virtual reality. It would be interesting to discover those examples from other countries.

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