"LET'S TALK YOUNG, LET'S TALK ABOUT CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT''
CHILD PARTICIPATION PROJECT
ENYA 2019

Content

1. ENYA 2019

The ENYA 2019 "*Let's Talk Young, Let's Talk About Children's Rights in the digital environment!*" child participation project aims to give children and young people in Europe the opportunity to raise their voice on issues connected to children's rights in the digital environment.

Children and young people from 18 ENOC countries/regions – *Albania, Andalusia (Spain), Belgium (FL), Belgium (FR), Basque Country (Spain), Catalonia (Spain), Cyprus, Estonia, France, Georgia, Iceland, Italy, Malta, Northern Ireland (UK), Norway, Poland, Scotland (UK) and Wales (UK)* - took part in the project. Participating ENOC member institutions used different methodologies to recruit and involve children and young people and explored different child participation tools and methods to collect and reflect children and young people's views and opinions.

Country trajectories

During the period February-June 2019, country teams conducted several physical meetings with children and young people using different formats: group discussions, focus meetings with relevant experts in the field, arts, digital workshops, etc. Involved children and young people hereby had the chance to explore their rights in relation to the different opportunities and challenges the digital environment poses.

ENYA 2019 Forum

At the final stage of country activities, participating children and young people elected two representatives (per country/region) who, accompanied by the ENYA country coordinator, participated in the ENYA 2019 Forum that took place between 25-26 June 2019 in Brussels.

Thirty-seven young people aged between eleven and eighteen years old, eighteen ENYA coordinators and seven Ombudspersons for Children's Rights[1] met over the two day event.

During the ENYA Forum, children and young people of each participating country/region presented their country activities. They participated in digital workshops and put together a creative video in which they addressed their opinion and recommendations concerning the digital environment. Participating children and young people held an interactive discussion with the ombudspersons present and engaged in four different focus groups on self-chosen themes: (1) education, (2) privacy, (3) opportunities and (4) challenges of the digital environment. At the final session, children and young people drafted a set of common recommendations on their rights in the digital environment for ENOC.

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[1] Geneviève Avenard, Children's Defender, France; Koulla Yiasouma, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children & Young People; Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, Ireland; Bernard De Vos, Ombudsperson for Children's Rights, Belgium; Salvör Nordal, Ombudsman for Children, Iceland; Nejla Peka, Commissioner for Children's Rights, Albania; Bruce Adamson, Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

This report presents an overview of the input children and young people provided during ENYA 2019 and were conducted by the Belgian offices (FL + FR) of the Children's Right Commissioners.

2. Participation trajectories in countries/regions

Information on participating countries

This section provides a brief overview of the input children and young people provided during the ENYA participation trajectories organized by local ombudspersons' offices. The information was gathered through reports from the national trajectories and through a questionnaire drawn up by the Flemish office of the Children's Rights Commissioner.

A total of **16 offices**: Albania, Andalusia (Spain), Basque Country (Spain), Belgium (FL), Belgium (FR), Catalonia (Spain), Cyprus, Estonia, France, Iceland, Italy, Malta, Norway, Northern Ireland (UK), Scotland (UK) and Wales (UK) shared information on the input children gave during the trajectories.

2.1. Prominent findings

A thematic analysis of children and young people's input during country activities provides some meaningful findings.

A. The experience of digital challenges seems correlated with a lack of digital knowledge and skills

In countries where children discussed a lot of negative aspects and **challenges of the internet** (online risks related to a lack of privacy, hate speech, sexting,...) children and young people (YP) also pointed out at the lack of information and education about the internet.

In addition, YP addressed the responsibility of **school** curricula to provide them with information about the digital environment and digital skills in order to be fully able to access and exercise their (digital) rights.

B. The use of digital media in school seems correlated with digital knowledge and skills

A difference between countries has to be acknowledged here. Some groups of children and young people perceive their **schools as lagging behind in the use of digital media**. They lack the use of media in class. In other groups, other countries, children and young people **can't imagine school without the use of digital media** (in classes, for homework, to share results etc).

The use of digital media seems related to the digital knowledge and digital skills children and young people perceive to have. Groups of YP that often mentioned the lack of digital media use / lack of courses on digital media in school, also experience a lack of information on the digital environment and digital skills themselves, and vice versa.

C. Children who know their rights are more likely to claim them, as well as respect the rights of others

Children and young people want to learn how to use digital media in a responsible and constructive way. They want to know more about their rights. Children and young people stress the importance and need of **accessible, understandable and trustworthy information**.

This brief analysis of the input children and young people provided during the trajectories shows that the more knowledge children and young people have on their rights in the digital environment and how to use the digital environment, the more they also tend to use the digital environment in a safe and constructive way. They are not only more likely to claim their own rights, but they also make more efforts to respect the rights of others.

For example, in the case of sexting (when private pictures of a young person are spread through the internet without their consent), children and young people who showed more knowledge on their rights and on the use of digital media, not only thought about ways to protect the victim of sexting, but also thought about ways to prevent sexting in general and to deal with the perpetrator in a respectful way. In other cases, children and young people tend to blame the victim more and thought less about the rights and responsibilities of each person involved.

D. Balancing views: possibilities and challenges, rights and responsibilities

Children and young people seem to have **a balanced and broad view on the digital environment**. They discussed their own rights and responsibilities as well as the rights and responsibilities of other actors involved. Topics seem never to be approached 'in black and white', but in a very balanced way.

For example when the topic of online privacy is discussed, YP pointed out that different actors have a role in this. Throughout the different trajectories YP mentioned they have to learn to act in a responsible way to protect their online privacy. They look at **teachers**, **parents**, **peers** and the **media** to support them herein. They also expect adults to 'practice what they preach and to give a good example, for example by not putting pictures of their children online without their consent, by not constantly being on their mobile phone' etc.

YP indicated that **companies and apps also have a degree of responsibility** in this. They can't just do what they want but they have to **respect the rights of (young) people**. These companies and apps also have to **explain** in a **transparent**, **accessible** and **understandable** way what will happen to the content that YP share online, so YP can make a well-informed decision.

2.2. Topics

This section provides a brief overview of the topics that were mostly discussed by children and young people. Yet, the observation has to be made that some participation trajectories were *pre-structured* around certain topics by the ombudspersons' offices. In some cases the topics could therefore tell us more about what ombuds offices think is relevant and important for children and young people concerning the digital environment - rather than what is of greatest concerns for the young people when talking about the digital environment.

The list of topics is based on the first ENYA documents and questionnaires on the digital environment.
The topics indicated with '1" were, to a greater or lesser extent, discussed by each group. Followed by "2" and "3"…

Topic		Views and recommendations of young people
Fake news/fake accounts	1	- Children pointed out at the difficulty to distinguish fake news/information from true news/information; - This topic is also discussed under "**information**": YP argue that **schools, parents - and (social) media platforms themselves** should provide them with **knowledge and skills** to be able to distinguish fake information form true information.
Education	1	- Digital media is used a lot at school; - Schools can't teach everything YP require to know about the digital environment; - YP felt that education on the digital environment should start **from a young age;** - YP feel **their parents need education** on the digital environment; - Schools should play an important role in the knowledge children and young people have on the digital environment and their rights in it. YP want to receive more information at school: through lessons, school debates, lectures of experts etc.
Digital literacy	1	- YP are in need of more information/guidance/training at **school;** - YP also feel their **parents** lack both the skills and the

		information to support them in the digital environment;
		- YP want to be able to support each other in the use of digital media (**peer support**);
		- YP address the importance of **critical thinking** – YP should be educated to be able to use the internet and digital media; to learn where they can find reliable information; to learn to distinguish between false/fake and true news and information.

Online risks and safety	1	- The topic of **sexting** was discussed a lot:
		    - In some countries YP seemed unaware of the potential negative consequences – here children also tend to blame the victim rather than the person who made the content public;
		
		    - In other countries YP were more aware of the possible negative consequences of sexting. Here the person who spread pictures without the other persons' consent is blamed;
		
		    - **School**, **parents** and the **media** are mentioned as important actors that should educate YP on online safety and responsible online behavior.

Information	1	- YP highlighted the importance of information that is **accessible**, **reliable**, **trustworthy** and **easily understood** – how can they distinguish between information that is reliable or is not? - Access to information is also necessary for '**offline**' activities (f.e. schoolwork, bus schedules, …)

Social media & apps	2	- YP think websites and social media apps have a **responsibility** in:
		
		    - communicating in a transparent, accessible and understandable way regarding what happens with the content they upload;
		
		    - protecting their privacy;
		
		    - Presenting terms and conditions in an easier and shorter way to make them understandable for everyone.

Civic participation	2	- **Learning about social issues** is made easier through the digital environment;

		- **Participating** online is **easier**, because there are more people to reach; - YP consider the digital environment as helpful **to promote and coordinate social movements** with constructive objectives like for example combating climate change; - YP argue that social media makes it easier for young activists to get together and organize actions. This should be strengthened for example by extra apps for young activists to meet online.
Mental health (and self-image)	1	- YP consider **cyberbullying** a big challenge that has to be tackled; - YP argue that social media makes people obsessed with their looks which has an impact on their self-image; - The digital environment exposes YP into certain "types" of appearance, ideas and identity aspects – which has an impact on the **identity formation** of YP, their **self-confidence** and **mental health** in general; - The **Media** has a **responsibility** in how children and young people are portrayed – this has an impact on how young people perceive themselves; - Young people want more and more accessible support for when something goes wrong online. They often don't know where to go with their questions. This support needs to be online (apps, chat, information) as well as offline (teachers/youth workers who can be trusted and have enough information on the digital environment, …)

Relationship with parents	2	- YP discussed their **rights to (online) privacy** in relation to their parents:
		
		    - They argued that parents should not be allowed to share pictures or other personal information about them without their consent;
		
		    - Parents should also not be allowed to scan through their private chats on social media – exceptionally if they are concerned about their child's safety;

		- YP discussed their **online skills and knowledge** about the digital environment in relation to their parents. In most cases, YP feel their parents lack digital knowledge and – skills to support them in the use of digital media; - YP discussed the **frequency of use** of digital media in relation to their parents: parents need to show a good example, like spending time with them without their phone; - Some groups mentioned the **difficulty to discuss** their social media use openly with their parents because they're afraid parents will not support them or will isolate them from the internet; - Parental control should be possible according to age and in a way the rights of YP are still protected.
Online - offline	1	- What YP do/read/experience online has an impact on their 'offline' lives; - Through social media YP keep **connected** with their 'offline' friends, as well as sometimes with new people; - The digital environment is **part of YP lives;** - Digital devices should all show the **screen time** – this can raise awareness among young people using them;

Privacy	1	- YP asked themselves what can happen with the content they put online. YP think websites should provide transparent information on this – that is understandable and accessible to them;
		
		- The **terms and conditions** of media platforms should be accessible and easy to read for everyone. To make it even more accessible, websites could create a video on them;
		
		- The topic of privacy was also discussed in relation to parents/caregivers:
		
		    - YP argue that they have a right to privacy. Therefore, they think parents should not be able to **share** pictures of them **without their consent;**
		
		    - Parents should also not be allowed to **scan through YP's social media channels**/private

		chat – unless parents are concerned about children's **safety**.

Accessibility of digital media	3	- Some groups talked about the right to digital media and internet for everybody, for example:
		
		    - Internet should also be available for **poorer** people;
		
		    - Digital media and internet should also be accessible to **disabled people**.

The following topics were only (briefly**) discussed** in **one or two groups**: the future of artificial intelligence; the damage digital media can cause to our eyes, ears and nerve system; the existence of influencers in the digital environment.

2.3. Strengths/advantages of the digital environment

The most prominent strengths and advantages of the digital environment discussed by children and young people during the participatory trajectories were:
- The possibility of **gathering information on everyday-life** (trains, shopping, school assignments, etc.);
- **Connectivity**: keeping in touch with family and friends;
- **Civic advantages** (fundraising for charities, learning about social issues, freedom of expression, etc.).

2.4. Challenges of the digital environment

The most prominent challenges of the digital environment discussed by children and young people during the participatory trajectories were;
- **Knowledge** on the digital environment in general: YP want to have more knowledge on how to use digital media and on their rights in the digital environment, on the possibilities and risks of social media;
- **Online privacy** and knowledge about this. To what extent can we control what happens with the content that we upload? Where can we find this information?
- The **negative impact** social media can have on **mental health** and the self-image of YP. Tracking online hate speech and online bullying is important here;
- Being able to **identify and dismiss fake news / reliable information** due to the huge amount of available news and information on the Internet.

3. ENYA 2019 Forum

During a group debate on the second day of the ENYA 2019 Forum, children and young people selected four themes that were the most important to them when talking about their rights in the digital environment – based on the discussions and workshops that were held the day before. These themes were: (A) Privacy, (B) Education, (C) the risks and challenges - and (4) the opportunities of the digital environment. They were divided into four groups to draft recommendations on these topics. Eight ombudspersons for Children joined the different groups and supported the children and young people by asking them additional questions and providing them with extra information. After that, a big group debate was held to discuss all of the recommendations. Children and young people were also able to add written comments to the recommendations.

Some of the recommendations children and young people drafted are a clear example of how the digital environment is omnipresent in their lives. Children and young people often propose the development of new apps to counter nowadays challenges in the digital environment.

3.1. Recommendations of Children and young people

A. Privacy

1. Schools, parents/guardians, the media and peers have to educate children and young people and their parents/guardians on online privacy.
2. There needs to be more awareness on oversharing amongst young people and parents/guardians. Parents/guardians should also be aware of the privacy rights of their children: they should not post pictures of them online without their consent.
3. It should be made mandatory for (social) media companies to ask people for their consent prior to their private content (pictures, information, etc.) being published online by others. In addition, social media platforms should have an accessible and reliable reporting system.
4. (Social) media companies should take responsibility of the personal information that children and young people provide. They should not be allowed to use it for commercial purposes without young people's consent.
5. Europe should make it mandatory for companies to have terms and conditions that are accessible, easily read and understood by people of all ages.
6. National Governments should be encouraged to provide accessible information to highlight the most important information and terms and conditions of the digital environment and to raise awareness of young people's rights in the digital area. (They can do this for example through a website).

B. Education

1. In order to uphold the rights of every child, Governments should provide equal access to the internet and to educational platforms in the digital environment.
2. There should be specific provisions for teachers and educators on the main issues faced by children and young people in the digital environment. This ensures the opportunity for all children and young people to seek help.
3. Children and young people should be educated from younger ages on social media and technical usage. This education could involve dealing with online hate speech; misinformation and it should provide children and young people with critical thinking skills to distinguish real and trustworthy information from fake information.
4. Governments should implement different sources of information (in formal and informal ways) on the digital environment for children and young people as well as for their parents, guardians and teachers.
5. There should be promotion of sexual education involving the digital environment (for example on gender, on the risks of sexting, etc.) to promote online respect and sexual awareness. This should aim to create acceptance and understanding of diversity.

C. Risks and challenges of the digital environment

1. Children and young people should be able to get personal support from a local person if they are experiencing problems online. This person should be assigned by children and young people and can be from a school or a local youth organization. Children and young people should be able to trust this person fully. This person should be trained and should receive ongoing training in supporting children and young people. This person can have lived experience.

2. In situations of online bullying or sexting it is important that both the victim and the perpetrator get support. In addition, it is important to focus on prevention rather than punishment. Creating a friendly and safe atmosphere within schools for example can prevent online bullying from happening.

3. "Don't do it" - attitudes towards sexting in education are ineffective and ignore the realities that children and young people nowadays live in. Schools should address the topic of sexting/sharing nudes in courses on sexuality or digital media. Adults (parents, teachers…) should also receive this education so that they can support children and young people to the best of their abilities in dealing with nudes, online hate speech etc.

4. Children and young people should have the right to talk about sexting and online bullying in a confidential environment without their parents/guardians being told. A system of peer support needs to be established so that children and young people can support each other if someone faces online difficulties.

5. Fake news is a concern for children and young people and can put them at risk. Creating an app or website that can fact-check news can help children and young people to spot fake news.

D. Participation and opportunities

1. The digital environment should be accessible to everyone. All (young) people should have access to digital technology, including free Wi-Fi. Special attention needs to be payed to the accessibility of the digital environment for children with specific needs (children with disabilities, children separated from their parents, children on the move, children in alternative care, children in poverty, etc.).

2. An app should be developed to help children and young people to learn about Human Rights and Children's Rights in a fun and accessible way.

3. A general app to protect the privacy of children and young people should be developed. This app has to provide trustworthy information and a complaint mechanism regarding privacy issues.

4. Children and Young People should always be involved when Governments make decisions and laws that affect them. Governments can include children and young people in decision making processes through online participation.

5. Grown-ups often mostly see and mention negative things about the internet. However, internet use is mostly a positive practice. Children and young people should be supported to interact in a positive way with digital media – banning technology (for example banning mobile phones in schools) is not a good way to teach children and young people how to use it: adults should aim at promoting positive use of the media by children and young people, rather than banning it.