Report on the Survey of Youth Information Professionals for the Project MedYIa — Youth Information vs Disinformation: Media under the Microscope!

MedYIa

Media under the microscope!

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Introduction

In 2020, the *MedYIa - Youth Information vs Disinformation: Media under the Microscope!* (financed by Erasmus+) project partners met together to develop a strategy, with the aim of enhancing the Media and Information Literacy (hereinafter MIL) skills and resources of those working in the youth sector (youth information workers, educators, youth workers).

The first step was to ask youth (information) workers about their expectations in this highly topical field. To do this, the partners prepared an online survey, which was shared in the spring of 2021, the pandemic preventing physical meetings.

This online survey became the basis for the MedYIa partners' work, enabling them to create a tailor-made, face-to-face training, closely aligned to the needs of youth workers.

The survey was shared widely in the three languages of the project consortium (French, German and English).

The final report will provide recommendations to policymakers, institutional bodies and youth work and youth information professionals.

Context and objectives

The ultimate objective of this project is to provide youth (information) workers with the tools and resources necessary to carry out MIL activities with young people, in order to equip them with the skills they need to navigate the information they come into contact with every day.

The MedYIa project is needs-based, as it focuses on the needs of the youth sector and young people themselves.

Numerous changes led to a redefinition of the objectives of the survey, linked to the constraints of the pandemic.

At first, the survey was aimed at young people, in order to assess their MIL needs. However, due to issues that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic, notably related to the number of young respondents, as well as the release of another survey aimed at young people around the same time, the target group was adapted.

In the end, the survey was targeted at Youth Information professionals, such as youth workers, youth information workers and even teachers. This allowed us to ensure qualitative answers and

to share the survey within our own networks. The project planned to organise focus groups with professionals from the youth sector. These focus groups were replaced by the survey.

We did however take into account the focus groups that ERYICA organised in the framework of the European project *SmartEU (Programme Media Literacy for All)*, which was on the same topic with the same target group. In order to ensure that young people's views and needs are taken into consideration, this report also references findings from other recent studies aimed at young people.

These results should then have served as the basis for Intellectual Output 2 (IO2), namely a collection of MIL tools and resources, grouped by theme and language, to optimise user-friendliness and accessibility. However, throughout the course of the project, and after it had already been approved, the MedYIa partners realised that such a 'toolbox' already exists and is available online (https://betternet.be).

From then on, to avoid duplication and to optimise on available financial resources, IO2 was adapted and the partners decided to develop a training programme and training activities for youth professionals. The survey was created with this objective in mind.

The first phase of the project, Intellectual Output 1: State of Play (hereinafter IO1), therefore created the survey in order to:
- Better understand youth professionals' understanding of MIL,
- Identify missing skills and gaps in the sector,
- Identify existing tools and practices,
- Determine what kind of tools are most useful for those working with young people.

Survey method

This survey is the result of strong cooperation between the MedYIa partners, who aimed to define and draft questions with real added value for the rest of the project.

Anonymous, prepared on Google Forms in French, German and English, the survey content can be divided into three areas:
- Demographic data,
- MIL interest and needs,
- Contact details (optional).

The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. It was disseminated among the networks of the project partners, reaching youth workers, youth information workers, NGOs and schools. Other profiles also responded, such as psychologists, for example.

Other contributions, such as the focus group results carried out by ERYICA in the framework of the Smart-EU project, have been added to this report in order to enrich its results.

As previously mentioned, the pandemic prevented the MedYIa partners from carrying out focus groups with young people. Therefore, the report includes the results from surveys conducted

recently by various actors in France and Belgium (see the webography), with a strong focus on the #Generation2020 survey from Media Animation/CSEM[1], which is particularly relevant for our project.

Given the huge number of surveys available, the partners decided to only include surveys conducted after 2014, targeted at 12-20-year-olds.
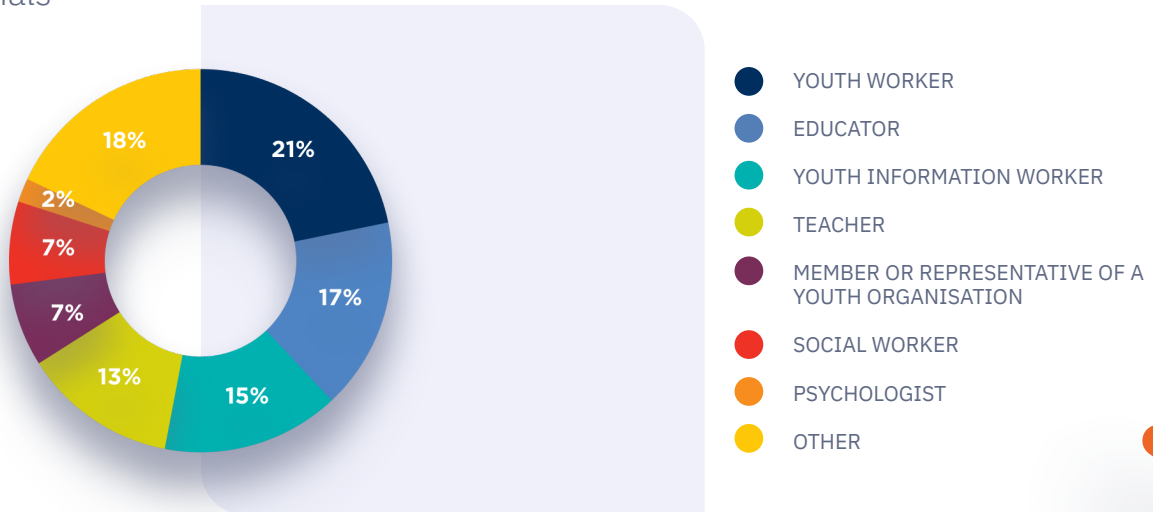
MedYIa survey results

4.1 Demographic results

Depending on the type of structure in which they work, the respondents hold various positions: teaching, youth information centres, psycho-socio-educational support services and others.
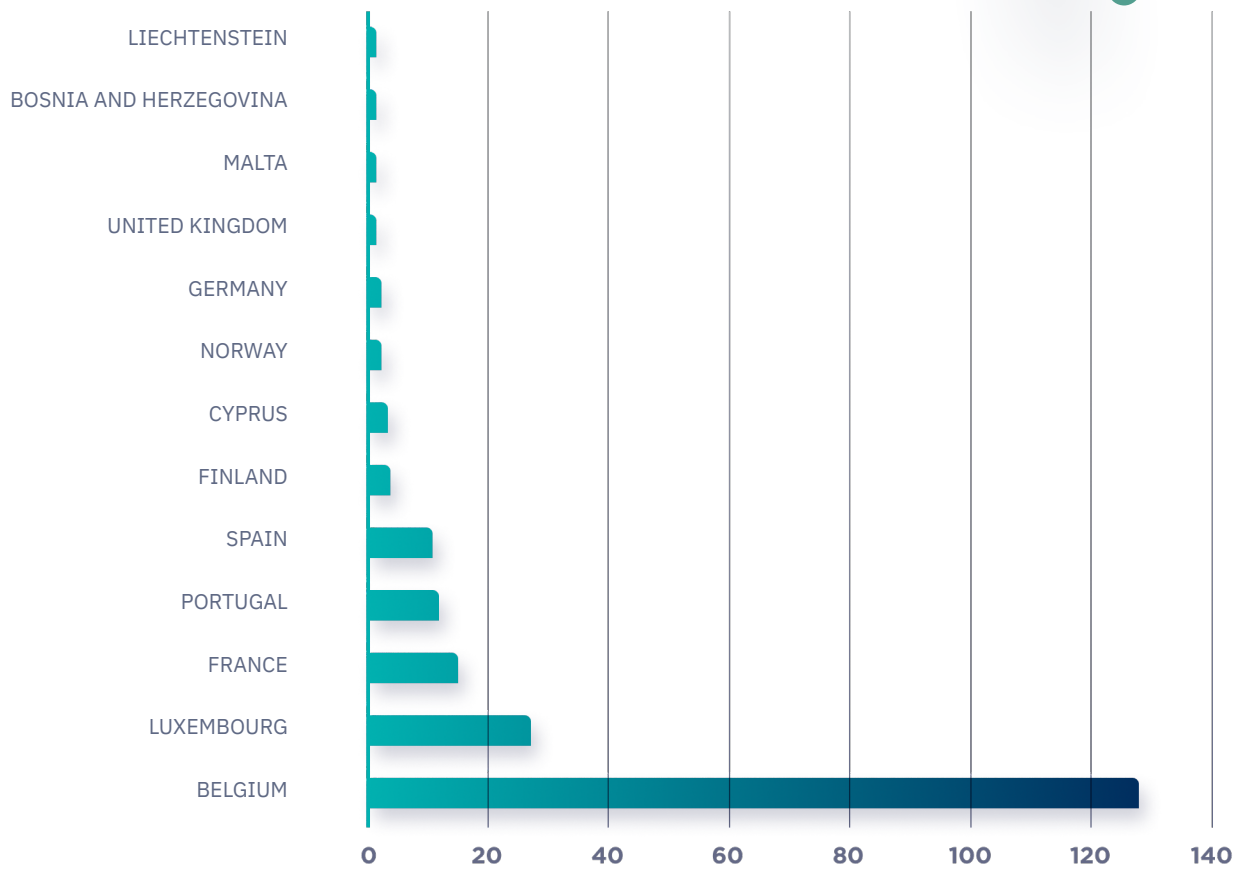
The majority of respondents are youth workers, educators and youth information workers. There were many different responses, which include for example directors or coordinators of youth structures, project managers and those in teaching roles. There were also respondents who correspond to several options: for example, they are educators and youth information workers.

Youth professionals

- ● YOUTH WORKER
- ● EDUCATOR
- ● YOUTH INFORMATION WORKER
- ● TEACHER
- ● MEMBER OR REPRESENTATIVE OF A YOUTH ORGANISATION
- ● SOCIAL WORKER
- ● PSYCHOLOGIST
- ● OTHER

The survey respondents come from 13 countries, the majority (61%) working in youth centres in Belgium, and the others working in France (7%) or Luxembourg (13%). The remaining respondents (19%) come from other countries, notably Portugal, Spain and Finland. The Belgian majority can be explained by the fact that most of the MedYIa partners are Belgian, and the survey was widely shared in their networks. The other partners come from Luxembourg and France, which explains the high number of respondents from these countries. Many ERYICA – the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency – members come from the Iberian Peninsula.

[1] See webography

A majority of respondents work in a youth structure or in a youth information centre, as indicated by the jobs in the graph below.

Youth structures

- STRUCTURE FOR YOUTH — 35%
- YOUTH INFORMATION CENTRE — 25%
- TEACHER OR EDUCATION — 17%
- SERVICE OF PSYCHO-SOCIO-EDUCATION SUPPORT — 11%
- OTHER — 12%
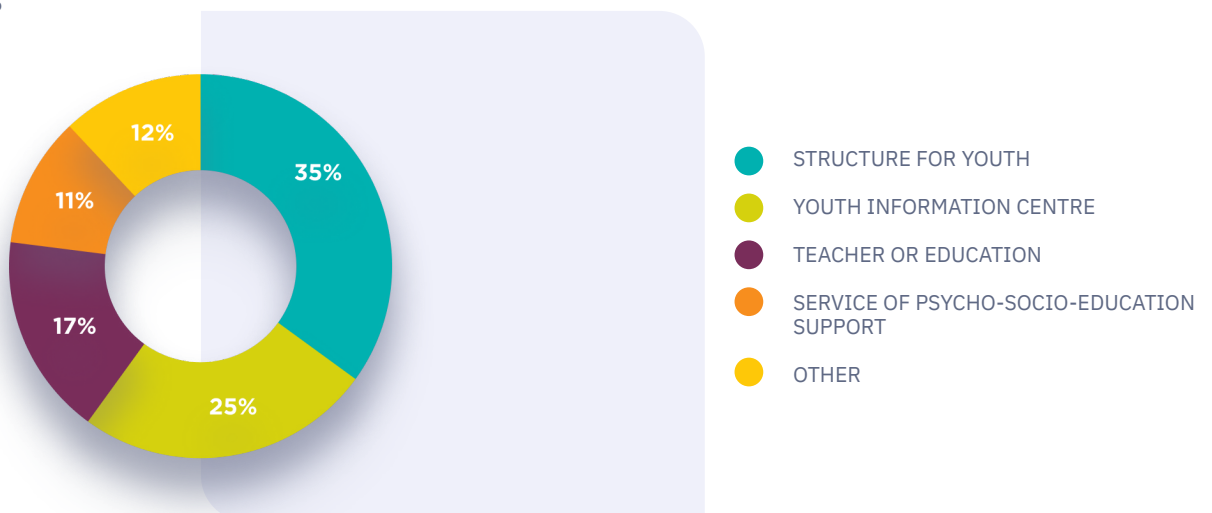
Key takeaway: the main respondents are youth workers, educators and youth information workers working in youth structures or youth information centres in Belgium, Luxembourg and France.

4.2 Interest in MIL

In this section, we examine how respondents perceive and manage their Media and Information Literacy (MIL) activities with young people.
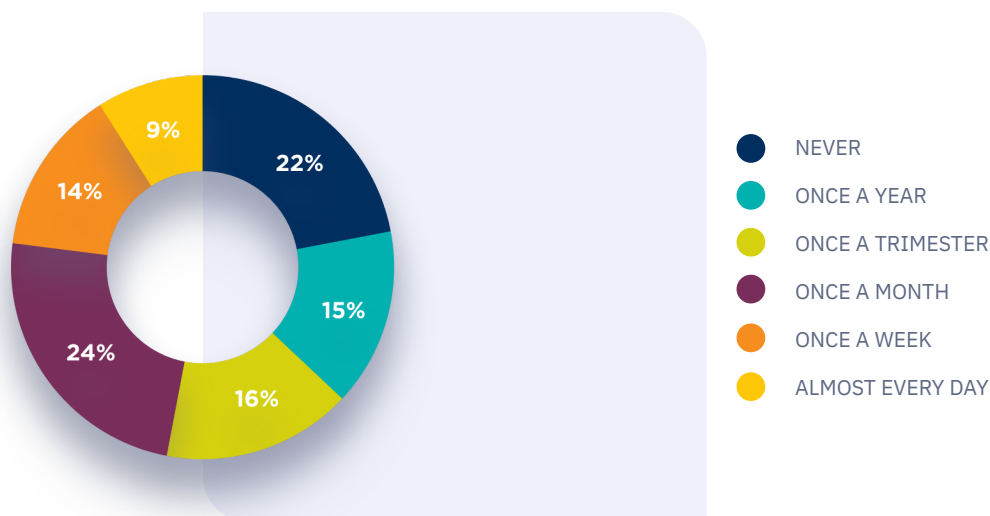
To this end, we examine to what extent they are involved in the following activities:
- Reading and analysing media;
- Knowledge of the functioning of the media;
- Conducting debates;
- Production of information by young people;
- Developing research and information management skills; and
- Developing responsible digital practices.

To identify respondents' interest in MIL, the questionnaire contained MIL pedagogical practices, with checkboxes determining how often these MIL practices are used.

On average, of all the pedagogical practices tested, one fifth are never used. Nevertheless, almost half of the practices are used quite often (more than once a month). The individual questions can be found in annex A.

Average:
MIL pedagogical practices

Legend:
- NEVER — 22%
- ONCE A YEAR — 15%
- ONCE A TRIMESTER — 16%
- ONCE A MONTH — 24%
- ONCE A WEEK — 14%
- ALMOST EVERY DAY — 9%

As mentioned above, six categories were measured:

- Reading and analysing media (audio, video, written);
- Knowledge of the functioning of media and information systems;
- Conducting debates;
- Allowing young people to produce media (expositions, school newspapers, podcasts, etc.);
- Developing analytical and interpretational skills, verifying sources; and
- Developing a responsible digital practice.

In general, the responses are very close to the average, with one exception. The practice that is applied least often is the production of information by young people, with 34% of respondents indicating that they never apply this approach.

Allow young people to produce media (expositions, school newspapers, podcasts, etc.)

|	
ALMOST EVERY DAY	
ONCE A WEEK	
ONCE A MONTH	
ONCE A TRIMESTER	
ONCE A YEAR	
NEVER	
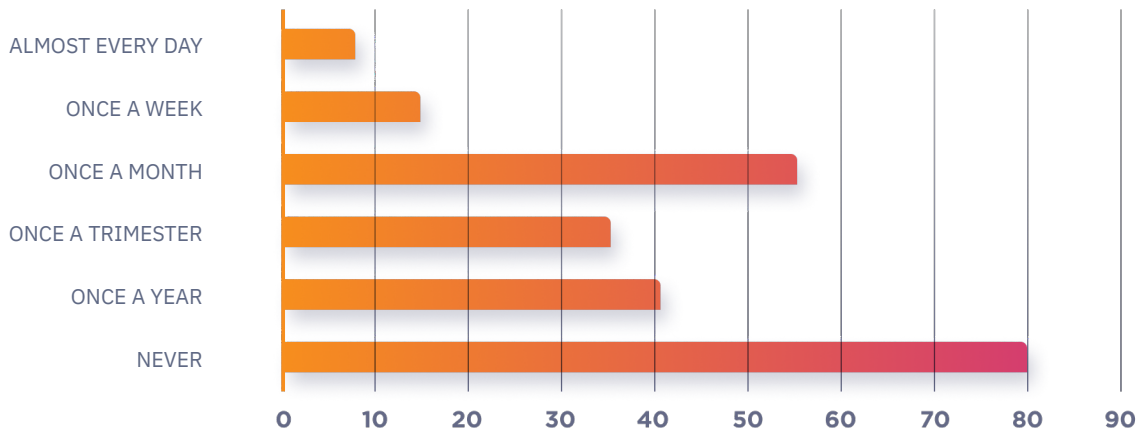
The survey also contained a question aimed at estimating respondents' interest in and motivation for using MIL practices. Respondents answered this multiple-choice question quite positively, acknowledging the importance of MIL in the current climate.

You have an interest in MIL because:

I UNDERSTAND THE INTEREST TOWARDS MIL, BUT I DO NOT HAVE THE TIME AND/OR THE KNOWLEDGE TO INTEGRATE IT INTO MY PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES.

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ASKING ABOUT IT: THEY OFTEN ASK (YOU) QUESTIONS ABOUT INFORMATION AND YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO GIVE THEM ANSWERS.

PERSONAL INTEREST: YOU ENJOY QUESTIONING CURRENT EVENTS AND THE WORLD OF INFORMATION CAPTIVATES YOU.

IT'S CURRENT: YOU THINK IT IS IMPORTANT TO DISCUSS IT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE BECAUSE IT'S A NECESSARY TOPIC TO BECOME A RESPONSIBLE CITIZEN.
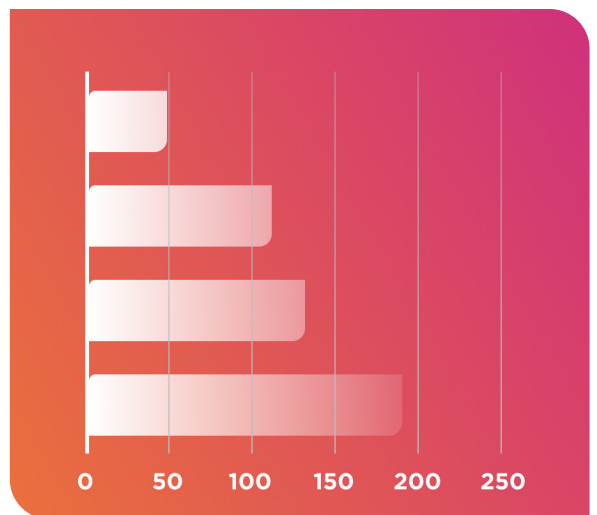
Key takeaway: respondents regularly practice all kinds of activities related to MIL, driven by a strong interest due to its relevance in the current climate. However, one activity is left out: the production of information by young people.
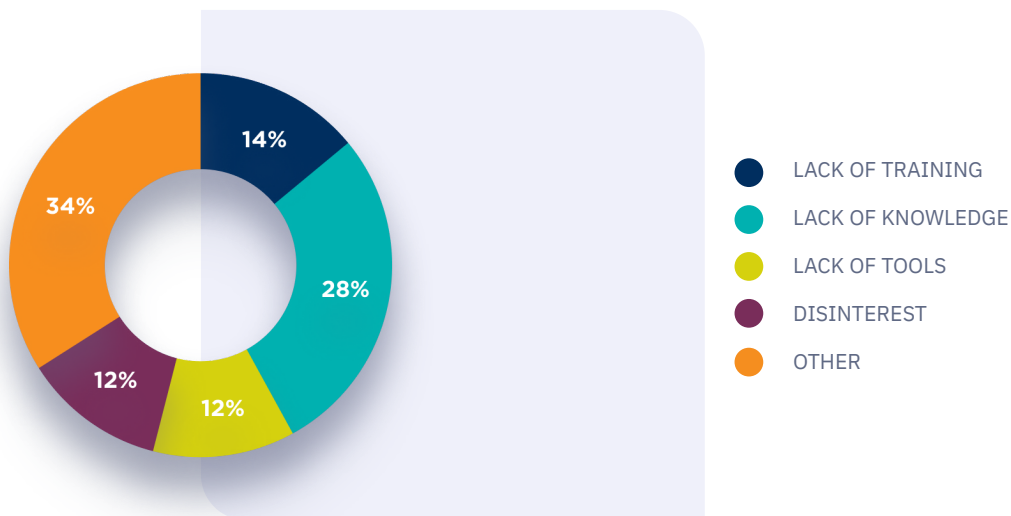
4.3 Difficulties encountered with MIL

To measure the difficulties encountered with MIL, the respondents had the opportunity to answer in their own words.

The replies can be categorised into 5 different types:
- Lack of training: one respondent mentioned a lack of professional trainings to teach MIL;
- Lack of knowledge: one respondent lacks basic MIL knowledge;
- Lack of tools: one respondent has the basic knowledge, but lacks tools to progress or train;
- Disinterest; and
- Other.

Difficulties encountered with MIL

Legend:
- ● LACK OF TRAINING
- ● LACK OF KNOWLEDGE
- ● LACK OF TOOLS
- ● DISINTEREST
- ● OTHER

The difficulties encountered regarding MIL are mainly due to lack of knowledge; lack of training comes second.

Regarding the lack of professional trainings, the respondents noted concrete examples, such as:
- Lack of pedagogy;
- Lack of capacity to motivate young people about this subject;
- Lack of training for themselves; and
- Lack of training for their colleagues.

The category 'other' included lack of time and resources. The lack of knowledge also means that respondents don't know how young people use social media networks, for example, or don't understand their relation to MIL.

**Key takeaway:** the respondents mainly lack MIL knowledge and trainings.

4.4 Digging deeper

To identify gaps in knowledge and the specific interests of the respondents, the questionnaire asked them to rate the following topics by level of interest:

1. **Freedom of expression and information** (discuss subjects such as digital citizenship, freedom of expression, freedom of information, propaganda, the role of media in democratic processes...)
2. **The information circuit** (learn about the different steps involved in the creation of information, from the event itself to its publication, to the deontology and ethics of information)
3. **Research and verification of information** (what are the key elements when searching for and verifying information, not to fall into the disinformation trap?)
4. **New and traditional media** (from Gutenberg to TikTok, looking at the evolution of media and its impact on responsible and active citizenship. Concrete use of social media networks with young people)
5. **Conspiracy theories** (how to approach conspiracy theories with young people, how to unpack and criticise them)
6. **Echo chambers and algorithms** (understand the existence of algorithms and be critical of the echo chambers that result from them)
7. **Representation in the media** (gender, sexuality, homelessness, racism, migration, refugees... how do the images that circulate in the media influence our perception of others and of ourselves?)
8. **How to react to complex situations** (conspiracy theories, radicalisation, sensitive and/or controversial topics...)

Every subject, except 'the information circuit', was voted by a majority as very interesting. In general, all topics were determined to be interesting (rather than not). All charts on individual topics can be found in annex B.

Average: Digging deeper
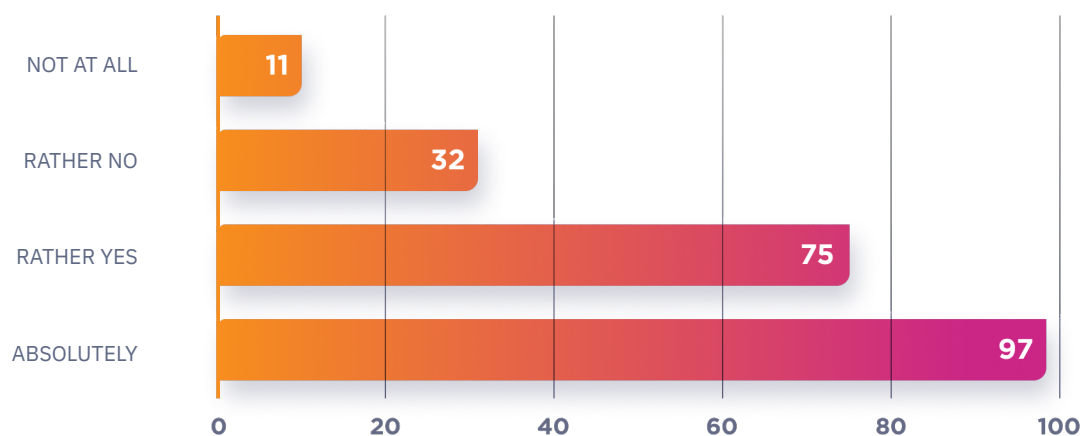
Key takeaway: respondents show great interest in all the topics proposed except for the information circuit.
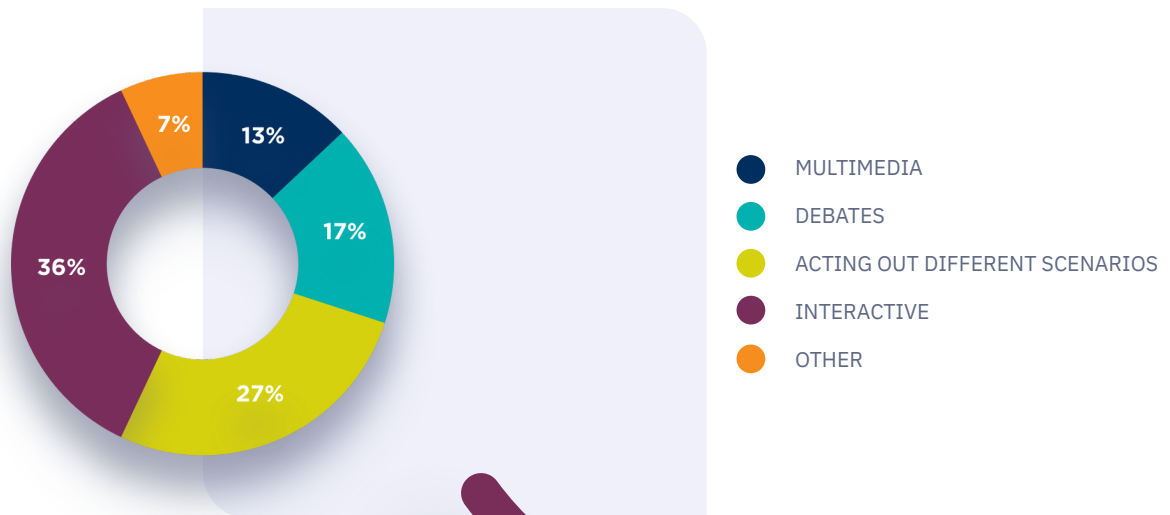
4.5 Respondents' recommendations

The final section of the questionnaire asked respondents to write, in their own words, recommendations for activities which work well with young people when it comes to raising awareness about different issues.

The responses can be categorised in the following way:
- Debates: discussions in the classroom with peers, ensuring a critical perspective;
- Multimedia: using videos, audio and social networks, to educate;
- Interactive: working actively in groups, reverse pedagogy; and
- Acting out different scenarios: role play, simulation, debates with people who have experienced the situation being discussed.

Recommended activities

- MULTIMEDIA
- DEBATES
- ACTING OUT DIFFERENT SCENARIOS
- INTERACTIVE
- OTHER

Key takeaway: in general, respondents favour an active approach that involves young people in an interactive way.

Recommendations

The core finding of this report is the important link between the lack of knowledge and the lack of training among respondents. The necessity for trainings that are accessible, both geographically and in terms of meeting the needs of the users, must be highlighted. Numerous trainings already exist covering MIL topics: these training courses must be recognised and adapted for different (future) MIL practitioners.

The respondents have a very clear interest in MIL. They also have pedagogical ideas for educating young people on this topic. However, deeper knowledge and feeling at ease on the subject are lacking. Training courses to increase the self-confidence of MIL practitioners is therefore necessary.

Regarding the difficulties mentioned in the 'other' category, which are mainly lack of time and resources, we recommend youth structures to consider MIL as an integral part of their institution and their school or extra-curricular programmes and to devote time and resources (such as computer equipment) to it.

Summary of the #Generation2020 survey

This survey covers young people and (their) information, focusing on 3 main elements, which are:

- Identification of and access to news (what young people consider to be news and how they get their information);
- Social use of information (how young people experience and consume information on a daily basis, with their peers); and
- Critical reception of information (the critical perspective of young people vis-à-vis information).

These 3 parts are detailed by young people in the form of testimonies. A summary of 11 more transversal points has also been written up. Finally, pedagogical approaches are suggested. The keyword of this survey is 'paradox'. Young people's answers are quite contradictory.

Important information for youth workers concerning young people's use of information

- **Identification of and access to news**
  - Young people's news is not the same as adults. Young people are more interested in

varied and cultural news in a broader sense (music, manga, people, etc.).
- They access their news mainly through social media networks, even though they don't consider these to be the most reliable sources (TV is considered more reliable in terms of content but is less interesting and they are suspicious of it shaping their thoughts). The other sources of information are, in order of preference, their entourage, then television, websites, radio. There is no mention of the written press. The format, and having the possibility to choose, are important for young people, as opposed to the constant stream of media from the TV/radio.
- The relationship with the information provider is important for young people. For this reason, young people don't like or feel less connected to the 'neutrality' of journalists (which explains why YouTubers and other influencers are attractive to young people). Nonetheless, occasionally their intuition tells them to get more neutral information from journalists.

- **Social use of information**
  - Confrontation and debates happen within the family circle, but news topics discussed with adults (from TV news) are not the same as what they discuss with their peers (from social media networks).
  - To discuss a subject, there is a need for trust amongst peers – there is a risk of losing face or being mocked. So, to talk about the news, young people need to feel confident, with true friends, parents, teachers, etc.
  - Young people know they are being watched and watch out for their peers posting potentially misleading information.

- **Critical reception of information**
  - TV news = reliable but too selective; shapes ideas due to the hierarchy of information

Prejudices about young people in relation to their use of the media

- There is indeed an interest in the news, but not necessarily as we understand it (not the same type of news);
- The main information source is social media networks;
- Young people have little or no knowledge regarding conspiracy theories;
- They know about fact-checking (in theory) but don't put it into practice;
- They check information when they have a doubt, but they trust their instinct and their friends' opinions;
- They trust their peers to talk about/confirm a piece of information, they discuss it together, look it up online and then talk about it amongst themselves;
- Young people need to make their own mind up (so they are not passive); and
- Even if they do not have in-depth knowledge, they are not fooled by a "buzz", or "clickbait", etc.

To what end do young people use certain media? Important regarding peers, building up a reputation...

- **Playful**
- **Informative**
  - to be involved, be part of discussions
  - to pass the time – it must jump out at you, but without making a big buzz
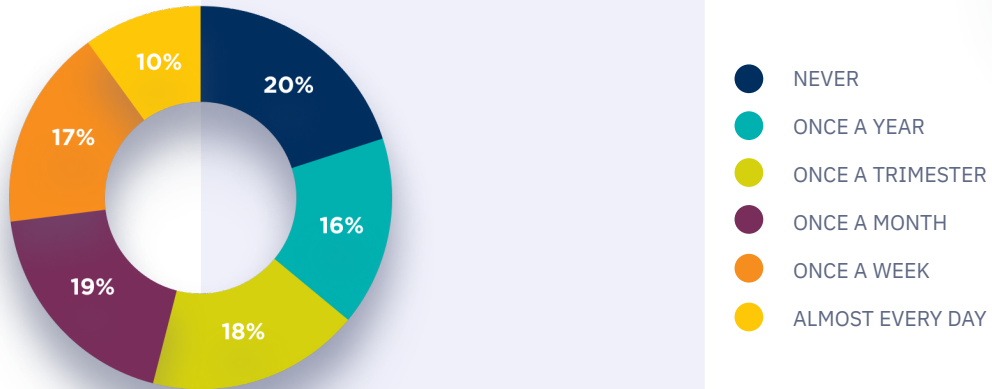 - to satisfy their curiosity

Recommendations
following the analysis of the #Generation2020 survey and the SMART-EU focus groups, carried out by ERYICA
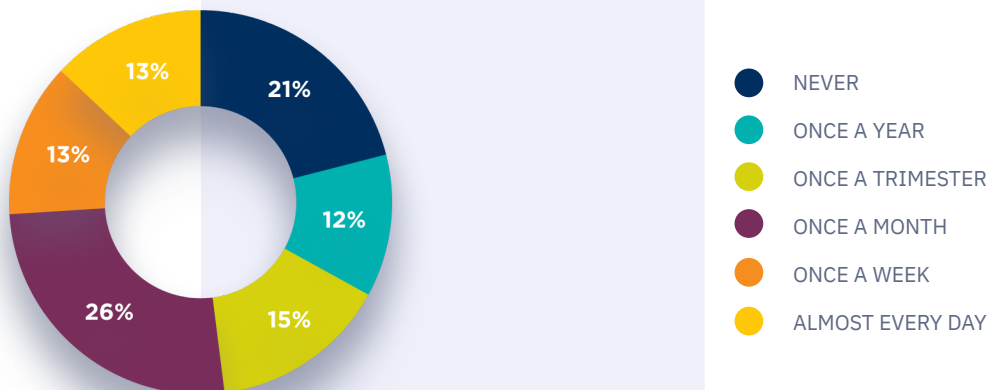
- Undoing the stereotypes projected onto young people about their social use of information, as well as their digital practices related to information, is necessary.

- What blocks young people from producing information are technical skills (YouTube videos, graphics, etc.). We found from the survey that these skills are also lacking among youth professionals. The MedYIa partners decided to, if a subsequent training is organised, integrate these techniques throughout the MedYIa training, by offering participants active content production activities that they can easily learn and use with young people.

- Although the information circuit is the least 'exciting' topic for youth workers, we have noticed that it is in this area that there are the greatest number of gaps, both among young people and the participants of the focus groups. This theme will be addressed in the training course developed within the framework of the MedYIa project.

- Finally, three main things stand out and should have an important place in the MedYIa training course (or any other subsequent training), namely:
  a. The role of affection towards the information provider (more important than expertise);
  b. The question of algorithms; and
  c. The economy of digital social networks.

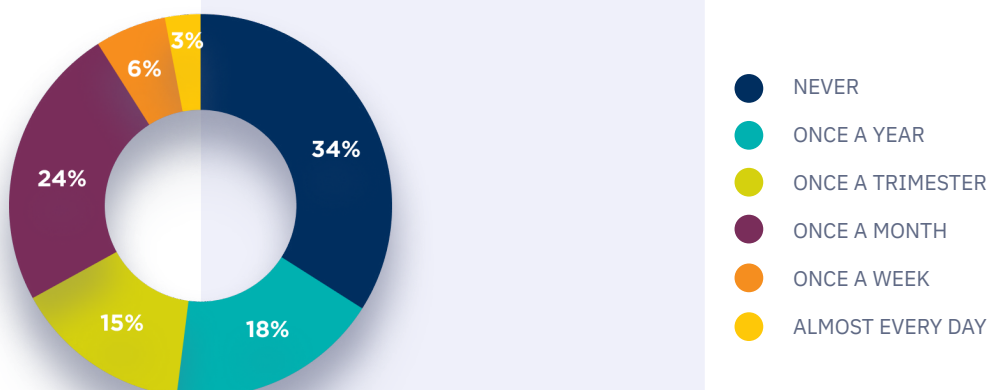## Knowledge of the functioning of media and information systems

20%	NEVER
16%	ONCE A YEAR
18%	ONCE A TRIMESTER
19%	ONCE A MONTH
17%	ONCE A WEEK
10%	ALMOST EVERY DAY

Developing analytical and interpretational skills, verifying sources

21%	NEVER
12%	ONCE A YEAR
15%	ONCE A TRIMESTER
26%	ONCE A MONTH
13%	ONCE A WEEK
13%	ALMOST EVERY DAY

Allowing young people to produce media (expositions, school newspapers, podcasts, etc.)

34%	NEVER
18%	ONCE A YEAR
15%	ONCE A TRIMESTER
24%	ONCE A MONTH
6%	ONCE A WEEK
3%	ALMOST EVERY DAY

Reading and analysing media (audio, video, written)

- NEVER — 20%
- ONCE A YEAR — 15%
- ONCE A TRIMESTER — 15%
- ONCE A MONTH — 26%
- ONCE A WEEK — 17%
- ALMOST EVERY DAY — 7%
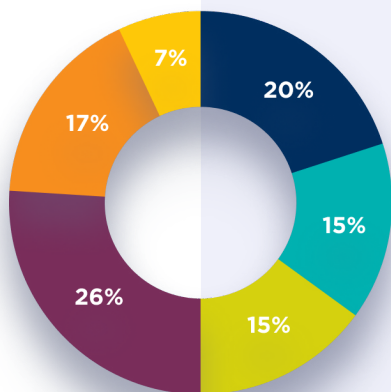
Conducting debates

- NEVER — 18%
- ONCE A YEAR — 15%
- ONCE A TRIMESTER — 19%
- ONCE A MONTH — 25%
- ONCE A WEEK — 14%
- ALMOST EVERY DAY — 9%

Developing a responsible digital practice

- NEVER — 22%
- ONCE A YEAR — 11%
- ONCE A TRIMESTER — 16%
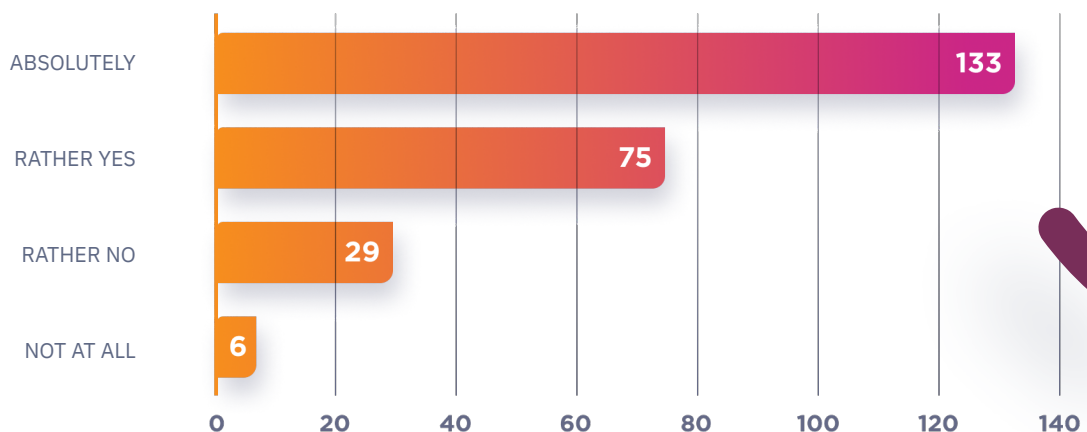- ONCE A MONTH — 22%
- ONCE A WEEK — 15%
- ALMOST EVERY DAY — 14%

Echo chambers and algorithms (understand the existence of algorithms and be critical of the echo chambers that result from them)

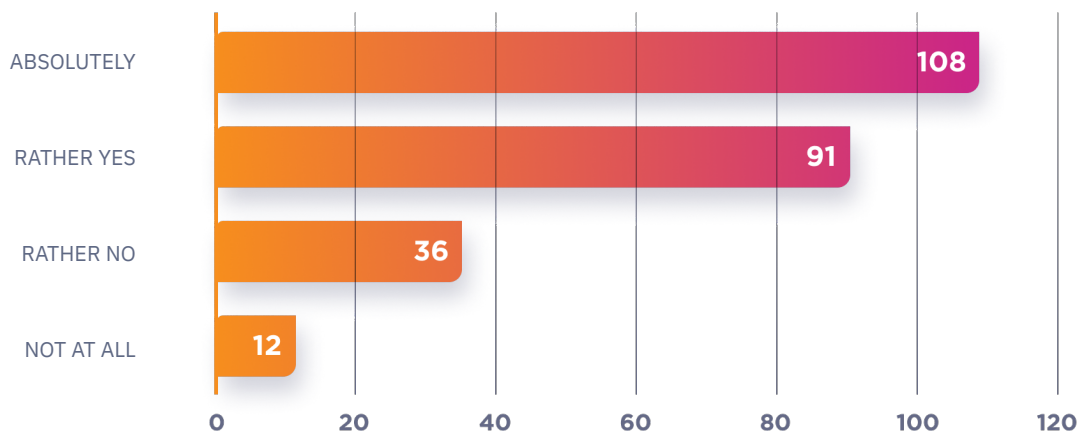|	
ABSOLUTELY	89
RATHER YES	86
RATHER NO	52
NOT AT ALL	19

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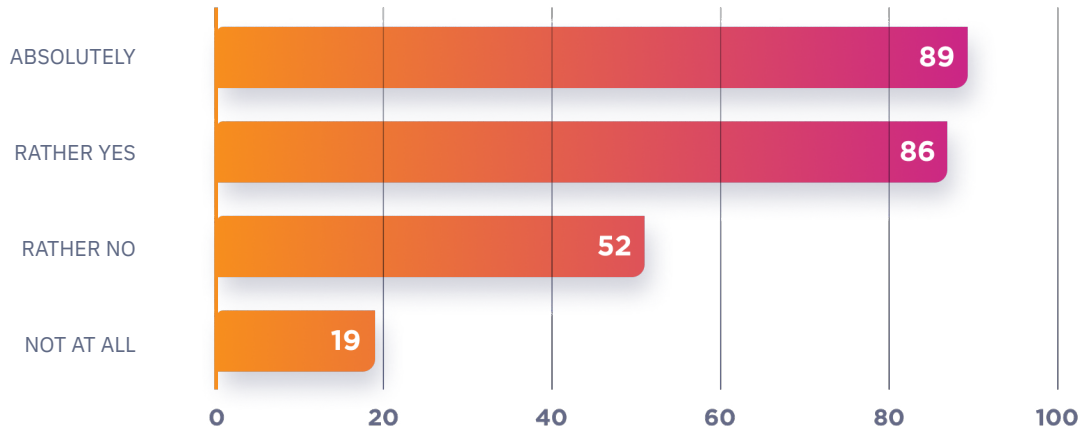
The information circuit (learn about the different steps involved in the creation of information, from the event to the publication to the deontology and ethics of information)
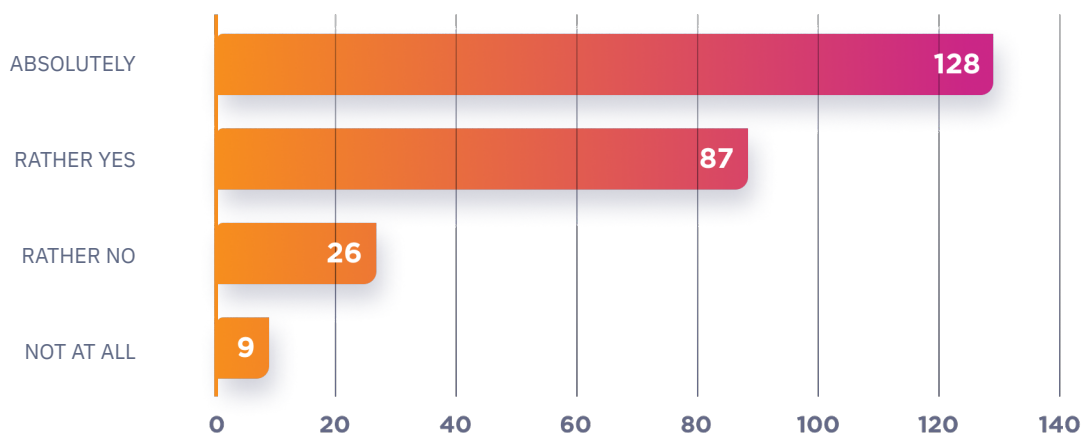
ABSOLUTELY	75
RATHER YES	101
RATHER NO	56
NOT AT ALL	19

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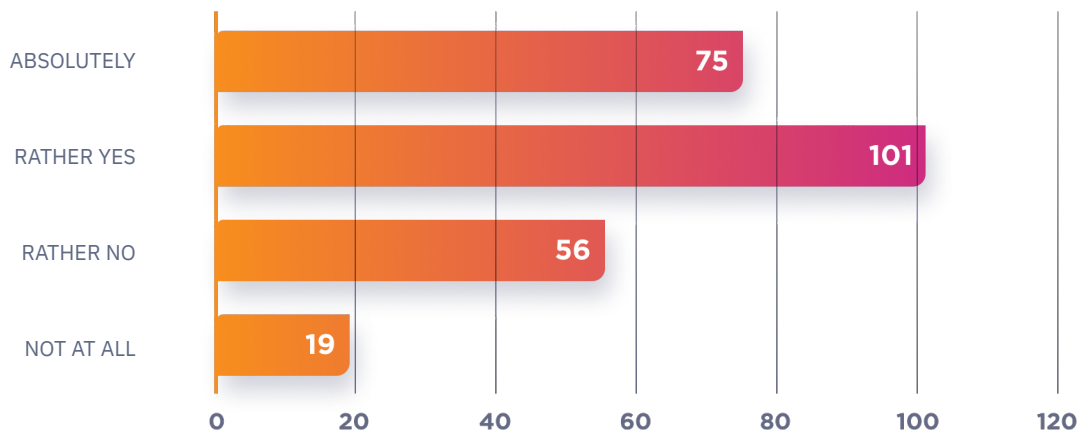
Representation in the media (gender, sexuality, homelessness, racism... how do the images that circulate in the media influence our perception of others and of ourselves?)

|	
ABSOLUTELY	133
RATHER YES	75
RATHER NO	29
NOT AT ALL	6

0 20 40 60 80 100 120 140

Freedom of expression and information (discuss subjects such as digital citizenship, freedom of expression, freedom of information, propaganda, the role of media in democratic processes...)

| Response	Value
ABSOLUTELY	108
RATHER YES	91
RATHER NO	36
NOT AT ALL	12

New and traditional media (from Gutenberg to TikTok, looking at the evolution of media and its impact on responsible and active citizenship. Concrete use of social media networks with young people)

Response	Value
ABSOLUTELY	128
RATHER YES	87
RATHER NO	26
NOT AT ALL	9

How to react to complex situations (conspiracy theories, radicalisation, sensitive and/or controversial topics...)

Response	Value
ABSOLUTELY	100
RATHER YES	72
RATHER NO	24
NOT AT ALL	5
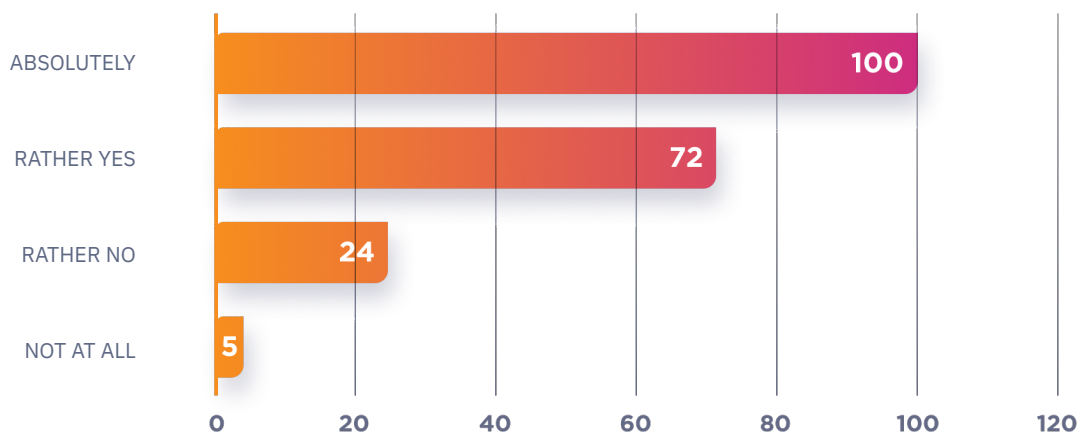
Research and verification of information (what are the key elements when searching and verifying information, not to fall into the disinformation trap?)
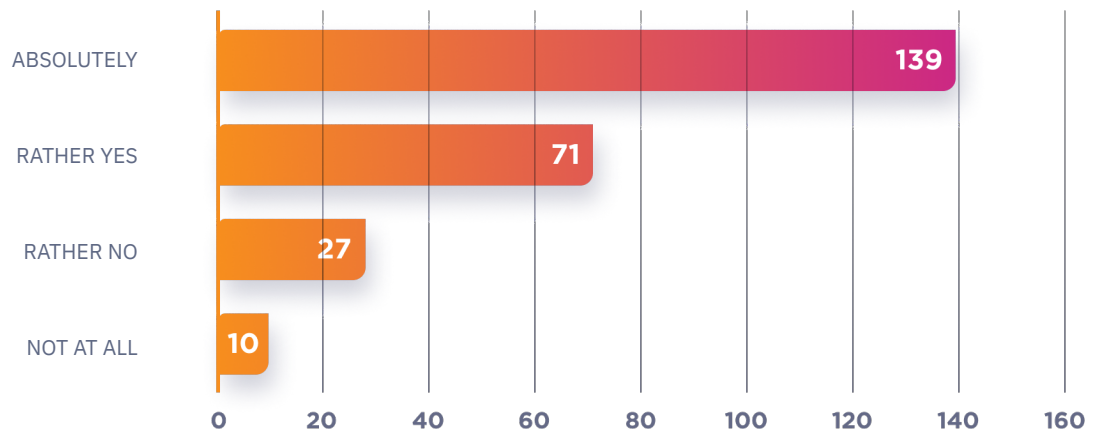
Response	Value
ABSOLUTELY	139
RATHER YES	71
RATHER NO	27
NOT AT ALL	10

Conspiracy theories (how to approach conspiracy theories with young people, how to unpack and criticise them)

Response	Value
ABSOLUTELY	103
RATHER YES	90
RATHER NO	37
NOT AT ALL	15
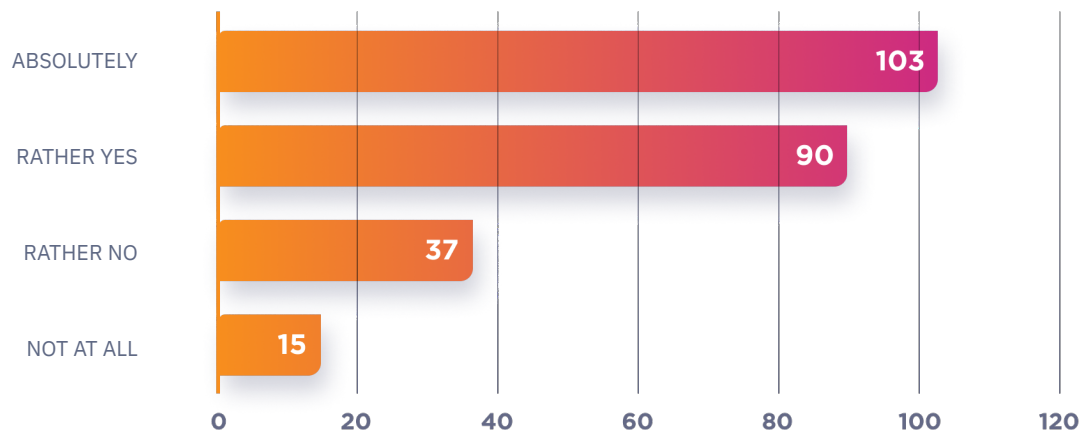
Webography

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