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Innovative Youth
Information design
and outreach



Focus Group Interview Report



Erasmus+



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Executive summary

The main purpose of the DesYIgn project is ultimately to expand the reach of youth information and counselling services (YIC) to a maximum number of young people across Europe by rethinking how the services are designed, and creating tools and resources for youth information workers to achieve this aim.

Youth information and counselling services aim to provide authentic and reliable information to young people and empower them to make informed decisions about their lives, and actively participate in society. However, the effort to empower young people can often fail to elicit the intended outcome when the services do not reach them. The acceptance and use of a service largely depends on **how well the service matches the needs and wants of its target users**. In this context, the service is the youth information and counselling service and the target group is young people. As the service is **providing information to young people**, the project consortium led by ERYICA, together with Åbo Akademi University, decided to study their **information-seeking behaviour** so the knowledge extracted from the study could be used in improving the service design and communication activities of youth information and counselling services, ensuring they are **user-centred and innovative**. The aim is to bring changes to the way the services are designed and communicated about so they match contemporary young people's information needs and information-seeking practices.

To meet the aim, eight focus group interviews were carried out in four different countries, which were: UK (Wales), Spain (Valencia and Madrid), Malta, and Luxembourg. A total of **37 young people; aged between 15 and 29 and with an average age of 19**; participated in the in-depth discussion, where they elaborated their everyday information-seeking practices, their level of awareness of the services, their challenges in accessing the services, and how they would prefer using such information services.

After analysing the study, it is clear that young people from the current digital age seek information in a different way from the pre-Internet and social media age. For almost all sorts of information, they make a Google search to get the primary idea and then consult more legitimate sources and friends. **They prefer consuming information from images and videos rather than long texts**. Young people practice autonomous information-seeking

today, although they find it is not easy to comprehend huge volumes of information and often suffer from **information overload** when looking for precise information for making decisions. They demonstrated the need for a **cognitive authority**; a source of information and advice which is believed to be trustworthy and reliable because of its expertise and knowledge. Outside educational institutions, youth information services could play an important role as one. Thus, to enhance young people's awareness, the **services must stay relevant to young people's lives**, produce content on the media of their choice, and disseminate it on appropriate channels. Multiple access points, both physical and virtual, are necessary to include young people living in rural areas, harder to reach young people and young people with disabilities. An interactive webpage and mobile application could also be very effective for this target group.

In the ever-changing technological landscape, information areas of interest change too; information regarding **anxiety, wellbeing, and cyber bullying** are gaining importance for young people. To create a sustainable connection with them, collaboration with schools, parents, youth organisations, different government bodies, and educational institutions is recommended. On the other hand, it is equally important to engage the youth in different educational events and activities to raise awareness and to enhance young people's **media and information literacy skills**. Youth (information) workers should be trained to practice empathy and openness, and along with their professional expertise, they have to be careful about young people's **privacy and confidentiality**. However, to keep up with the fast and fluid information and technological landscape, it is necessary that youth information-seeking behaviour is monitored and studied at regular intervals, which will help youth information and counselling services to remain relevant and important to young people.

A DEFINITION

youth information and counselling

Youth information and counselling services encompass a wide variety of different methods and techniques, and can be provided at a number of different services, varying from country to country. What matters is that the person who provides the information is equipped with specific skills and competences, and respects a code of practice in order to provide quality information. The [European Youth Information Charter](#) can be used as such a code, and is the reference professional principles and guidelines for youth information and counselling work across Europe. The definition below is taken from the Compendium of National Youth Information and Counselling Structures, further definitions and explanations can be found [here](#).

Youth information uses a vast range of techniques – from informing to signposting and referring, to orienting and to counselling – to guide young people through this process and support them in reaching their own decisions. Below is a closer look at these techniques:

- **Informing:** providing reliable, accurate and up to date facts on all relevant topics for young people in an understandable and user friendly way and putting them in a meaningful context. Networking/referring/signposting: providing not only relevant information, but also knowledge and a network of contacts on relevant topics in the area concerned, thus being able to signpost or refer young people to the appropriate institution or person who can help with their query.
- **Orientation:** putting the information offered in a broader context and offering the young person, through interaction with a youth information worker (whether online or not), the possibility to reflect on different alternatives and the consequences of deciding on each option.
- **Advising/guiding:** in addition to tailor made information, from time to time young people also need the advice or guidance of a professional. Youth information aims to help them by offering several points of view, while always ensuring that the decision itself is taken by the young person independently.
- **Counselling:** in the youth information context, counselling very often focuses on clarification. In a guided and professional conversation, the youth information workers and the young person together first identify the reasons and motives behind a question or a problem put forward by the young person. Then they seek to clarify what the next steps might be. Not all youth information centres and services offer all these forms of intervention. For example, not everywhere in Europe is counselling seen as an integral part of youth information. What youth information services offer often depends on the provision of other services for young people in the area, as youth information aims to close existing gaps and not to duplicate services.

Introduction

Youth information and counselling services, or YIC, provide high quality guidance to young people and help them make decisions to lead their lives constructively. These services also have a remarkable preventive function that constitutes a great added value to society¹

Despite the importance of youth information services in supporting young people to achieve their full potential, a large number of young people are still outside the reach of youth information and counselling services. According to a Eurofound research report (2019), a significant proportion of young people have difficulties in accessing these services. The reason behind the limited reach of the service could be a result of **inadequate awareness, low perceived usefulness**, and a gap between the channels used to promote the service and the channels used by young people to collect information. In the Erasmus+ KA2 Project of Future Youth Information Toolbox, the research report [“Future Youth Information and Counselling: Building on Information Needs and Trends”](#) revealed that young people are not always aware about youth information and counselling services (Karim, M. and Widén, G., 2018). In order to ensure sustainable improvement and relevance, it will be essential for youth information services to expand their **visibility and reach**. The project consortium understands that ways of reaching out to young people are constantly changing. The unprecedented technological advent and pervasive use of the Internet have significantly transformed young people’s ways of seeking and collecting information. Hence, to ensure a wider reach of such information and counselling services, it is essential to understand the **contemporary information-seeking behaviour** of the young population and tailor the services according to trends.

In order to address this gap and to ensure that youth information providers count on the tools and skills needed to succeed in reaching as many young people as possible, ERYICA along with Åbo Akademi University studied the current trends of the young people’s information-seeking behaviour in Europe. The department of Information Studies of Åbo Akademi considered The Eurostat definition of youth (“Overview - Eurostat”, Ec.europa.eu, 2019) and carried out an in-depth focus group interview of young people aged between 15 and 29 in multiple countries across Europe in collaboration with national and regional youth information and counselling structures. The aim of the focus group interviews was to understand how the young people of Europe perceive youth information and counselling services, how they collect, verify, and use information across different channels and formats, and how they would like these information services to respond to their information needs and trends of collecting information.

¹“Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education”, Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), 2019

The knowledge elicited from the study is instrumental in developing innovative resources for youth information service design that adheres to current youth trends and needs. The tangible outcomes include digital tools and face-to-face approaches, which will help to extend the service to more young people, particularly those from disadvantaged groups.

background

The age of the Internet and communication technology has shifted the information-seeking behaviour of young people in many ways. Recent studies stress that new forms of information-seeking behaviour have arisen, for example, young people today prefer information sources to be **interactive, visual** and available on **social media platforms, applications and game environments**. They seek store catalogues online, watch videos to learn languages, musical instruments and shortcuts for games, and they use a combination of search engines and applications for smart phones or tablets. **YouTube** was found as a critical information source for several teens, **preferring to view rather than read**. Although the young people were found to be aware of Internet threats, the speed of information retrieval and rapid assessment of the quality of information continue to be defining characteristics of young people's information-seeking behaviour (Bowler et al., 2001; Rowlands et al., 2008). Smartphones and tablets offer a quick look for information to fulfil everyday life needs, and often serve as an information tool. In an investigation entitled Net Children Go Mobile (Bowler et al., 2018) the authors found out that apart from Wikipedia and school referred websites, there were few references to text-based sources (Bowler, Julien, and Haddon, 2018).

However, seamless access to information through the Internet, multiple social media platforms, and unrestricted creation of information have allowed **fake and misleading information** to go unchecked, which impairs young people from making informed decisions, perceiving different social dilemmas, and making the right choices. Despite the abundance of information sources available to young people, it is not always easy for them to access and understand the information provided through a wide variety of media. At the end of 2017, Åbo Akademi University and ERYICA conducted a survey targeting young people in 18 European countries in the framework of the Erasmus+ KA2 Project Youth.Info: Future Youth Information Toolbox. The questionnaire was translated into 20 languages and gathered **over 6000 responses** thanks to the contribution and active support of national and regional youth information and counselling structures. The aim was to study information behaviour and experiences with youth information and counselling services of both users and non-users of the service. The resulting research report "Future Youth Information and Counselling: Building on Information Needs and Trends" showed that despite the popularity of online sources, young people find it difficult to validate online information. Around 50% of youth surveyed believe a lot of information they access is unnecessary and irrelevant. Over half of the respondents underlined that the information they use is not always **complete and reliable**. Almost

half of the respondents voiced difficulties in evaluating the reliability of the information they access and 55% expressed they would like sources where information does not require further verification. A large number of the respondents demanded an information source that would not require further validation (Karim, M. and Widén, G., 2018). Surprisingly, around 45% of users and 42% of non-users of the youth information and counselling service preferred **face-to-face channels for information collection** (individually and in groups) despite the digital age, indicating the importance of human interaction in the process of information seeking.

To address this challenge of the digital age, youth information and counselling services (YIC) aim to provide access to authentic information through both online and offline components, guidance through face-to-face counselling, and carry out necessary activities to enhance the media and information literacy of the youth and help them to make **informed decisions that will shape their future**. This service is available to every single young person, free of charge, and uses a wide variety of techniques, from informing to signposting and referring, to orienting and to counselling. However, not all young people are aware that these services are available to them or perceive it to be less applicable for them because it is not visible enough on the channels they follow. Thus, the service providers often struggle to reach out to all young people.

To respond effectively to such challenges requires **new skills, know-how, tailor-made tools and resources**. The Eurofound research report (2019) recommended service providers adopt new tools in line with trends among young people, provide guidance on what type of service the young person needs, acquire a high degree of knowledge of the issues of concern to young people, and empathy with young people and an understanding of their needs. In order to ensure that youth information providers are equipped with the tools and skills needed to succeed in supporting as many young people as possible, the project consortium wishes to develop innovative digital resources and service design methods connected to current youth trends and needs. Thus, the first priority of Innovative Youth Information Service Design and Outreach (DesYIgn) is to promote **quality youth information work**, by optimising youth information services and establishing efficient strategies and tools to reach out to more young people, by understanding the needs of the user, so that it is **user-friendly, needs-based, competitive and relevant to the target group**. To achieve this target, the DesYIgn project was initiated by ERYICA, in collaboration with partner organisations: [Youth Work Ireland](#) (Ireland), [Koordinaatti](#) (Finland), [Agence Nationale pour l'Information des Jeunes](#) (Luxembourg), [Dirección General de Juventud y Deportes de Madrid](#) (Spain), [ProMo Cymru](#) (Wales, UK), [Aġenzija Żgħażaġh](#) (Malta), [Institut Valencià de la Joventut](#) (Spain), and [Åbo Akademi University](#) (Finland). The consortium is working to re-think youth information provision through the application of this innovative methodology so that youth information services are **easily accessible, attractive and visible to young people**.

The project partners Agence Nationale pour l'Information des Jeunes (Luxembourg), Dirección General de Juventud y Deportes de Madrid (Spain), ProMo Cymru (Wales, UK), Aġenzija Żgħażaġh (Malta), and Institut Valencià de la Joventut (Spain) carried out focus group interviews with a representative sample group of young people aged between 15 and 29 in four different countries across Europe. Through an in-depth discussion with the target group, the study strived to discover their perception of youth information and counselling services, how they use those services, how they collect information, and how the youth information and counselling services could be modified so that more young people would voluntarily use the service through their preferred media and channels.

objective

The study aims at broadening the understanding of youth information-seeking behaviour and practices and will use the knowledge to enhance the **modernisation and effectiveness of youth information services**. The aim of the focus group interviews was to understand how young people prefer to **seek, collect, and use information** in their everyday lives, and how youth information and counselling services could be modified to better match the information needs of young people.

methodology

Qualitative studies often manage to discover greater details of human behaviour than quantitative studies. In order to understand the information-seeking behaviour of young people in their everyday lives and their expectations from youth information and counselling services, a focus group interview was considered appropriate and is instrumental in shedding light on complex behavioral patterns. 8 focus group interviews were carried out in 4 different countries across Europe. The data gathered also complements the data already obtained through the Future Youth Information Toolbox survey (quantitative data).

A total of **37 young people from Luxembourg, Malta, Spain (Madrid and Valencia), and the United Kingdom (Wales)** participated in the interviews. The respondent group had 21 females and 16 males. The age of the participants ranged from 15 to 29 with an average age of 19. While 22 of them were students, the rest were employed in full time occupations. Out of 37 respondents, 23 were from large cities, 13 from small towns, and 1 from a medium-sized city.

The 8 interview sessions took around 1.5 hours each and allowed all the participants to contribute with their own views and thoughts about the topic.

To ask about their perception of youth information and counselling services, their everyday information-seeking behaviour, and the possible augmentation of the service to help reach out to more people, the **unified theory**

of acceptance and use of technology (Venkatesh et. al. 2003) was used, along with another 4 appropriate constructs, which were: **Awareness, Access, Information Need Fulfilment, and Tangibles**. The DesYIgn partners strive to promote the services and expand their reach, and will engage young people to co-design the service in the later phases of the project. Hence, these constructs were added. This theory was used in earlier studies to assess library services (Awwad et. al 2015) (Ayele, and Sreenivasarao, 2013). Information-seeking has largely shifted to a virtual process; thus this theory was used to understand what features young people require in youth information and counselling services that could attract more young people to easily access and use the service. Finally, the question had 10 constructs in total which were: **Awareness, Perceived Usefulness, Access, Performance Expectancy, Information Need Fulfilment, Effort Expectancy, Tangibles, Facilitating Conditions, Social Influence, and Hedonic Motivations**. According to the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology, these are the constructs that comprise the attitude towards a particular technology/service, which triggers the behavioral intention to use the technology or service.

As well as the theoretical framework, we added another activity where the respondents had to mention two features they liked in the youth information service, two features they disliked in the service, and two features they would like to add to the service.

Results

1 awareness

In this study, the construct Awareness discussed **young people's knowledge about the youth information and counselling service**. The aim was to understand if the young people knew about such services, why they exist, what their utilities are, if they already know about the service and if so, how did they know, and so on. The questions that moderated the discussion were:

- What is a Youth Information and Counselling Centre to you?
- How did you come to know about it (Family/Friends/Website/Social Media/Brochure)? (Also for non-users who are aware of the services but never used them)
- What do you think could be the purpose of this service?
- What could YICs do to be more visible to young people?

The young people's general perception of the youth information and counselling services was that they **provide important and reliable information to young people**. It is possible to collect information regarding **studies, summer jobs, volunteering, and training** from these services. A number of participants also considered the place as a space for participating in extra-curricular activities and a place to meet people. It seemed that their idea about the service is rather vague and **they were not adequately aware of the other opportunities this service could provide**. Moreover, the respondents from small towns were less aware of their existence and were not clear about what the services offer.

The young people who were aware of the service came to know about it mostly from youth houses, youth centres, and youth workers. The next most mentioned source was friends and occasionally some online sources. They mentioned it was seldom discussed at school, neither was it recommended by their parents. While they knew it is a centre to help and guide young people, they also agreed that the service is not visible enough to them. When asked **how** to make it more visible, the majority of young people suggested **strong**

affiliation with schools. This indicates that cognitive authorities need some interconnection to build trust and confidence. It means, even though youth information and counselling services are perceived to be a reliable source of information by the youth, in order to raise awareness among the majority of them, affiliation with other possible cognitive authorities could be effective in making the youth aware, and encourage them to use the service. Youth information services when recommended by teachers could be more effective, since the students apparently trust the experience and expertise of the teachers. It is worth checking with the national youth information service in your country to see whether a strong affiliation with the formal education sector is possible or pertinent.

They also gave a great deal of importance to **social media presence.** The young people recommended using Facebook and Instagram for stronger social media presence, and expected it to be easily accessible when searching Google, and demanded **QR codes** when designing promotional materials. However, according to the current trend, the organic reach (the number of people who have seen a post once via unpaid distribution) through social media is declining. Facebook's organic reach in recent times has dropped to 6% (Manson, M., 2014). Under these circumstances, a strong object oriented social media strategy is necessary for external communication, wider awareness, and target group engagement. To set up a sound social media strategy, it is important to understand what social media to use, who are the target group, what content is best suited for them, and how to engage them in those contents and post. Some rudimentary initiatives are mentioned here to build a longer term social media strategy to reach the youth organically:

1. Verified social media profile/page
2. Enhance followers and stay on top of their news feeds
3. More audiovisual contents
4. Going Live
5. Multiple type of post formats
6. Online contest and engagements
7. Balanced number of posts
8. Quality over Quantity
9. Find the best time to post
10. Atomised communication- circulating the most relevant part of communication in multiple media.

Moreover, by utilising information already available via Facebook's API, key behavioural information can be extracted. For example:

- When a user becomes a fan of a page, and often, why they did so.
- What content they have liked, commented on, or shared.
- When they last engaged with the page's content.
- Their age, interests, and assorted other profile information.

Therefore, parallel to a social media strategy, **constant monitoring** of the trends within the target group is necessary. As part of the social media strategy, the youth workers and the service providers must get **adequate social and digital media training** to use the digital tools and software to reach out to the youth.

Apart from the media of engagement, the format of the content was also found decisive. It was clear that the young people are less interested in text-based communication and thus recommended **YouTube channels and promotional videos online**. For offline awareness enhancement, they preferred activities and engagements, local influencers, and youth ambassadors to spread news among young people.

MAIN FINDINGS	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS	REMARKS
<p>Inadequate awareness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affiliation with schools, vocational institutions, and other types of formal educational institutions • Engaging parents and making them aware of the service and its importance • Go where young people are and promote the service through peer engagements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In some cultures, recommendations from parents are often disregarded by young people • In some countries affiliations with the formal education sector are not always easy or pertinent
<p>Preference in Online sources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tailored social media strategy to reach more young people and keep them engaged <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Verified social media profile/page 2. Enhance followers and stay on top of their news feeds 3. More audiovisual contents 4. Going Live 5. Multiple type of post formats 6. Online contest and engagements 7. Balanced number of posts 8. Quality over Quantity 9. Find the best time to post 10. Atomised communication- circulating the most relevant part of communication in multiple media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people living outside urban areas, in small towns and villages could benefit from the Internet, engagement with parents and schools can be effective
<p>Awareness through engagements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovative programmes to engage the young people in volunteering/ training/ workshops • Arranging events at places frequented by the youth could be effective • Employing/ Deploying local influencers/ peers/role models/local youth workers • The presence of YIC must appear 'associated' with youth's life 	

2

perceived usefulness

In this study, the construct Perceived Usefulness discussed **how useful the young population think the youth information and counselling service is for them**. The group discussed how the service is applicable for them and how they associate the information and counselling service with their everyday life. This section tried to understand on what occasion the young people turn to the youth information services, how they usually collect information about important topics, and how the youth information services could play a more important role in their lives by providing quality information over other sources. The questions that guided this section were:

- When (on which occasions) do you use the YIC Centre? (If you don't use it, why do you think it is not useful?)
- How do you collect more serious information? (about Education, Employment, Investment, Entrepreneurship, Global issues and Voluntary work, etc.)
- Why would you choose YIC services over other channels of information?
- What is the role YIC could play in your life?

From the discussion, it appeared that the young people who are aware about the youth information and counselling service tend to use it mostly for getting information regarding possible **employment**. In some cases, it was seen that the youth centres and youth houses are used for the same purpose, but the overall utility of the service is unclear to these groups. The types of employment are usually: traineeships, student jobs, and summer jobs. Additionally, young people use the youth centres to look for leisure activities, and events. Some other areas of interests were **education, schooling, accommodation, loans and financial support, law**. Only a few young people mentioned different reasons for seeking help and counselling from the youth information and counselling services. These concerned pregnancy, depression, gaining clarification on rumours, and intimate topics which they cannot share with family or friends.

Next, they were asked about their general practices of collecting information about serious topic areas that are associated with their day-to-day personal life, career and life goals, and information regarding different social, political, and global development. As suspected, almost all of the participants preferred **Internet sources** as the primary source of collecting information. In addition to that, since the young people need some cognitive authority, they mentioned **school and youth centres**. However, generally they would collect information by chatting with friends followed by a quick check on a search engine. In many cases, the first reference point is **Google**. For less serious information needs, they would contact friends, family, and relatives. For comparatively

more serious issues, the young people prefer going to reliable and designated websites, which they consider authentic, messaging or calling the organisations. In some cases, young people showed reservation talking to their teachers about more serious issues, although for less serious issues they are considered a reliable source. What remained striking was that **none of the young people mentioned books as a source of information or visiting the library, or even digital libraries, for information.**

To reply to the question why the young people would be interested in collecting information from the youth information and counselling services, they showed the need for **reliable information that comes from a body that is knowledgeable and dependable.** The concerns young people have while using such services are: **reliability, openness, expertise, youth-focused, and empathy towards them.** However, it was mentioned if the issue is something general such as law, these centres can be reliable and helpful, but **for more intimate and personal topics, blogs and forums are preferred since they ensure a higher level of privacy.** There was a concern about privacy and a lower trust in professionals.

On the other hand, the respondents believe that youth information and counselling services have a role to play in assisting them in their lives, regarding professional career and job hunting, training and studies, and providing a platform for volunteering and extracurricular activities. In addition, some of the young people expect the service to be a direct reference point for validating information, advice, and sentimental support regarding depression, social isolation, and other life crises, but the majority see the service more for professional opportunities and activities.

MAIN FINDINGS	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Lack of knowledge about the overall service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The young people see this service as an agency that mostly helps with information regarding studies and jobs and occasionally leisure and training. It is necessary that young people are educated about different services that these agencies provide in some cases (e.g. psychological support and counselling, health, legal advice, etc.)
Youth information practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When there is an information need, the youth will first look it up on Google and then consult with friends, therefore providing young people with the necessary competencies to search for reliable information and enhancing their media and information literacy is necessary. Enhancing peer-to-peer youth information is also an interesting approach to increase the service outreach. For more intimate areas (e.g. sexual health), instead of directing them to teachers, initiating a virtual forum could be very helpful.
Young people's expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people need cognitive authority, youth information services are positioned as such Along with awareness, empathy and openness are necessary to gain the trust of young people since they value confidentiality

3 access

In this section, **the level of ease in accessing the service, both physical and virtual**, was discussed. Along with a clear awareness and perceived usefulness, having easy access from multiple platforms is necessary for young people. The discussion involved questions such as:

- How do you use the service of YIC Centre? (Internet/Mobile/Visit YIC) (If you don't use it, tell us how difficulty in accessing the service led to non-use)
- Is reaching or accessing the service easy?
- What could be a better way of accessing the service? (Virtual/Physical)
- How do you think young people living far from these facilities could be included?

The young respondents clarified that when they use the youth information and counselling service, they **prefer accessing the service mostly through the Internet, usually via their mobile phone**. While using social networks and the Internet is popular, **face-to-face** contact is also equally important to them. However, the young population living outside urban areas suffer from the distance of the youth information centres, and thus would be discouraged to use the service.

When asked about the ease of access to the service and centres, there was a mixed reaction among the participants. While the frequent users testified it was easy to access, non-users and youth coming from suburban or rural areas complained it was not particularly easy. Most complained about the location of the centres while the others mentioned the low visibility and awareness among young people. Seemingly alternative channels of accessing the service were not always properly implemented or have not gained enough popularity. According to some answers, the youth centres which provide telephone access failed to satisfy young people with quick solutions to their questions.

Along with these concerns, the group suggested **more virtual access points** for the service. Since young people are predominantly looking for information on the Internet via Google, they showed it is critical to find youth information content via Google search. What is more, the respondents think a strong and engaging presence on social media platforms such as **Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube is important for both promotion and communication via instant messaging**. In addition, they also proposed a more **interactive webpage** which will allow them to seek information through an easy search process. Regarding information areas that require discussion, the young people seemed to prefer virtual forums because of ease of access and

confidentiality. Youth information and counselling services can initiate such a platform for knowledge sharing regarding various sensitive information areas. In this discussion, some preferred going directly to the centre and expressed their preference for **personal information-seeking practices**. The respondents living in larger cities where the centres are closer to them choose to visit physically, the young people living far from the centres are less likely to. It was therefore observed that some young people are reluctant to engage in personal contact, whereas others prefer it. Thus, texting and autonomous information collection over phone calls, virtual forums and face-to-face contact are all necessary for youth information services, to meet the **different needs and preferences of young people**.

When asked how to reach out to the young people living outside the urban areas and far from the youth centres, the group mostly suggested **virtual access points**. Creating a network for all of the youth information services in a given area on an existing social media platform could ensure that the services keep in contact with one another, and reach out to young people across their region. Additionally, mobile and video calls were suggested. Affiliation with schools and government offices could also be effective since the young people could then have access to the service more easily.

MAIN FINDINGS	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
<p>Not enough alternative access points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsive and interactive webpages for mobile devices • Search Engine Optimisation • Social Media YIC Networking strategy to ensure external communication and interaction with followers • Virtual discussion forums • Video calls
<p>Physical contact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affiliation with schools and government agencies to distribute YIC materials • Youth Ambassadors from schools to serve as a touch point in suburban and rural areas (peer-to-peer youth information) • Decentralisation of information areas. Making relevant information available for youth according to the places they visit both physically and virtually

4

performance expectancy

In the section of performance expectancy, the group mainly discussed **how the youth information structure and its services could be improved to enhance the outreach and usage of the service among the young population**. The aim was to understand how young people think information should be presented for consumption. The respondents discussed their own choices of seeking and collecting information, elaborating on their format and channels of choice and their own ways of assessing collected information and various information sources. The questions were:

- How do you want to collect information regarding important matters?
- How efficient should the process of seeking information be? (Physical/Virtual)
- How should information be made available for consumption? (Physical/Virtual)
- Where should information be presented online? (Social Media/Website/App/ Blog/Online Newspaper)
- In what format would receiving information be easier? (Text, Audio, Video)
- On what channel would receiving information be easier? (App, Web, YIC Centers)
- Which online sources could be more authentic than others?

From the replies of the young respondents, it was clear that the type of information sought often determined the source. When the information is regarding studies, jobs, and other similar areas, which might also require discussion, human interaction and face-to-face contact was considered appropriate. On the other hand, information relating to something less intense (i.e. leisure activities) could be discussed with friends either face-to-face or often via instant messaging platforms such as WhatsApp. Information that is important and relating to intimate personal matters is often looked up on the Internet, and this group was mostly **reluctant to use phone calls** and considered them as awkward and the last option of communication. Many young people find social networks to be the most direct and easiest way to collect information. This tendency was important and needs attention because **young people seem to depend more on the Internet when it comes to important information that they are not comfortable sharing with others**. The role of stigma and anxiety often determines the information-seeking process. The young people were quite confident about their search skills, and assessing the authenticity of websites. A slightly unusual point was that almost no one mentioned family members or relatives as an information source.

To describe efficiency in information-seeking and collecting, the young people stressed that **speed and ease** are the most important factors. The sources or channels that provide information quickly and easily will be more

popular. Thus, we observed little mention of library sources because the process of collecting information from a library can be considerably long and complex. Moreover, the group also considered those with disabilities - the information collecting process has to be easy for all. This indicates the need for an **easy search option on the webpage, quick chat or instant messaging communication with the service**, and other similar possibilities.

When asked about the format in which consuming information is easier, the young people agreed **audiovisual** content is the easiest for them to consume. Young people today prefer videos, not for entertainment only, but to learn new skills, about new developments, and about different complex topics. Therefore, to inform the youth, more **visual and audiovisual content** is effective over text-based materials. The group also added that text is more appropriate for queries, while videos/images are more appropriate for learning. To consume such materials, they have to be available on relevant channels such as social networks, and the YIC webpages. The young participants agreed it would be much simpler for them to collect information from social networks and mobile applications because it is quick and easy. Quite a few respondents stressed the importance of a **YouTube channel for YIC and podcasts** to communicate with young people.

Finally, the group was asked how they determine the reliability of a webpage. They stressed the importance of attractiveness, trustable institutional webpages that are regularly updated and promoted by public/government institutions or organisations that are apparently reliable. **Young people usually assess authenticity by looks, recognition, and word of mouth** (especially peers) although some respondents doubt the authenticity of large corporate websites and their tendency to manipulate the user.

MAIN FINDINGS	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS	REMARKS
Sensitive information areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide reliable websites and a chatting option (both Instant Messaging with a professional and automated chatbots) • Virtual forums for sensitive issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instant messaging involving a professional may not be available at all times.
Mobile application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mobile application or web-based App for accessing the service • Accessibility for disabled youth both in virtual and physical form 	
Content/ Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational/promotional videos disseminated on relevant platforms (Social Media) • Spreading the content at appropriate touch points- youth clubs/schools • Podcast for educational content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth-friendly material co-produced by young people in cooperation with youth information providers could ensure a wider outreach • Cooperating with young people to spread the content via different media and forms would also increase the outreach

5 information need fulfilment

In this section, the discussion included **the most relevant information areas for young people, what other information topics they would like to have at youth information and counselling services, how they want to collect information from the service and what challenges they face in the process.** The questions were:

- In what way do you use/ would like to use the YIC services (e.g. going there physically/calling/using website/emailing)
- What are the topics of information that matter most to you?
- What other information areas do you wish YIC centers would address?
- What challenges do you face when searching for information and how could YIC help?

The group showed two primary ways they would like to collect necessary information from the youth information services. The participants who live near the youth information centres preferred going there directly to collect information. For the rest, it was primarily **social media and websites**. The popular choices were **Instant Messaging** on the webpage or mobile applications/web-based apps. It seems young people today are more interested in making text-based queries than interacting face-to-face while looking for information that demands a quick response. On the other hand, when it comes to information needs that require longer interaction, human sources seem to be preferred.

Whether a young person will use a particular source of information is determined by how well the source matches the topics relevant to their needs. The groups agreed that information regarding their primary concerns such as studies, summer jobs, career planning, training, and other development and volunteering are readily available in youth information and counselling services. However, there are some intimate information areas that may not always be in the desired format and the social dogmatism associated with such information areas can be a barrier to collecting reliable information from youth information and counselling services. They therefore often turn to **Google** where they may encounter incomplete or misleading information. It appears that the social dogmatism of such areas creates a barrier in using formal information services, where they need to interact with a stranger. This encourages them to look for this information from unverified sources, which indicates that these sensitive information areas are relevant and youth information services must have information regarding these matters.

Additionally, to respond to the hesitance of the youth, the channel of communication must be revisited and improved so they feel comfortable talking with youth workers. An instant messaging service could be introduced where youth could chat anonymously. Information regarding **mental health, abuse awareness, cyber bullying, social and environmental issues, nutrition and sexuality should be covered and made available to the youth so they can collect and use such information without the discomfort of stigma**. While technological efforts are necessary to establish an anonymous mode of communication with the youth information workers, the service providers themselves must be equipped with adequate expertise in these areas and a necessary level of empathy.

It was also observed that there is a **seasonal pattern** in the demand of different information areas. According to the time of the year, the information demands may vary. For example, during summer, there is usually a higher demand for leisure activities, while at the end of the year or during graduation, information related to jobs or higher education can be more sought after. Information areas of interest can vary according to the season, and studying this pattern can be very beneficial for the youth information and counselling service and young people. By knowing the possible information demand of its target group, it can respond better to their information needs.

The last section of the discussion was about the **challenges** young people face while collecting information from their usual sources. Paradoxically, the young participants all agreed that the information they collect is mostly from online sources and can often be difficult to comprehend. It is considerably difficult for them to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and it is tricky to find the right answers using the Internet. Clearly the young population today suffers from **information overload** due to the oversupply of information. It leaves young people puzzled and is difficult for them to validate the collected information. Under such circumstances, young people believe they need an authority who would provide reliable information easily, or would direct them to reliable sources and at the same time contribute to enhance their **information and media literacy skills** so they could assess and validate information by themselves.

MAIN FINDINGS	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS	REMARKS
New information areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health • Abuse, harassment, cyber bullying, stigma, anxiety • Social and political issues • Global warming and other environmental issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seasonality of information needs to be monitored • Engagement activities should be planned according to the information need trends • Youth information services need to change the way they are perceived so young people see them as a source for information on sensitive issues
Contacting YIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Along with physical access, there should be some indirect virtual ways to contact the youth information and counselling service • Via Instant Messaging/ Mobile applications 	
Media and Information literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Materials (both text and videos) have to be developed with concrete media and information literacy instructions • Build up capacity on how to assess authenticity of news/websites/information in general • Identify reliable sources for different topic areas 	

6 effort expectancy

In this section, the group discussed the **level of effort they are willing to give in order to use the youth information and counselling service**. The group suggested their choices for easier means of reaching, searching and collecting information from the youth information and counselling service.

- How do you think the information providing service could be easier, more efficient and entertaining? (E.g. instead of a website, an app would be easier to follow and use)
- How could reaching and collecting information be easier/ quicker?
- How could searching information through YIC centres be more fun? (Website layout/App Design/ YIC Centers)

The respondents suggested two ways of collecting information according to their choices. One is an **interactive webpage**, possibly with a **search option** to find their topic area of interest. The next one was a web-based application that is accessible from everywhere. In addition, having a touch point at schools was reiterated by many of the participants. Seasonal events and activities could also be arranged to address contemporary information topics (such as global warming). Such events related to emerging topics and social debates could disseminate important information to young people and at the same time attract them to use the service. Young people learn better through fun engagements.

MAIN FINDINGS	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS	REMARKS
Mobile Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A web-based application for Android/iOS with easy communication options 	
Webpage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactive website and content • Instant Messaging option for contacting the youth workers • Search option/ Categorisation of information areas 	
More branches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instead of branches, temporary kiosks, stands or info-mobile trucks in youth-frequented spots could be effective for marginal regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralising information areas. Instead of providing information regarding all possible topics just at the youth information centres, different activity areas and partners could be used to disseminate information related to those activities. Youth information centres could channel out some information in those relevant areas. For example: youth information services could be promoted at sport-halls or gyms, higher education websites, festivals, etc.

7 tangibles

In this section, the respondents were asked about **what physical equipment or different arrangements could be included in the youth information and counselling service to make the entire experience of usage efficient, pleasant, and fun**. This included both physical resources, as well as human resources, which could be added or improved in the service delivery. The questions asked to the group were:

- What could be added to the YIC centres to make the service delivery efficient, pleasant, and fun?
- What equipment do you think the centres should have?
- How do you want the information workers to respond to your queries (through f2f counselling, audio/video calls/chat)
- What could youth information workers improve?

In response to the abovementioned questions, the group suggested a few ideas for the physical appearance of youth information and counselling services. They think the youth information centres are a bit hidden and must have a more **vibrant look**, or at least enough signs outside so young people notice them. Additionally, they suggested a **youth-friendly interior**, and involving more young people in the provision of the service and in the content and format design, which can help ensure that it is youth-friendly. At least some face-to-face counselling could be effective, especially regarding topics such as nutrition and psychological support, which they would like to see included in the service. The group also showed interest in having small workshops and briefing in the centres on related contemporary topics, or events to promote youth information services. The group thought such activities would create a positive word of mouth, which could reach more young people effectively. They expect the place to be **up-to-date with contemporary trends with free Internet**, and **multiple contact points** to use the service.

It was necessary for the group to imagine the place associated with their age. Being from the digital age, they expect the centre to be equipped with modern design and basic digital devices and Internet connection. Moreover, they expect the place to look less institutional, rather an open and welcoming place for young people, with **study/working area, sofas, and exhibitions**.

The young people primarily expect that the youth information workers in the centre will be knowledgeable so that they can help them find relevant information. In addition, it is imperative that the youth information workers practice empathy and assurance while dealing with vulnerable youth with intimate and personal information

needs. They think **empathy is instrumental in helping the user build confidence in the service**. More youth information workers, youth ambassadors, and trainees could be an easy yet effective way to reach out to more young people.

MAIN FINDINGS	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Signboards for the centre to make them more visible, especially from the outside• Youth-friendly environments that look less institutional
Tangible resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More digital devices, where required or appropriate• WiFi connection for users• A counselling facility• Seminar room/ place to arrange small briefings
Human resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More youth information workers/ youth ambassadors and strong involvement of peers• Regular training and re-training of the youth information workers and volunteers

8 facilitating conditions

In the section of facilitating conditions, we asked about **the internal and external features that could encourage the youth to use the service**. The internal drivers were their own perceived conviction about the service and relevant areas of information they think the youth information service covers. The external drivers were additional services and other practical arrangements for easier contact. The questions were:

- How confident are you in getting help from YIC? (if not, why?)
- In which areas do you need more assurance and empathy?
- What other services could be added?
- What other facilities could be added? (better location/opening hours/ more info. Workers/ brochures/ website enhancement)

It was clear that the respondents who had used the service were more confident about the assistance received than those who had not used the service before. The confidence of the group was based on the belief that youth information and counselling services are focused on young people, the service providers are specialised professionals and a reliable source of information covering different areas. **The young people also trust that the service ensures safety, confidentiality, and privacy of the users.** The human approach in the service delivery was often pointed out to be important when longer discussions were necessary. They also described the centre as a place where one can ask any question and be sure to be listened to and get a reply **without judgement**. However, the opposite sentiment regarding the service was also present. Some respondents commented that they lack confidence in the service because they are not familiar with it and they assume the youth information workers may fail to understand their circumstances.

The group reiterated that along with information related to jobs, studies, training, and volunteering, information related to fake news, obscure rumours or hoaxes, stigma, stress, cyber bullying, sexual orientation, nutrition, prevention, disabilities, drugs, emergencies and environmental issues should be more covered.

To facilitate the information collection experience, some other features were suggested by the group. These were: Access to e-libraries, longer opening hours if necessary or opening hours more adapted to the availabilities of young people, and a social network of its own.

MAIN FINDINGS	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS	REMARKS
Features to retain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide young people with a sense of trust • Protect the users' privacy and confidentiality • Practice empathy and advice without judgement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The European Youth Information Charter and the Charter guide could be used as a guideline for these activities: • European Youth Information Charter • European Youth Information Charter Brochure
Other facilitating features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider opening hours and adapt them better to young people's availability. • Library service or affiliation with libraries 	

9

social influence

The aim of this section was to understand **which influencers encourage young people to visit and use youth information and counselling services**. This opens new avenues of possible engagement between the service provider and the influencers.

- How much did the recommendation of your friends/families/peers encourage you to use YIC services?

In the discussion, it was observed that the most common source of recommendation was from youth (information) workers, youth houses, or youth clubs. Apart from such sources, young people were mostly recommended the service by their friends. Another popular way of knowing about the service was the different extracurricular events and activities that the young people had participated in and thus came across the service. While the events and the youth information workers were a systematic approach to make young people aware, there were still many who were never recommended from any source, and almost never from their parents or teachers. This indicates that there is scope to explore new avenues for engagement. **Parents, relatives, friends, schools, and other educational or vocational training institutions work as cognitive authority for young people. Raising awareness among parents and teachers could be an effective way to reach out to a maximum number of young people.**

MAIN FINDINGS

Lack of recommendation

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Involving peer groups and youth multipliers to increase the outreach and visibility of the services through peer-to-peer activities
- Connecting the parents and raising awareness among them
- Connecting the teachers from the school or other educational institutions in recommending students

10

hedonic motivations

Hedonic motivation refers to **the influence of one's pleasure and pain receptors on their willingness to perform an action**. Hedonic motivation as a construct was particularly important in the context of the youth and their intention to use any particular service. Hedonic motivations, along with the other constructs, strongly determine the tendency of a young person to use the youth information and counselling service. If the entire process of information collection is a nice experience to a young person, it is more likely to be reused and recommended to others.

Young people are attracted to experiences that are uplifting and at the same time **produce a sense of inclusion, attention, and purpose**. Since the youth information and counselling service aspires to empower young people and ensure their active participation in society, it is imperative that the attachment with the youth information service shows them the bigger picture. An experience that ensures young people are welcomed, listened to, and involved with adequate attention can enhance a more spontaneous participation and attract others. The questions used in this section were:

- What could be done to make the service more satisfying, fun, pleasant, enjoyable (an app, website, counselling, and the YIC centres)
- How do you think the participation of young people in YIC could be enhanced?
- What could be done to keep the YIC up-to-date with contemporary trends among young people?

In response to the question “what can be added in the youth information and counselling service to make the whole process an experience”, the group came up with many insightful suggestions. While some suggested conventional ideas such as redecorating the interior of the youth centres, making it look trendy, there were quite a few who focused on the core service. The group seemed to be attentive to the fact that the collection of information and the associated counselling must be **welcoming, comforting, and free from any judgment**. It should be quick, easy, and preferably informal. Face-to-face counselling might not always be necessary if there is an active physical or virtual forum of young people. A youth information and counselling service youth network, backed by a mobile application, can be a very effective tool to make the experience easy. It was clear that young people prefer the experience to be quick and easy. At the same time, they are more interested in learning from each other, or from youth workers who are close to their age, since it is easier for them to be comfortable and trust the service provider.

It was also observed that young people are more interested in **peer-to-peer information** seeking and learning. Therefore, involving the youth in the whole process and promoting such involvement on all possible platforms should have a very effective ripple effect. While distributing discounted tickets for different events and appearing in youth-frequented places can be done for short-term engagements, for long-term engagement it is necessary that young people get to know about the bigger objectives of such services and associate themselves with the **core values of the organisation**. A sort of membership in a youth network can thus be useful in attracting other young people. Additionally, **thematic events and activities** involving young people could be considered.

Since activities attract young people, branding the youth information service in places frequented by the youth could indicate the association between the activity and the fact that the local youth information and counselling service has more information on these areas. This approach can increase the knowledge of the youth about the wide variety of information areas the youth information and counselling service covers. Thus, branding the service in multiple touch-points helps the youth associate the service with their regular activities, changes the perception of the youth towards the service, and makes them aware that the youth information service provides information on different areas which are closely related to their everyday life. For example, branding youth information service's sport and health related information at the gym or sports centre, and providing job and other extracurricular related information at schools and training centres will make the users of those places aware that information regarding these activities are also available at the youth information and counselling service.

Since the information landscape and the information needs of young people change very frequently and has a clear seasonality trend, the group eagerly suggested **involving young people more in the process development** and listening to their needs, wants and suggestions. To keep up with the information needs of the youth, the most effective way could be to document their queries and create a **database**. This could reveal the information needs and trends of young people. Additionally, following social media and involving young people as youth ambassadors could help the agencies stay up to date with youth trends.

MAIN FINDINGS	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS	REMARKS
A forum for the young people/users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical/virtual forum could be implemented to encourage knowledge sharing Events arranged involving or led by young people could create a ripple effect to reach out further 	
Awareness through participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involving the youth in co-designing different events and other functions and proper promotion of those activities can help expand the reach of the service 	
Decentralisation of specific information services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capitalising on different activity centres as platforms to enhance awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For example, having job related information at educational institutions
Studying youth information needs and trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using data to mine the queries of the young people throughout the year to understand the diversity of information needs and their seasonality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating such a database can help with answering queries more efficiently Confidentiality and data protection must be ensured in all cases

11

positive features

In this section, the group was asked about **two features they like about the youth information and counselling service**. It is necessary to understand what works in attracting young people to use the service and thus should be retained and improved further. Grouping the replies of the respondents, we see the **young people value human interaction** at the service, **the expertise of the youth workers**, and above all, their intention to focus exclusively on young people and willingness to listen to them. This was resonated across the interview: the young people need a place where they can openly discuss their issues and information concerning them.

Additionally, they mentioned the **trust** towards the service, the safety and privacy it provides regardless of the area of information, and how diverse the information that the service covers is. The clarity of the information provided and helping them find the most relevant information without overwhelming them was also a necessary feature of the service that helps young people manage information overload. As well as this, physical equipment such as WiFi, workspaces, and helpline services were also highly appreciated by the young people.

MAIN FINDINGS

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Human approach

- Related to the training of the youth information workers
- Practice empathy and openness
- Provide clear and complete information, in accordance with the European Youth Information Charter
- Ensure privacy and confidentiality of the users

Other facilities

- Internet connection
- Workspace

12

negative features

In this section, the features that **discouraged young people or hindered their repeated use of the service** were discussed. Since youth information and counselling services do not work in a uniformed manner across all countries, these features were diverse and might not be applicable to all youth information services across Europe. However, it is still worth taking the inputs into consideration when improving the services. Moreover, many of the concerns were made by young people who were not necessarily aware of the service and had not been recommended the service. This can be instrumental in understanding the lack of awareness and shortcomings of the service in expanding its reach.

The group mainly showed concern about **accessing the service**. People who intend to visit the centres often found it a bit far or hidden from view. Moreover, they have very few touch points that could have directed them to the service or at least caught their attention. From the users' point of view, many mentioned that the service is perceived to be quite outdated and thus unattractive to the users. It was commented that due to the lack of awareness and visibility of the service, young people often lack curiosity or interest in using the service.

MAIN FINDINGS	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS	REMARKS
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The distance to the centres could be dealt with by providing more alternative channels to access the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Implementing a new mobile application/web-based appsEasy and interactive websiteStrong social media presence and use of tools like instant messaging platforms
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">There is a lack of interest among young people, better awareness and knowledge about the service could be instrumental in enhancing interest	
System update	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The service delivery has to be modern both by content and channel of disseminationInformation dissemination has to be updated and made available across different platforms and channels, including peer-to-peer activities	

13

proposed addition

In this section, the group was asked which additional features they would add if they were given the chance. This section elicited quite a **few ideas that match the tastes and needs of young people with their own contemporary information-seeking behaviour.**

The group showed interest in arranging events and activities that could involve young people and thus create a strong awareness among them. They all suggested **involving young people in the service design and delivery process.** They believe their own meaningful involvement can work effectively in spreading awareness and interest. They care about their employability, along with schools and other educational institutions, therefore the youth information centres could arrange more **workshops or seminars** on these topics. Additionally, the group showed interest in enhancing the YIC's presence and visibility on social media, and connecting it with **RSS feed.** In terms of information topics, they stressed adding nutritional and sexual health related information, counselling service for abuse, depression, and bullying. They also demanded more accessibility for disabled young people. For easy contact, the respondents proposed to use instant messaging platforms, for instance by having a WhatsApp number so the youth information workers could be reached easily.

MAIN FINDINGS	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Events/Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arrange seminars and workshops on job seeking and interviews
Co-designing service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involving youth as youth information workers in designing and delivering the service
Social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Connecting RSS feed• Enhanced social media presence and visibility
Easy contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having a direct contact protocol (Helpline/ Messaging option)• Using instant messaging platforms such as WhatsApp or Messenger

Conclusion and recommendations

In this section, we synthesise the insights collected from the study through the focus group interviews and try to group them to produce concrete directives for youth information and counselling services. The discussion with the young people drew our focus to **eight major areas** that youth information and counselling service providers should pay more attention to in order to reach out to a maximum number of young people, enhance the service quality, and deliver the service across all possible media that young people are comfortable using for seeking out information. These findings can be compared and contrasted to the eight major recommendations from the 2018 study.²

From the data, we tried to understand how young people meet their information needs in the **digital age**, how to raise their awareness about youth information and counselling services, how they could access youth information and counselling services, what information areas need to be included along with the existing ones, how to collaborate with different social actors and institutions for **sustainable long-term development**, how youth information and counselling services could contribute to the **media and information literacy** of the youth, how to optimise tangible and human resources, and how to monitor youth information-seeking behaviour to keep the service up-to-date and relevant for young people. Working on these avenues and enhancing the involvement of young people themselves in the service design and delivery (peer-to-peer youth information) could create a higher level of awareness among young people. Awareness, coupled with easy and quick access to the service through platforms popular with young people, could build a favourable attitude towards the services and prompt the behavioral intention to use them. The tangible and human resources, and other facilitating conditions, are likely to produce a positive experience towards youth information and counselling services. A favourable disposition towards the service could trigger both repeated use and recommendation to others. Along with this cycle, service providers need to continue monitoring youth information-seeking behaviour. Staying updated about information trends, the changes in the digital landscape, the services can style the service design to match the taste and needs of young people. Additionally, they must also use every possibility to contribute to enhancing media and information literacy skills. The recommendations for each of the abovementioned areas are the following:

² Future youth information and counselling: Building on information needs and trends (pp.42-43)

YOUTH INFORMATION BEHAVIOUR

- When there is an information need, young people will first look it up on Google and then consult with friends. Being visible on a Google search and among peers is therefore crucial;
- Young people need cognitive authority, youth information services could position themselves as one;
- Youth are concerned about confidentiality and privacy while seeking information, this should be highlighted as an advantage of using youth information services.

AWARENESS

- Young people see this service as an agency that mostly helps with information regarding studies and jobs and occasionally leisure and training. It is necessary that young people are aware of the different services provided (e.g. psychological support and counselling, health, relationships, etc.);
- There is a lack of awareness among young people, better awareness and knowledge about the service could be instrumental in enhancing interest and the use of the service;
- The presence of youth information services must appear 'associated' with young people's lives;
- Educational/promotional videos could be disseminated on relevant platforms (social media);
- Content should be available at appropriate touch points - youth clubs/schools;
- Visibility has to be enhanced where young people are;
- Adequate online presence on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube is necessary;
- More images and audiovisual content over text-based content;
- Plan to reach young people living outside urban areas, in small towns, villages and rural areas;
- Capitalise on different activity centres as platforms to enhance awareness;

ACCESS

- Branding of the information services according to topic areas. For example, having job-related information at educational institutions;
- Connecting to RSS feed;
- Search Engine Optimisation;
- Social Media youth information service networking;
- Virtual discussion forums;
- Video calls;
- Easy and interactive website;
- A direct helpline number;
- Instead of branches, temporary kiosks or info-mobile trucks in youth-frequented spots could be effective for rural areas or marginal regions;
- A mobile application for accessing the service;
- Accessibility for disabled young people both in virtual and physical form;
- Queries via chat box and bots on the website/ mobile application for contacting youth workers;
- Responsive and interactive webpages for mobile devices;
- Search option/ Categorisation of information areas on website and applications; and
- Information dissemination has to be updated and made available across different platforms.

INFORMATION AREAS

- For more intimate areas, initiating a virtual forum could be very helpful;
- Abuse, harassment, cyberbullying, stigma, anxiety;
- Nutrition and health;
- Mental health;
- Social and political issues;
- Global warming and other environmental issues; and
- Seasonality of information needs to be monitored.

INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION

- Affiliation with schools, vocational institutions, and other types of educational institutions;
- Collaboration with government agencies to distribute YIC materials;
- Affiliation with hospitals/doctors;
- Collaboration with libraries;
- Youth Ambassadors from schools to serve as a touch point and to support the outreach in suburban and rural areas;
- Making the teachers aware of the service so they can recommend it to their students; and
- Engaging parents and making them aware of the service and its importance. In the absence of the Internet, engagement with parents and schools can be effective.

ENGAGEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

- Arranging seminars and workshops on job-seeking and job interviews;
- Innovative programmes to engage young people in volunteering/ training/workshops;
- Arranging events and presence at places frequented by young people;
- Enhancing peer-to-peer youth information to increase the service outreach;
- Engaging local influencers/local youth workers;
- Involving young people in co-designing different services, events and other functions and proper promotion of those activities can help expand the reach of the service; and
- Planning engagement activities according to information needs and trends.

TANGIBLE RESOURCES

- More digital devices, where required or appropriate;
- WiFi connection for users;
- A counselling facility;
- Seminar room/ place to arrange small briefings;
- Longer or more adapted opening hours if necessary; and
- Library/workspace.

HUMAN RESOURCES

- More youth workers/ youth ambassadors;
- Training and retraining of for youth information workers;
- Practicing empathy and openness and advice without judgment;
- Providing clear and complete information;
- Ensuring privacy and confidentiality of the users; and
- Providing young people with a sense of trust.

STUDYING YOUTH INFORMATION NEEDS & TRENDS & CO-DESIGNING SERVICE

- Involving youth in designing the services (co-design);
- Using data to mine young people's queries across the year to understand diverse information needs and seasonality; and
- Creating such a database can help answer queries more efficiently.

Discussion

Involving young people in the service design, delivery and evaluation must be part of the service planning culture and essence.

Synopsising the recommendations from the section above, we divide the areas of concerns into **7 major avenues**. These are: Awareness and communication, Access, Areas of information, Activities and collaboration, Media and information literacy, Resources, and Study of young people's information-seeking behaviour. The segregation in this way can help YICs to pinpoint different approaches and understand how one area influences another.

Since the data says young people have limited awareness of youth information and counselling services, and a general disinterest in using it, all the recommended actions have to be implemented to raise awareness among young people and to create a positive attitude which could trigger the behavioural intension to use the service. To use the service, young people are likely to follow their contemporary trend of seeking information. Thus, it is imperative that youth information and counselling services possess enough **physical and virtual access points**. Judging from young people's contemporary information-seeking behaviour, it is necessary to position the service as a quick and easy solution to their information problems and to the information overload. Hence, it will be instrumental to have **mobile applications/web-based apps, interactive webpages with chatting options**, and other virtual access points. It will not only help reaching urban youth, but also youth who live in rural areas where physical youth information services are rarely available.

After accessing the service, it is of course necessary that the young people find what the service offers to be relevant. This is where **relevant information areas** play a vital role. The services have to stay up-to-date about young people's areas of interest. While regular information areas such as studies, jobs and training are likely to stay relevant, other information areas emerge as crucial too. Information related to anxiety, stress, cyberbullying, and other areas are gaining importance for young people, yet many do not know about the support they could receive from youth information services in these areas. Therefore, including these information areas in the counselling service, using the right formats to address these topics, and allowing young people to know about such support is necessary.

To position youth information and counselling services as a sustainable information support system for young people, adequate **collaboration** with other major bodies, key stakeholders and young people themselves is

necessary. To raise its relevance and chance of being recommended, engaging with parents, tutors and schools could be effective. These are the cognitive authorities of young people, therefore, recommendations from them may raise awareness among young people. However, youth are a diverse group and so are the cultures that they belong to, so this may not be the case across the board. Additionally, other government bodies who work for education, health, and wellbeing could be collaborated with for a stronger impact.

Youth information and counselling services must continue to produce content and material related to **media and information literacy**. It might not always be possible for youth information services to directly answer all queries. Therefore, they should be **well-networked** with other complementary services and contribute to educating young people with media and information literacy skills so they can develop the competencies to find information from multiple sources, properly assess and validate them and use them effectively to make informed decisions. While youth information and counselling services could produce their own material and disseminate them to young people through their own webpages and social media channels, or organise seminars and workshops, collaborating with different authorities and experts, youth clubs and schools could additionally have a wider impact and thus include young people currently outside the reach of youth information and counselling services.

While creating awareness, providing access, and having relevant information for young people is imperative, how information queries are received, processed, and replied to is comparatively more important.

After all, youth information and counselling services are focused on young people. In order to serve them well, it is important to know about different internal and external challenges they face when seeking information. While there are “easy” information areas, such as information related to jobs and studies, there are more sensitive areas of information which create a substantial level of hesitation among the majority of young people when seeking out such information. Intimate problems, sexuality, anxiety, and cyberbullying are a few of these areas and young people explicitly expressed that there are few sources for them to collect information about them, therefore they usually turn to a random website or a close friend. Both of these sources have a high possibility of providing misleading information. Thus, youth information workers have to ensure empathy and openness, and answer queries without judgment in an appropriate environment and through adequate channels. Youth information workers also need to be careful about young people’s privacy, confidentiality, and safety while performing their jobs. Therefore, along with other expertise, youth information workers require good listening skills and empathy.

Finally, to keep the cycle of improvement running and to stay relevant and connected to young people as an information support system, it is essential to monitor the information demands of the target group. Using **data mining systems** to develop databases of queries could group the types of queries young people have for youth information and counselling services. This will help the service providers to know their users’ information demands and at the same time the seasonal pattern of information could be traced. Involving young people in the **service design, delivery and evaluation** must be part of the service planning culture and essence. Studying young people’s information-seeking behaviour at regular intervals will produce the necessary knowledge for the services, which will be instrumental in keeping the service modern and capable of serving the contemporary digital age youth effectively.

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