WEBINAR READOUTS
14 December 2022

Digital literacy for practitioners – inspiration from youth work

Introduction on the topic

As the online world has become an integrated part of people's everyday lives, digital literacy is an essential skillset for individuals to navigate the continuous stream of information through traditional and alternative media. The past years have proven that many people are susceptible for radicalisation online. After all, online echo chambers provide a space where people can find likeminded others and feel a sense of belonging. Practitioners in P/CVE therefore have no choice but to also dive into these online dynamics, as they might otherwise miss out on important developments and narratives that impact the people they work with. Despite young people being labelled 'the digital generation', the importance of (radicalisation in) the online world is equally relevant for adults. The youth work sector however, has for several years been invested in tailoring their work to the 'hybrid' reality of young people. In this webinar, RAN has aimed to disseminate some key lessons from youth work to other sectors.

Overview of webinar

The webinar featured two expert speakers, who each gave a presentation of around 30 minutes, followed by a Q&A. The Q&A sessions were moderated by RAN staff and included questions from both the staff and the audience. More details of the presentations are given under the header 'Key topics'.

- **Christian Mogensen (DK)** has shared how gaming relates to the wellbeing of young people, not only negatively, but also with the positive opportunities for socialisation. He explained what happens before young people get entrenched in ideologies and communities and become hard to reach.

- **Frank Sikkink (NL)** has shared several online trends his organisation has dealt with recently. He explained that practitioners have to at least recognise popular online phenomena or narratives, and he shared some dog whistle-symbols ([1]). He also explained that the polarisation online is for a large part driven by 'hobby-haters' who like to provoke and spread fake news.

The webinar was moderated by Feline Deniz and Boy Broeders (RAN Practitioners staff).

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[1] Hidden symbolism or subliminal messages that refer to extremist narratives. Only those who know will recognise it in the public space or online.

Engagement of participants

A total of **56 participants** (excluding RAN Staff and speakers) attended the webinar. They could ask questions through the Q&A function of WebEx. In total, 3 questions were asked with this Q&A function.

Follow-up topics for future RAN activities

- Engaging emotionally with youngsters to create a trustful connection and address their personal issues to create resilience.

- Transferring the online knowledge from youth work to specific other P/CVE sectors.

Key topics

Throughout the webinar, the following important takeaways were stated:

- The problems of likes and followers are not unique to social media, 20 years ago young people also worried about being popular or being seen. Some things are new, which we can see as digital problems, such as cyberbullying, the dark web and online radicalisation, but these are rather 'digital expressions' of 'real world' problems. The 'quote-on-quote' is essential, because the internet is part of all aspects of young people's lives.

- The search for identity has become complex, because online you can find so many different identities, you can be whatever you want, there is no guidance on how you 'should' be. The internet then, makes it easy to find likeminded communities. These communities have to be somewhat extreme to distinct themselves from others. This multitude of optional communities can be good for some, but a challenge for others. How do practitioners know whether these communities are constructive or destructive?

- Reactionary Rollercoaster: Young people who already feel like outsiders in mainstream society can find likeminded people in fringe platforms and antagonize this mainstream together, form a community and turn to reactionary activism.

  - o There is a boom of 'manosphere' communities, who tend to be reactionary and sometimes even proclaim anti-democratic values. These are welcoming and provide (emotional) support to those who need it, but might lure boys and young men into violent movements.

- Online experiences are a great hook to start a conversation with young people. If practitioners understand digital culture, they understand young people. They are not obliged to know everything, but they can engage well by knowing a small part and showing curiosity.

- Quality of screentime is more important than the quantity of screentime. Time spent says barely anything about the wellbeing. Therefore it is more relevant to ask (young) people which apps they used, who they follow, what they saw, rather than judging on the amount of hours spend online.

- Paradoxes of unlimited information and options online:

  - o There are so many ways for people to voice their opinions, which can be good, but not for everybody. This is an increasingly complex world in which they are expected to understand and have opinions about everything.

  - o Basically everything can be learned on the internet nowadays. This makes it possible to potentially have the most gifted generation in the future. However, we only see perfection online, which affects insecurities and mental health.

  - o You can be whoever you want by constructing your identity online. However, this hyper-individualism can make us feel rootless.

European Commission

- Media such as Facebook or Twitter are becoming less relevant, as young people mostly moved on to sources like TikTok, Twitch or Discord. They know how to navigate these, and thus also to avoid extremist servers, and find more constructive online communities. Practitioners should know that there also exist positive online communities on these platforms, and can push their pupils towards these environments.

- As a practitioner, when going against what someone believes in and are socialised into online, you don't only go against ideas or conspiracies theories, but also against their social belonging. Instead, while engaging with young people, focus on what has happened to them that has led them to these extremist environments".

Questions addressed during the Q&A

Q1: How can practitioners stay up-to-date with online developments?
- Appoint one online-expert in your organisation to stay up-to-date and share the information with their colleagues. Also, youth workers have to be online themselves.

- If you can share a frame of reference with young people and have some knowledge about their interests, you can engage with them about how they use their phone. You get the information from the source, and they feel heard because they can teach the professional what they need.

- Signals can be picked up online, but real personal conversations have to be face to face.

Q2: Can the gaming environment be a place for radicalisation; in games that in itself include violence, but also on the platforms they use?
- The games themselves do not have influence, there is enough research about that. However, people with bad intentions might groom youngsters who are online a lot, because they look at vulnerable targets. The platforms in itself however, are also not a driver of radicalisation.

Q3: What can practitioners in other sectors learn from youth work?
- For youngsters, you have to use the platforms teenagers use, if you work with adults who use Facebook for example, you have to also use these platforms.

- Parents and adults also have to learn how echo chambers work, for the children but also for themselves.

Representation from Member States

56 participants from 15 EU Member States attended this event and 11 participants from outside the EU.

Austria **[1]**	Italy **[2]**	**Non-EU**
Belgium **[2]**	Luxembourg **[1]**	Albania **[1]**
Bulgaria **[3]**	The Netherlands **[3]**	Canada **[1]**
Finland **[2]**	Romania **[4]**	Indonesia **[1]**
France **[1]**	Slovakia **[1]**	Mozambique **[1]**
Germany **[2]**	Slovenia **[2]**	United Kingdom **[6]**
Greece **[16]**	Sweden **[4]**	United States **[1]**
Ireland **[1]**		