



future youth information and counselling: building on information needs and trends

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Executive summary

The European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA), and its member organisations, have established a robust network of youth information and counselling services across Europe throughout the last few decades. The aim of youth information and counselling services is to **provide comprehensive and reliable information to young people** according to the principles of the [European Youth Information Charter](#).

To evaluate the service quality and to understand the perception of young people towards youth information and counselling services, ERYICA conducted a survey for service users back in 2013. At the end of 2017, a new survey was conducted across Europe in the framework of the *Erasmus+ KA2 Project Youth.Info: Future Youth Information Toolbox*. This time the aim was to study information behaviour and experiences with youth information and counselling services of both users and non-users of the services. The primary objective of the survey was to analyse the usage pattern of the current user base, and to compare it later with that of the non-users. In the process, the survey strived to reveal the most preferred sources of information, the perceived reliability of sourced information, preferred presentation form and media, and young people's trust in youth information and counselling services. Parallel to the survey, the project conducted a foresight study comprising three different methods to identify possible changes in the youth information landscape in the coming years. The insights obtained from the Scenario Planning, Future Youth Camp, and Delphi Survey provided directions to understand the information behaviour of young people and helped interpret the survey results.

ERYICA, along with eight different project partners and its member organisations, conducted the survey across **18 different countries** in Europe and in **20 different languages**. The target for the survey was **young people aged between 12 and 29**. The survey questionnaire was distributed online and the data was collected from 1 November 2017 until 14 December 2017. Over 6,000 individuals took part in the survey. The respondent group comprised of both users and non-users of the services. The majority of both groups were female, between the ages of 12 and 29, largely living in urban areas, and enrolled in educational institutions.

The survey attempted to study the perceived **youth information service quality, information reliability** and **information evaluation** of the young respondents. The study revealed that information regarding **leisure, health, and education** is easily accessible, while topics such as **entrepreneurship, housing, and employment** are difficult areas to collect reliable information. Young people also demanded more availability of information regarding **education and employment**, and their preferred channels are face-to-face youth information and counselling, online search engines, and social media. A striking contradiction in the answers of the survey indicated that, despite the popularity of the online sources, young people find it difficult to validate online information. A large number of the respondents demanded a source of information that would not require further validation. On the other hand, most of the respondents trusted the reliability of information provided by youth information and counselling services. The users were sufficiently satisfied by the experience and placed enough trust on the services to recommend it to others. Thus, the survey indicated **the importance of youth information and counselling services** in Europe. Hence the necessity of evaluating the current service structure, so that it can be expanded, modified, resourced, and improved for future demand.

The ever-changing landscape of information will become more diversified and complex in the coming years. Along with changes in technology, changes in the information behaviour of digital natives will be equally significant. In this context, it is important to bear in mind that although young people use the Internet on a huge scale to seek information, they do not necessarily possess the critical thinking skills to determine the relevance and veracity of what they find. Indeed, this generation is more likely than previous ones to demand **reliable information** in convenient formats. Therefore, it is highly recommended that youth information and counselling services profile and promote themselves as a reliable information source, and that they count on institutional support to do so.

More availability of information, particularly in the more difficult areas, is necessary, but releasing them on the appropriate channels in the preferred format and media is imperative. Due to the rise of mobile technology, wireless communication, and clouds of nonstop content, more information and services than ever before are accessible anytime and anywhere through online and on mobile applications. Youth information services replicate this trend and must innovate following young people's preferences in order to ensure their visibility and stay connected with their target group. However, despite the staggering attractiveness of online media, **face-to-face youth information and counselling is still the most popular channel to get informed**. Combining these two preferences, youth information and counselling over video calls for example, can in fact open up a new horizon in youth information provision.

Additionally, the survey indicated that young people are not always aware about youth information and counselling services. While improving the service for the current users, in order to ensure sustainable improvement and relevance, it will be **essential for youth information services to expand their visibility and reach**, especially to the less represented groups of society. Innovative peer-to-peer youth information activities could be other effective ways of increasing the outreach among non-users. For instance, the involvement of young multipliers and influencers in youth information activities are not only effective means of increasing the outreach of youth information services, but also a genuine way of empowering young people and ensuring their participation in youth information provision and promotion.

Respect for **democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms** in the post-truth era implies the right of all young people to have access to comprehensive, unbiased, understandable and reliable information on all their questions and needs.

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We have made all possible efforts to reference all those who were involved in the study. We apologise for any omissions and will be pleased to correct them in the next edition.

1. Introduction

The recent advancement in the landscape of information, media, and communication technology has made information sourcing easier than ever. Today, information as and when required is available on multiple devices in diversified forms and media.

However, this has also brought about new challenges; false information and disinformation are all over most of the popular information channels, often deliberately or due to weak sources and investigation. The questionable legitimacy of information has led the young generation into a dilemma in selecting genuine information sources that could be used to make constructive decisions (Koltay 2011; Schellenbarger 2016). The commitment of youth information and counselling services is therefore to ensure access to quality information in order to ensure young people's right to information. Easy access to reliable information helps young people achieve their aspirations, promotes their participation as active members of society (ERYICA 2018), and contributes to the development of a media and information literate generation.

ERYICA and its member organisations have established a strong network of youth information and counselling services across Europe, which is working relentlessly to provide high standard information and counselling services to young people. The information services provided by these outlets require regular monitoring and upgrade so they can keep up with the ever-changing landscape of information, media and technology. This study on youth information therefore strives to understand whether the services are tailored to appeal to young people and describe their experience with youth information services. The finding on their satisfactions, dissatisfactions and comments will be communicated to the respective stakeholders.

This report is founded upon a survey conducted as part of the *Erasmus+ KA2 Project Youth.Info: Future Youth Information Toolbox* in collaboration with different stakeholders and members of the ERYICA network. The project consortium consists of eight partners listed in *table 1*. The survey is based on a similar survey conducted by the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) in 2013 (Krzaklewska and Potočník 2014). The corresponding organisations in this project were:

European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (LU)	Viešoji įstaiga Creativitas (LT)
European Peer Training Organisation (BE)	Jugend- und Familienstiftung des Landes Berlin (DE)
Åbo Akademi University (FI)	Bundesnetzwerk Österreichische Jugendinfos Verein (AT)
Youth Work Ireland (IE)	Labdaros ir paramos fondas Jauniems (LT)
National Youth Council of Latvia (LV)	

Table 1: Participating organisations

2. Background

2.1. What is youth information and counselling?

Enabling greater access to independence. Youth information and counselling seeks to **inform and accompany young people** on the delicate path to adulthood; a transitory and challenging period. In this relatively short time, young people are expected to make a myriad of important decisions that will no doubt be highly influential in their future. These first-time decisions need to be based on **unbiased, complete and comprehensive information**. Often faced with dilemmas, young people turn to various sources of information, one of these being youth information and counselling services.

Generalist youth information and counselling work covers **all topics that interest young people**, and can include a spectrum of activities. The term “youth information and counselling” can encompass a wide range of services and activities, such as informing, counselling, supporting, coaching, training, peer-to-peer, networking, or referral to specialised services. The services can be set in different frameworks and provided by many different actors through various media. The essential aim of youth information and counselling is to engage and empower young people by **guiding them in their autonomous decision-making**. It builds on the fact that it is not possible to make a sound decision without knowing one’s options and alternatives. Youth information aims to guarantee **the right of young people to full and reliable information**, regardless of nationality, sex, religion or social situation. The [European Youth Information Charter](#) establishes the minimum standards for youth information and counselling services according to nine principles: Independent, Accessible, Inclusive, Needs Based, Empowering, Participative, Ethical, Professional and Proactive.

Youth Information aims (among other objectives) to:

- Provide reliable, unbiased, accurate and youth-friendly information;
- Facilitate access to different sources and channels of information;
- Give an overview of options available on topics relevant to young people;
- Help young people to navigate the information overload of modern day society;
- Ensure that young people know their rights, services available and how to access them;
- Support young people in evaluating the available information and its quality;
- Guide young people to find the best options available to them and make their own decisions;
- Offer different channels of communication and dialogue to directly support young people in their search for information and knowledge; and
- Educate in media and information literacy.

Finding your place in society. The aim of youth information and counselling is not only to meet the needs of the general public – its principal objective – but also to anticipate their needs and prepare **preventative measures** accordingly. Some of these needs will relate to key issues in society, notably, physical and mental health, high-risk behaviour, interpersonal relationships, discrimination, citizenship, active participation in society and access to social rights. Only by being adequately informed about one’s rights and duties is it possible to find a place in society and be a well-informed citizen.

Creating an information culture. Today, young people are **inundated with information** and **exposed to a variety of different media**. This access to information is unprecedented and brings with it a previously unseen tendency to also want to create media content, often in a personal and uncontrolled manner. In order to be a conscious citizen, it is important that one looks at this content with a critical eye, evaluating the quality, reliability, strategy and interest of those producing the information (Landy & Le Tellier, 2016). In this context, youth information and counselling services take on a new aim; **to educate young people on media and information literacy**. Youth information services are fully equipped to advise young people on how to research, evaluate and appreciate information and how reliable it is. For this reason, media and information literacy occupies an important part of youth information and counselling work.

2.2. Policy and historical background

The right to information has been recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Youth Information was established as a model in the late 1960s and then extended throughout Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. The European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) was born out of this in 1986, when the Council of Europe brought together a committee of expert professionals in youth information. This committee helped to extend the youth information model into a network of local and national structures, which today form an **integral element of youth work in many countries**. Today, ERYICA is composed of some **36 structures** of youth information and counselling spread across **27 countries**.

In 1990, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe issued a recommendation concerning information and counselling for young people in Europe (Recommendation No. R(90) 7), which gave the issue of information and counselling for young people a significant new importance and provided a first European document to rely on and refer to, not only for politicians and decision-makers, but also for youth information services at all levels (this recommendation was updated in 2010 with Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)8. More recently, Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)7 of the Council of Europe on Young People's Access to Rights also highlights the right to information as a basis for accessing other rights.

In 1993, ERYICA adopted the first version of the **European Youth Information Charter**, which describes the underlying values, principles and working guidelines for the part of youth work that relates to youth information. The Charter was revised and updated in 2004, and more recently in 2018.

Another major development concerning youth information was the **White Paper on youth**. Announced to the European Parliament at the end of 1999 and published by the European Commission in 2001, the White Paper, called "A New Impetus for European Youth", identified **youth information as one of four key priorities**. The EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018 recognised the importance of youth information and counselling services and specifically listed the development of quality standards on youth participation, information and consultation as a separate field of action aimed at ensuring full participation of youth in society (Ivanovskis and Rupkus 2015). More recently, the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 refers to the need of embracing a more systematic approach to quality youth information, outreach and dissemination building on existing networks (European Commission, 2018).

Over time, youth information has had to adapt to changing societies, technological and media and information developments, the difficulties that young people come across as they try to find their place in society, and a growing demand for guidance. Nowadays the sector continues to evolve and adapt. Young people today do not face the same challenges as young people ten or even five years ago, and they do not seek information and guidance in the same way, nor on the same topics. Therefore, it is crucial for youth information and counselling services to be up-to-date and aware of the ways in which young people access information, ensuring that the information and counselling provided corresponds to their needs. It is for this reason that the *Future Youth Information Toolbox* carried out the survey on identifying the needs, trends and relevant topics of young people across Europe, and to contribute to **empowering an autonomous and well-informed generation of young people**.

3. Methodology and Sample

In 2017, the partners of the EU-funded project [Youth.Info: Future Youth Information Toolbox](#), in collaboration with different stakeholders and members of the ERYICA network, conducted a survey to collect data about youth information needs and services.

The aim of the study was to understand the future information needs of young people, the current service quality and satisfaction of the users, and identify improvement areas so youth information and counselling services could be designed according to future demand. Data collection was administered using a questionnaire survey in **20 languages in 18 countries across Europe**. The countries were:

Country	Complete Response	Country	Complete Response
Ireland	86	Luxembourg	107
Lithuania	1048	FYROM	29
Ukraine	97	Finland	56
Spain	391	Croatia	13
Austria	58	Cyprus	13
Latvia	85	Czech Republic	9
Portugal	683	Estonia	8
France	44	Belgium	3
Germany	73	Norway	7

Table 2: Participating countries and respective number of complete responses

Despite the effort of maintaining parity, a few countries generated more replies than others. Due to this, the data is skewed towards Lithuania and Portugal, who generated over half of the replies. Nevertheless, the other countries also collected a substantially large number of responses, which also creates quite a representative sample group. The survey was addressed to both **youth information service users as well as non-users** to get as broad a picture as possible. Therefore, two different sets of questionnaires were used to collect answers from the two different sets of the population. The aim of the questionnaire intended for the users was to understand the current satisfaction level of the youth information service users, while the questionnaire for non-users focused more on the possible service gaps identified by this group. Additionally, questions about media and information literacy¹ were added to the questionnaires to get some insights into the information handling skills of young people today.

¹ "Media and Information Literacy recognises the primary role of information and media in our everyday lives. It lies at the core of freedom of expression and information - since it empowers citizens to understand the functions of media and other information providers, to critically evaluate their content, and to make informed decisions as users and producer of information and media content." UNESCO (2017) [Media and Information Literacy as Composite Concept](#).

The questionnaire was primarily developed in English and later translated into 20 different languages for the 18 participating countries. The platform *SurveyMonkey* was used to build and share the questionnaire and then to collect answers from in the respective languages. While the targeted population of the study remained the young people of the participating countries, to determine a uniformed sample size, a target of at least 50 users and 25 non-users were communicated to the participating countries. The survey was open from 1 November to 14 December 2017. Within this tenure, a total of 6,212 individuals started participating in the survey. 2,809 (45%) responses were completed and taken into consideration for further analysis. Out of these responses, **1,380 were users and 1,429 non-users** were identified. With 49% users and 51% non-users, *Figure 1* shows that overall there has been a sound balance ensured within the respondent group to discuss both sides of the experience.

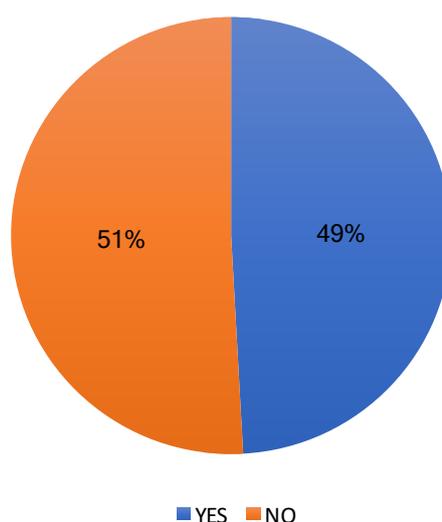


Figure 1: User/Non-User distribution

The users and non-users of the study share an equal portion in terms of participation. The inclusion of the non-users will not only help to understand possible improvement areas, but also compare their replies against the users so potential gaps in youth information and counselling services can be identified.

In order to have a better understanding about the differences between users and non-users, the following phases of the report analyse the two groups separately and compare the findings at the final phase. To maintain a clear comparison between the two groups, the questionnaire was segmented in three larger areas: **Demographics, Quality of youth information and counselling services, and Information reliability and evaluation**. In the following phase, we will first discuss the demographics, usage experience and information behaviour of the users and later the non-users.

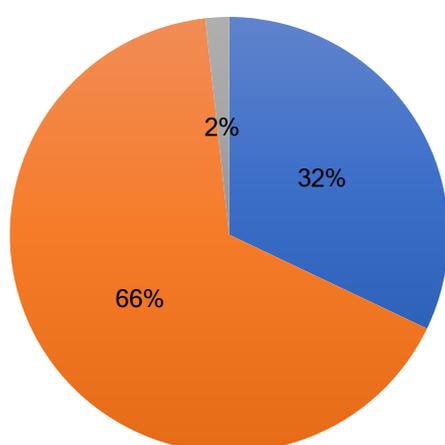
4. Users of Youth Information and Counselling Services

This section discusses the general demographics of the users who participated in the survey. The questionnaire collected information about **the gender, age, educational attainment, residence and current education and life status**.

4.1. Demographics: Users

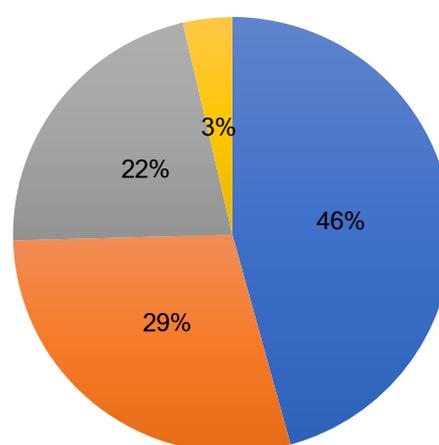
4.1.1. Age and gender of users

From the total of 1,380 users, 443 were male and 913 were female, while 24 chose not to mention their gender. Seemingly **66% of the users that participated and completed the survey were female**, while the male population comprises 32% of the entire sample group of users. The age of the users was also representative and was inclined towards younger individuals; as *Figure 3* portrays, 46% of the respondents were within the age range of 12-18, while around 30% of them were between 19-24 years old. Such a sharp incline towards young people aged below 24 years old is quite self-explanatory, since this is the group of the population that is undergoing important transitions and need information from reliable sources to make informed decisions that will impact their lives (and delete the next sentence). Clearly, the **most common service users** of information and counselling services are the young population below 24 years old.



■ MALE ■ FEMALE ■ Others

Figure 2: Gender of users (%)



■ 12-18 Yrs ■ 19-24 Yrs ■ 25-29 Yrs ■ 30 + Yrs

Figure 3: Age of users (%)

4.1.2. Current residence of users

Along with the age of the users, their area of current residence was collected. To avoid specific addresses, four categories were given as choices, which were: **large city, medium-sized city, small town and rural area or village**. The determinant of the size of a city was its population. Cities with a population over 50,000 were considered large cities, while below that size was considered as medium-sized and cities with a population below 10,000 were considered small towns, and areas with a population below that range were considered as rural areas or villages.

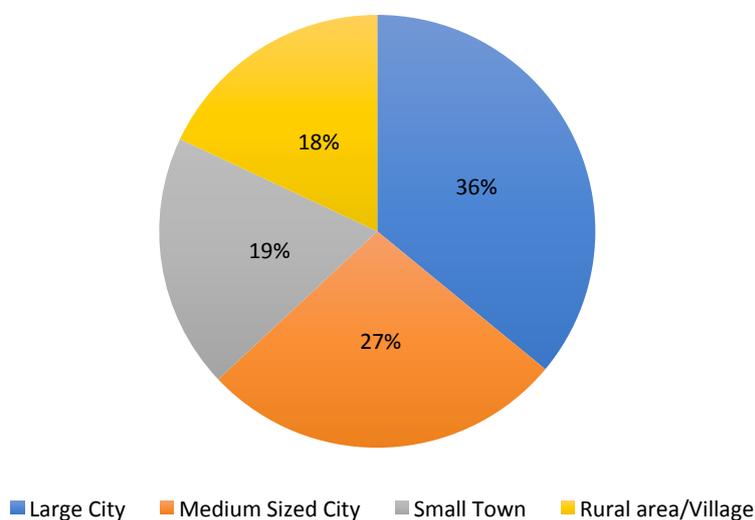


Figure 4: Current residence of the users (%)

We collected information from users coming both from large cities and relatively smaller towns or rural areas. **Over 60% of this young population of users currently live in large or medium-sized cities.** Such a trend is normal as these areas are more densely populated, and at the same time more options for education and possible job opportunities may attract young people from smaller towns and more rural areas. Youth information services located in urban areas are usually more resourced and staffed to reach out to more young people. This indicates that the majority of the users living in the relatively larger cities are aware of the facility and use the services.

4.1.3. Educational attainment of users

The educational attainment of the users was another key attribute that was collected within the survey. The educational parameters ranged from lower primary school to Master's or higher degrees. **Figure 5 shows a majority of the users surveyed have attained middle school education.**

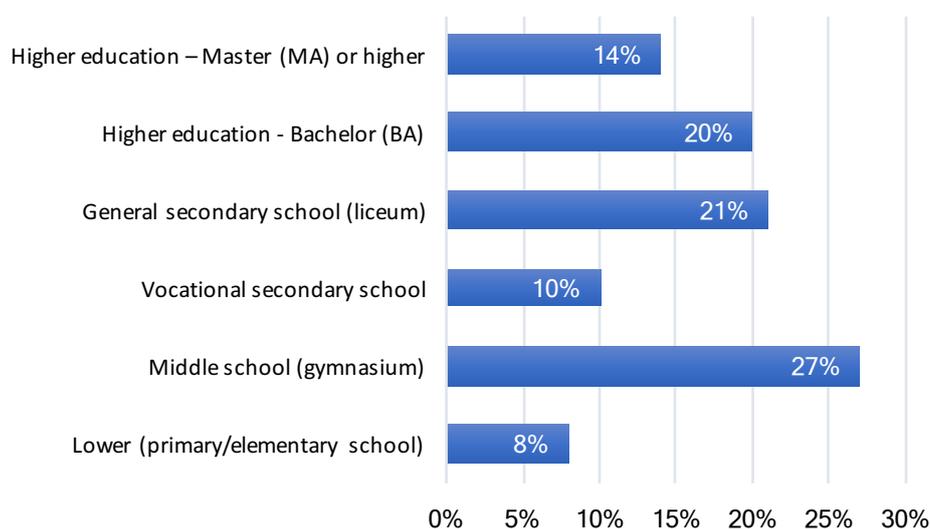


Figure 5: Educational qualifications of the users (%)

Among the 1,380 users, 377 users have finished middle school (gymnasium), which represents the majority of the young users. A total of 933 individuals, comprising 60% of the population, have finished studies ranging from middle school to university level (bachelor). This again corresponds with the previous picture displayed in *Figure 4*. The two least representative subgroups were the vocational and primary education graduates. In the case of primary education, the explanation behind this can be that most respondents have already attained a higher level of education and that the majority of the user group between 12-18 years old are probably closer to 18 than to 12 years old.

As far as vocational education attainment is concerned, in most European countries there are usually a higher number of individuals that complete general secondary education compared to vocational education (Eurostat 2017). The fact that this is also reflected in the survey results underlines the representativeness of the sample group. In addition, the proportion of male graduates from vocational secondary education in most European countries is higher than the number of female graduates. Considering that the majority of the users surveyed are women, this also explains why fewer respondents have attained secondary vocational education.

The oldest amongst the subgroups, i.e. **Master's degree holders, approach youth information services less frequently**, probably because they do not consider themselves as a target group or because they feel more equipped and autonomous to address their information needs.

4.1.4. Current status of users

The last individual demographic characteristic was the life situation (socio-professional status) of the respondents. Among the users group, around half of the population were either studying in schools or university. This corresponds with the last question of educational qualification, which also indicated most of the users were still students. Additionally, **one third of the users of youth information and counselling services have entered the workforce** on a full-time or part-time basis. 8% of the respondents who have used youth information services were unemployed. **Only 2% of the users were not looking for work and/or take care of their households.**

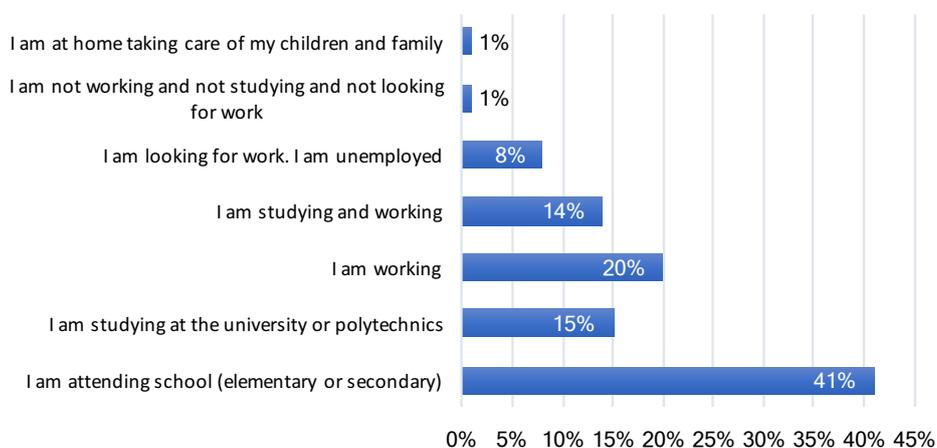


Figure 6: Life situation (socio-professional status) of the users (%)

As predicted, **around 70% of the population is either studying or working and studying**. This reflects the trend observed in the demographics of the users earlier.

Summarising the above-mentioned characteristics of the user population of the survey gives us a young student group, slightly inclined towards a female majority, residing largely in urban areas and attending schools/educational institutions. The concentration of more educational institutions, especially higher education institutions, and more job opportunities in large or medium-sized cities explains the trend of young people residing more in urban areas. To illustrate this, it is important to bear in mind that around 40% of the users surveyed have attained general secondary education or a Bachelor's degree, thus they may find themselves enrolled in a higher level of education, working or about to enter the labour market. As a part of a fast and fluid society, they have adequate awareness about the youth information and counselling services available and they have used them as well. The age, residence, gender, educational qualification and current socio-professional status, collectively, will help us better

understand the trends in the answers regarding service quality and media and information literacy. The connection between the result and the demographics of the respondents will also help to design and structure the future expansion of services and assist more young people with youth information and counselling services.

The next phase will discuss the service experience of the users and their satisfaction level in terms of ease of use and authenticity of information. Reliability of information refers to information that is accurate, complete and trustworthy in the representation of facts. The discourse will progress in connection to the demographics of the users, to establish an explanation.

4.2. Quality of youth information and counselling services: Users perspective

This section analyses the questions about the service experience of the users. The discussion encompasses ease of access, level of assistance, preference about receiving information in different subject areas, and their channels of choice. The analyses will progress in relation to the length and frequency of usage.

4.2.1. Length of usage of youth information and counselling services

When the respondents were asked about the length of usage of youth information and counselling services, **around 55% of the population could recall their engagement with the service for not more than three years.** The second largest subgroup was the one which has been using youth information services between four to six years. At the lower end of the scale were the participants who have been using youth information services for less than one year, while around 150 individuals claimed to use the services for over 10 years.

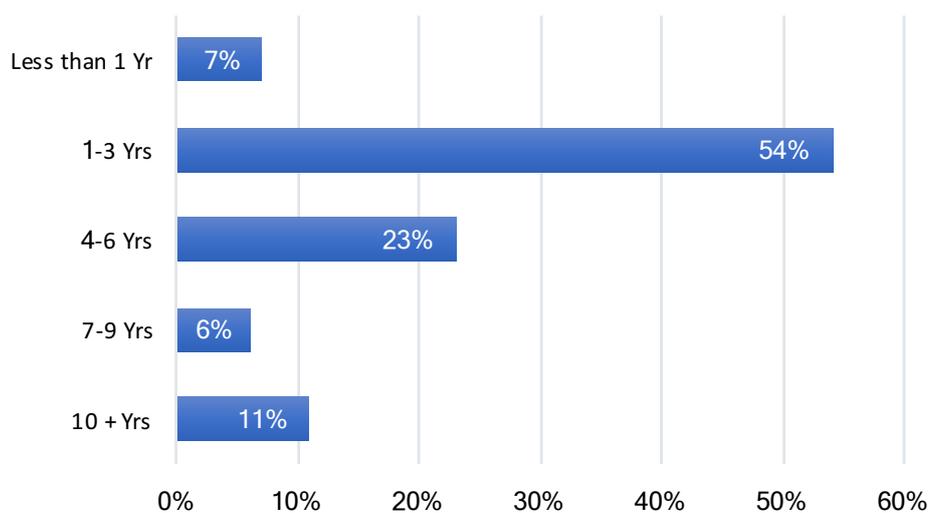


Figure 7: Length of usage of youth information and counselling services (%)

The distribution of usage length of the youth information and counselling services corresponds with the previous demographic attributes of the users. The youngest group of users are aged between 12-18 and this is also the group that has been using youth information services for 1-3 years. In the same manner, the second youngest group have been using the services for 4-6 years. The oldest subgroup is the one that claimed to use the service for over 10 years. This is also the group with the highest level of education. **Respondents who are still attending school are more likely to have used youth information and counselling services for 1-3 years**, while the subgroup that has more advanced education is likely to have used the service for 4-6 years.

4.2.2. Frequency of usage of youth information and counselling services

This question tried to understand how often users use youth information and counselling services. The graph shows that almost 60% of the user group used the service between 1-5 times, while one third of the users have used it between 10-20 times, and 20% of the users used it more than 20 times.

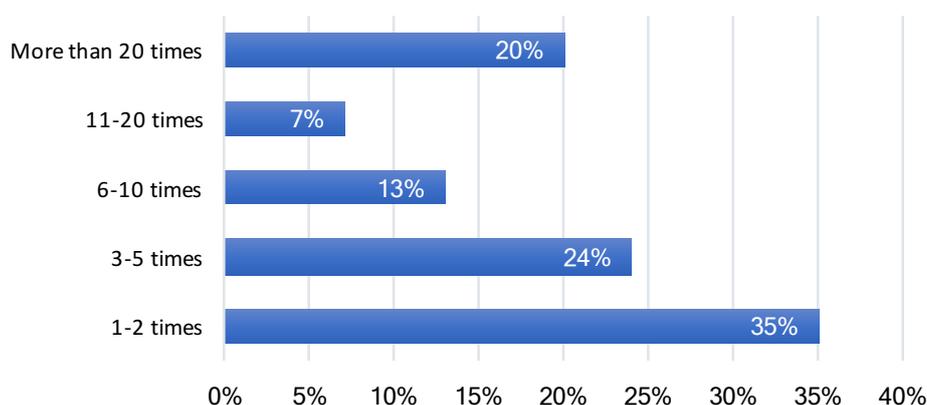


Figure 8: Frequency of usage of youth information and counselling services (%)

The overall picture of the frequency of usage of the service corresponds well with the previous answers. Clearly, the age and length of usage have influenced the frequency. Therefore, it is likely that age and length of usage will be proportional to frequency of use. The youngest group contacted the service between 1 to 2 and 3 to 5 times, while the second oldest group made contact between 6 to 20 times. The oldest group, due to their age and length of usage, contacted the services more often than most. However, overall, the results show that **64% of users have used the service multiple times** (3 times or more than 20 times), and therefore were satisfied with the first experience they had with the service. This result will be more evident when analysing the level of satisfaction of the users later in this report.

4.2.3. Access to information by users and level of difficulty

The experience of the users of youth information and counselling services can be evaluated by assessing the ease of access to different areas of information. In the survey, **11 different areas were identified where information is imperative to make decisions**. In Figure 9 these areas of information were plotted against a 5 points Likert scale and 5 representing the maximum level of ease of access.

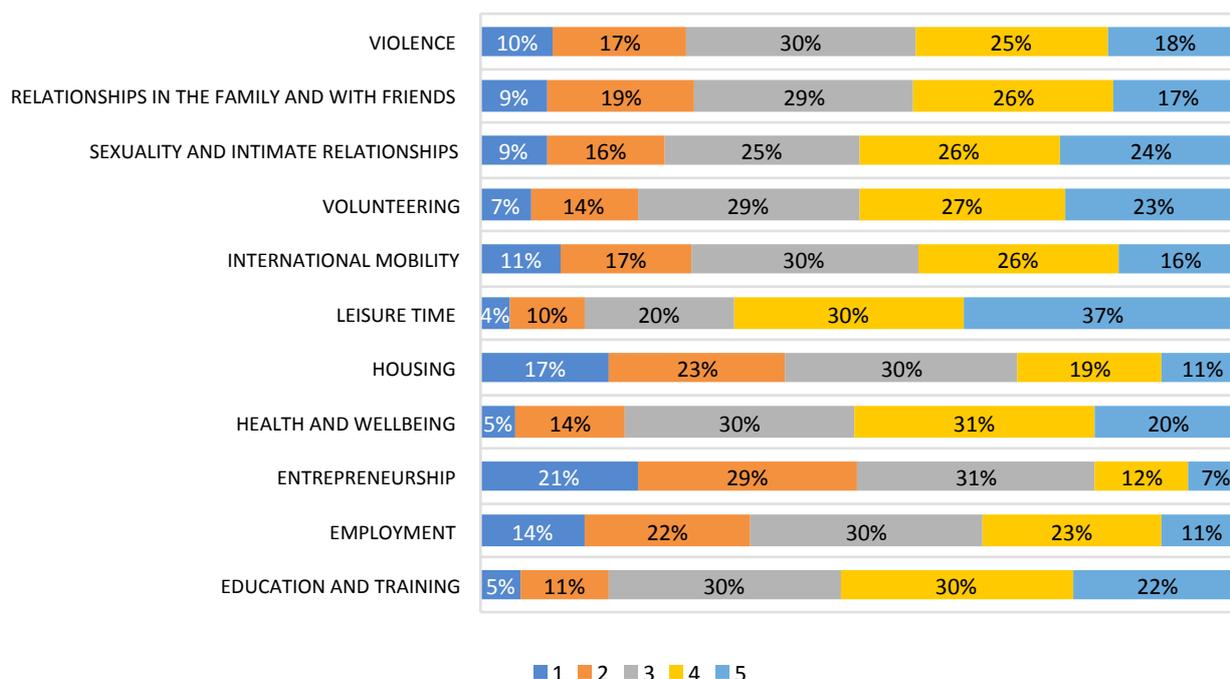


Figure 9: Ease of access to information of users
5 points Likert scale: 1 very difficult - 5 very easy

From the result, it was observed that leisure time, such as recreational activities, is the area where information is available and accessible. After leisure time comes education; the participants believe that information about schools, universities and courses is quite easy to access. On a similar level to education are the areas of sexuality and volunteering. However, access to information in areas such as **housing and entrepreneurship is perceived as quite difficult**, followed by employment. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the majority of the users are young people aged between 12 and 24, in *Figure 10*, we can see that almost 40% of users replied that they do not know or do not have experience in demanding information on entrepreneurship (37%) or housing (38%). Therefore, it could be difficult for them to judge the actual level of ease of access information in these areas. A more qualitative analysis would be needed in order to make a more grounded statement of whether it is a matter of relevance or interest in these particular areas.

In further analysis, it was observed that the perceived ease of access to information is positively correlated with the frequency of visits to youth information and counselling services. The comparison between the frequency of visits and perceived ease of access showed that individuals **who had used the youth information and counselling services more often tend to perceive access to most of the areas of information easier** than those who had used the services less frequently. For example, an individual who claims to have used the youth information service around five times was seen as perceiving access to information regarding education and housing easier than an individual who used the facility less often. Similarly, access to information on employment and housing was easier for young people who had made contact with the services. This trend indicates that the higher the number of contacts made, the higher the perception of ease of access to information.

4.2.4. Assistance of youth information and counselling services

The assessment of the perceived level of ease of access to information in different areas leads to the question: how helpful were the youth information and counselling services in providing adequate assistance to its users in these areas? Maintaining the same parameters and 5 point Likert scale, the participants plotted their perception. From the chart below it can be suggested that youth information and counselling services have been considered quite helpful.

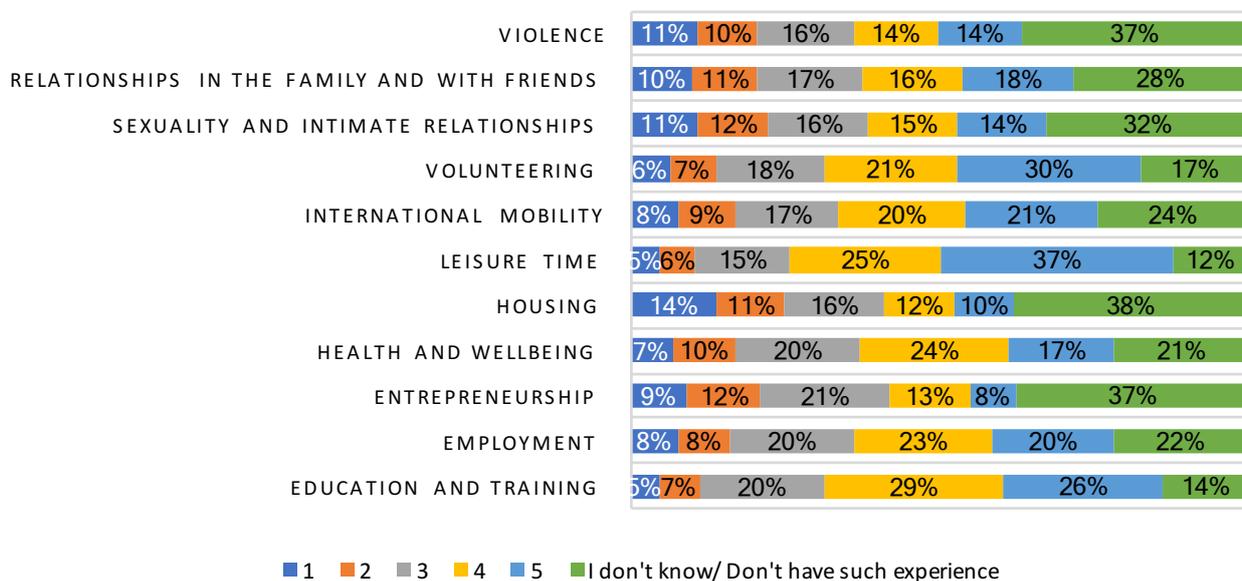


Figure 10: Assistance of youth information and counselling services
5 points Likert scale: 1 not very helpful - 5 very helpful

Youth information services were found instrumental in providing information in the area of leisure. This was followed by the areas of **volunteering and education**, and the trend corresponds with the previous answer, which stated that these two areas were considered easy to collect information about. This might be a reflection of the youth information and counselling service. On the other hand, areas such as **sexuality, relationships, and violence were considered as areas where youth information and counselling services were not sufficiently helpful.** However, this can be argued as in the previous answer; there is a high possibility that young users were not adequately comfortable in inquiring information in those areas, which might have led to such a perception. Parallel to the previous answer, **housing and entrepreneurship remained difficult areas** for the majority of

respondents, who were aged 12-24. Since most of the users surveyed have not yet finished their studies, these subjects seem to be of less relevance to them for the moment, they therefore do not seem to have much experience in using youth information and counselling services to obtain information on these issues compared to other areas.

4.2.5. User information demand

After studying the perception of the users on the service quality, we were curious to know about the fields of information young people perceive as important. Shedding light on the demand of young people will help us to understand the areas that have to be enriched with quality and accessible information. The replies of the users displayed that 40% of them believe **employment and education areas must be given higher priority** than most of the rest.

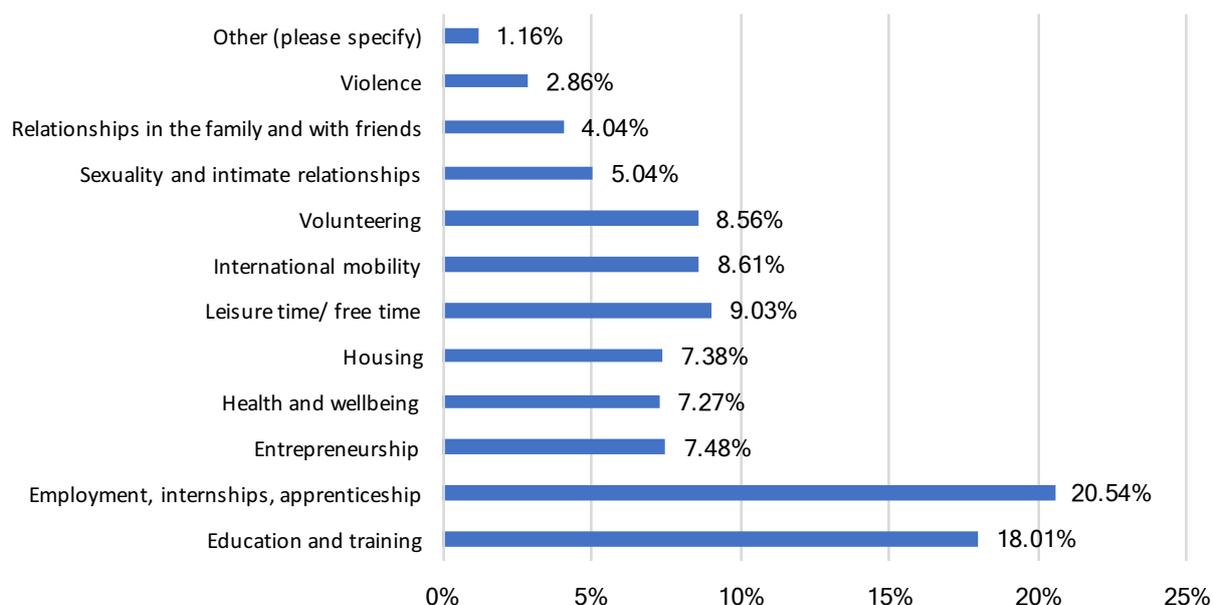


Figure 11: Information demand of users

This incline towards the education and employment field is predictable, as due to their age, **60% of the users are in transition to a different level of education or to the labour market**. Students attending schools or universities are likely to assign more importance to the education and post-education phase, which is the job market. In addition, 25% of the users marked the areas of volunteering, international mobility, and leisure time as important fields for information. On the other hand, **violence, relationships and sexuality received less interest**. It can be argued that this particular age group may not perceive youth information services as the place to turn to for information and counselling in those areas, or may access this support through other channels or services. Some of them may also consider that they do not require information and counselling in these areas. Additionally, specific characteristics of the sample group and/or some cultural aspects may also explain this outcome. In any case, a more qualitative analysis would be needed in order to draw more conclusive statements on this particular result. As in other areas, **few users mentioned voting and gender equality**.

From another angle, **lack of experience in requesting information in a particular area could also be a force that determined the fields the users consider important**. For example, the users who found access to information about entrepreneurship difficult also mentioned that they did not have experience in that area. This created a predictable impression on *Figure 10*, where entrepreneurship did not receive as much importance to young people. More importantly, the users were asked to select not more than three choices. This heavily shaped the choice of the majority, and being student or working part-time, the majority was inclined to give more importance in the areas that are currently relevant to them.

4.2.6. Information presentation: Users preferences

Along with the demand for information, it is imperative to understand the **sources** that are appropriate for the target group, in order to **channel quality youth information** in their desired areas. The majority of the sample group, who are users of youth

information and counselling services, are mostly young and school-going individuals. Representing the new generation of digital natives, they are likely to possess a different information-seeking behaviour. The graph shows that only **2% of the users are interested in collecting information from traditional mass media**, and only **5% from regular printed materials, such as booklets and leaflets**.

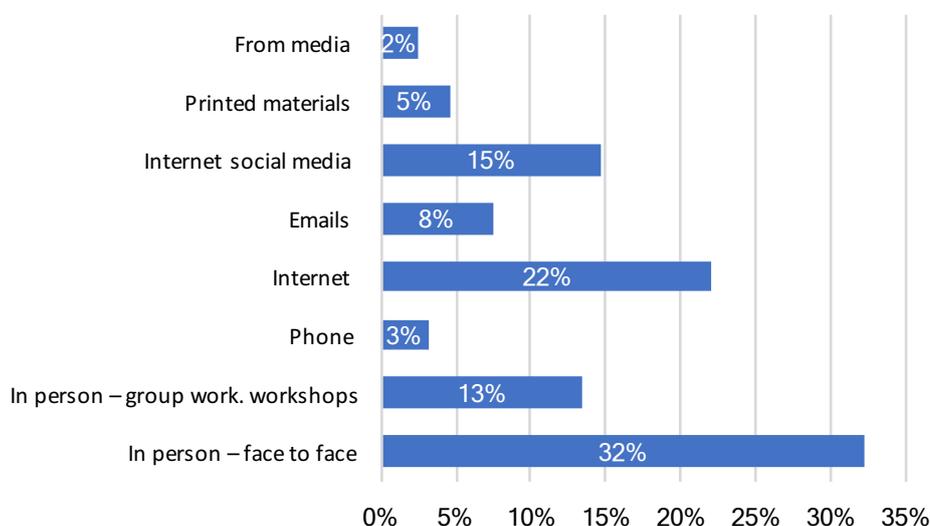


Figure 12: Preferred channels by users to access information

It is clearly visible that the majority of the users **prefer receiving information either in person or browsing through search engines or social media**. While 32% of the users want to receive information in person, 22% preferred online search engines and 15% marked social media. The question allowed only two choices to select out of seven. It is possible to assume, as long as the user can access the information by him or herself anytime and anywhere, that the Internet is the preferred channel, while if it is necessary to pay a visit to an organisation for a more personalised service, face-to-face communication is more desirable. From the popularity of face-to-face youth information and counselling services, together with the interest in online youth information sources, it can be assumed that in the coming years, **video calls and instant messaging applications for youth information and counselling services** might gain popularity. In the foresight study, conducted parallel to this survey, the experts highlighted the growing importance of tailor-made, personalised services, such as video calls.

From the discussion above, we can observe an overall trend. The user group surveyed has a majority of young school-going individuals who have been using or aware of youth information and counselling services for around three years on average. Within this time period, almost 60% of the population used the service from 1 to 5 times. They have identified leisure, health and education as easily accessible areas of information. It was also observed that the majority believes that **youth information services have been useful in providing information in the areas of leisure, volunteering, employment, and education**. Additionally, the users gave the areas of education and employment most importance. To access information, young people preferred face-to-face support (32%), online search engines and websites (22%) and social media (15%).

4.3. Information reliability and evaluation: Users

In this phase, we discussed the users' perception about different sources of information in terms of reliability, level of trust in the information received from these sources, and the evaluation of their answers against the parameters of media and information literacy. The discussion is particularly important because it identifies the channels perceived as more reliable to young people and helps us understand **how the users trust the information they access through different media**. Moreover, it is also necessary we understand the group we are studying. Therefore, part of this phase discusses the information behaviour and media and information literacy of the users.

4.3.1. Reliable sources of information for users per area of interest

In this question, the users were asked to mention the sources they believe to be most reliable per area of interest. The choices were: Internet websites, social media, radio and television, peer groups (family, friends etc.) and youth information centres. Maintaining the same areas of information as before, there was also a choice included as "Don't Know" should the user have no experience in a particular field or not be sure about the answer. The overall picture shows **youth information services and Internet websites were considered as the most reliable sources** of information.

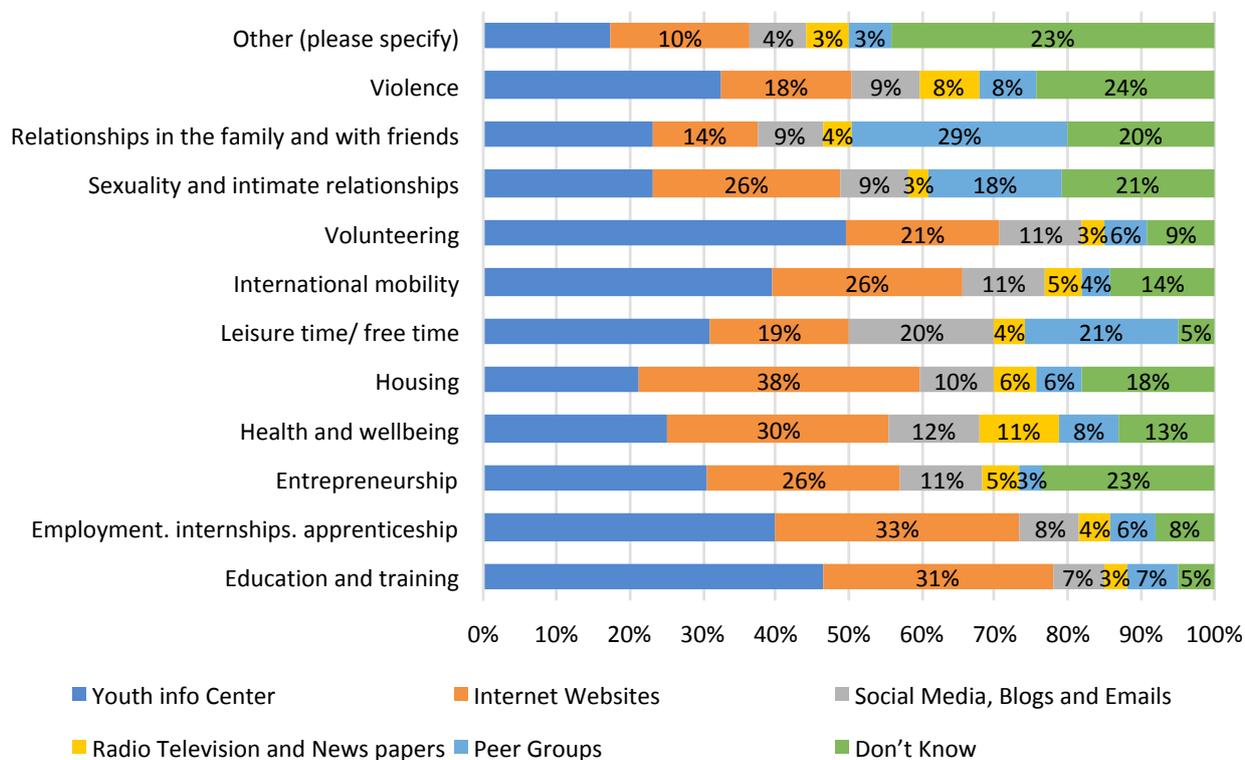


Figure 13: Most reliable information sources per area of interest according to users

In the areas of **volunteering, education, international mobility, and employment, youth information centres were regarded as reliable sources**. In the areas of health and wellbeing and entrepreneurship, both the Internet and youth information services are believed to be almost equally reliable. On the other hand, information from the Internet about housing is perceived to be more reliable to the users. Another interesting finding is that when it comes to information about **family and relationships**, the users group believe **peer groups** (as in immediate family, friends and close relatives) are more reliable than other sources. At the same time, information regarding **sexuality** is mostly sourced **from the Internet** and perceived as reliable.

4.3.2. General reliability of information sources for users

After listing the perceived reliable sources of information per area of interest, the users were asked about the reliability of the information they source from these channels. The objective is to understand whether young people consider quality information is being transmitted in these popular sources or whether they doubt the reliability. The graph primarily shows that the information obtained from sources such as **youth information services, youth clubs, youth workers, and educational institutions are reliable, with youth information services being the most reliable**. To understand the level of perceived reliability, a 5 point Likert scale has been used, where 1 represents the least reliable and 5 the most reliable information.

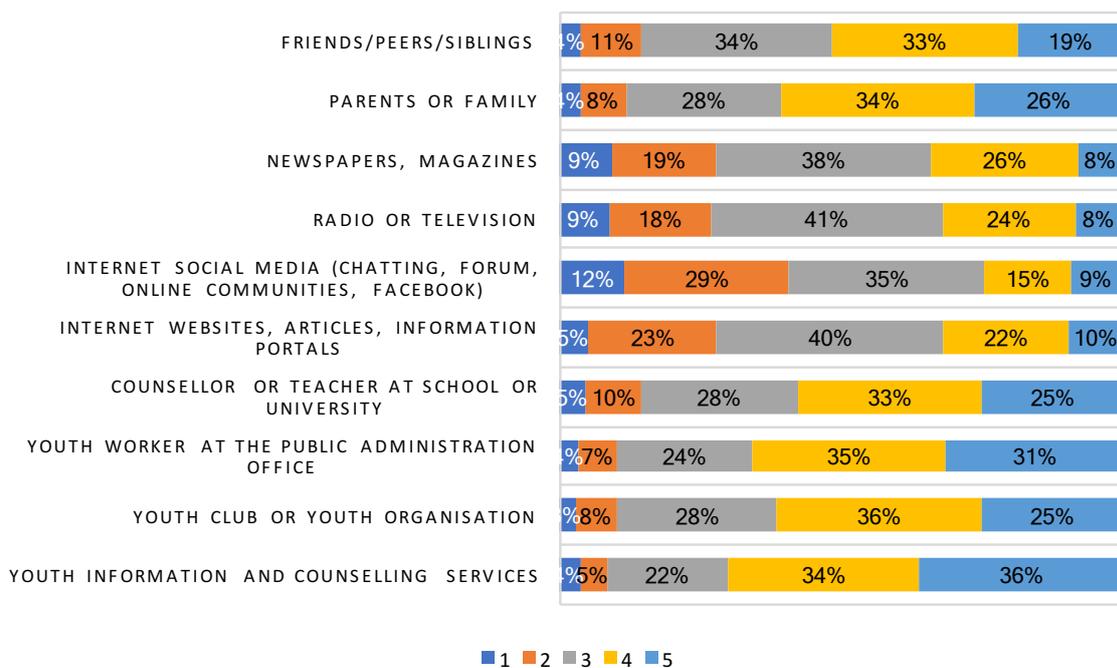


Figure 14: Reliability of information from different sources according to users
5 points Likert scale: 1 less reliable - 5 more reliable

What is striking in this picture is, despite the Internet being a popular source of information, users are not confident in its reliability. A substantial portion of the users surveyed **do not consider information from the Internet and social media as reliable**. The recent trend of fake news, Internet hoaxes and cyber fraud has played a role in shaping this perception. At the same time, **the majority of users trust information provided by friends and family**.

4.3.3. User satisfaction with youth information and counselling services

The users were also asked about their overall satisfaction level with the information provided by youth information services. The question inquired about the impact of the service in the users' lives, their level of satisfaction, chances of recommending to their peer groups, and finally how they evaluate the information sourced from these facilities. To reply to the question, the respondents were given a 5 point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree.

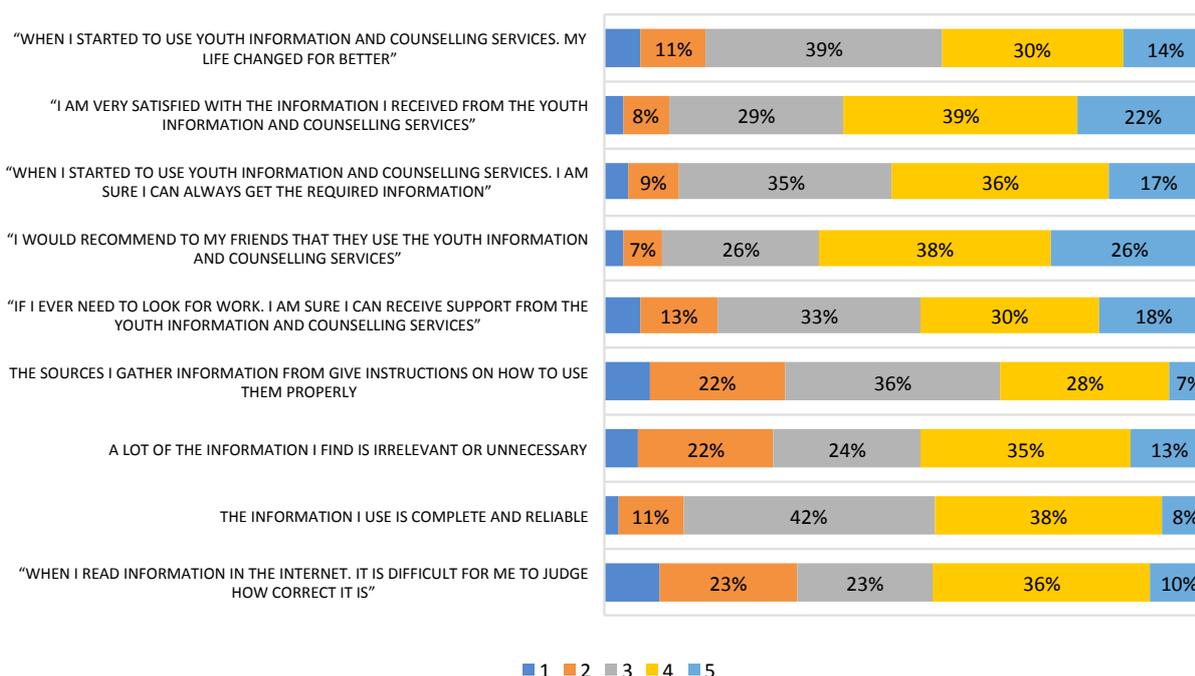


Figure 15: Users satisfaction with youth information services
5 points Likert scale: 1 strongly disagree – 5 strongly agree

From the replies from the users, it was clearly visible that **the majority of them agreed that the services provided by youth information structures have contributed to changing their life for the better**. Over 60% of the users are satisfied or highly satisfied by the service. Additionally, they have shown adequate trust in the information quality provided by the youth information and counselling services. Over half of the users surveyed consider the information reliable, and an almost equal number of them are likely to recommend the services to their friends. To summarise the overview of the users' level of satisfaction, the majority of them share **a common satisfaction, trust and consider youth information services as reliable sources of information which can be recommended to others**.

4.3.4. Media and information literacy of users

In this study of the service quality provided by the youth information and counselling services, it is equally important to study the young service users as well. The perceived service quality and satisfaction level largely depend on the service user. Youth information and counselling services also aim to support young people in gaining autonomy in their own search for information by building up their media and information literacy skills. Thus, as well as providing information and counselling according to the needs of their users, it is also the mission of youth information services to advise young people on how to research and evaluate information in a critical manner. Media and information literacy occupies an important part of youth information and counselling work, which is why it is a key part of this study. The service users' ability to comprehend the benefits of the service, and have enough confidence to use the support and skills gained through the service to make better decisions and critically process information in an autonomous way, may be a prominent driving force to use it.

The chart below (*Figure 16*) helps us understand how the users that responded perceive and process the overload of information they face, especially in online environments. A 5 point Likert scale has been used, ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree.

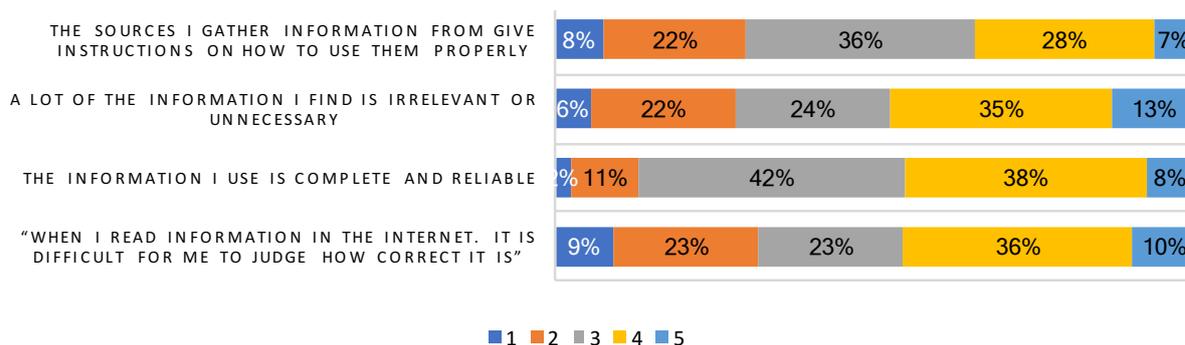


Figure 16: Information evaluation competencies of users
5 points Likert scale: 1 strongly disagree – 5 strongly agree

Considering the existing overload of information, **around 50% of the users believe a lot of information they find is unnecessary and irrelevant**. Additionally, over half of the respondents said that the information they use is not always complete and reliable. **Almost half of the users also face difficulties in evaluating the reliability of the information they access**.

Figure 17 aims to understand how users evaluate and perceive their level of media and information literacy. The users replied using the same 5 point Likert scale as in the previous questions.

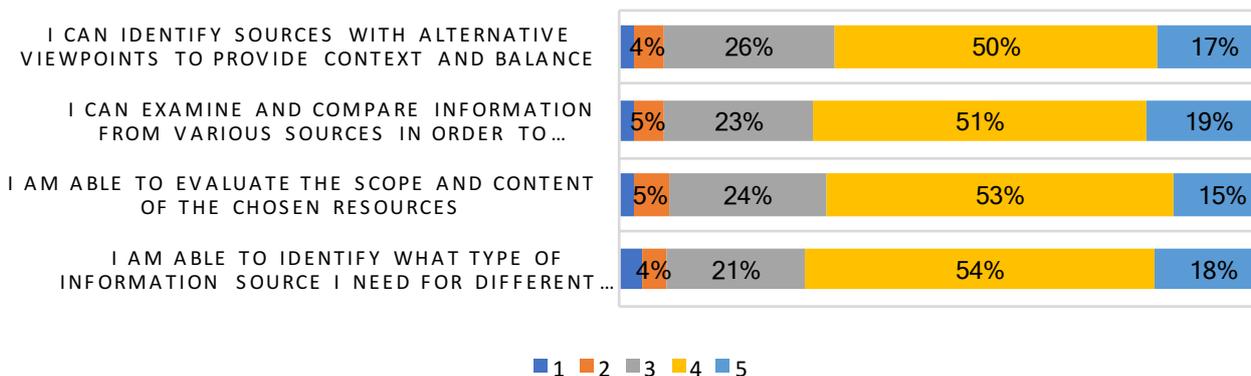


Figure 17: Media and information literacy of the users
5 points Likert scale: 1 strongly disagree – 5 strongly agree

From the picture drawn above, it is clear that the majority of users believe they possess enough competencies in identifying reliable information sources, processing information and evaluating it properly. The graph indicated that **around 70% of all users believe that they are quite competent in sourcing and processing information for themselves**. This indicates that the young population, living in large and medium-sized cities, and who have been using youth information services for long enough and frequently, feel that they have the competencies to identify reliable sources and process information acquired from them. However, in an earlier question (figure 14), a substantial portion of the users did not consider information from the Internet and social media as reliable. This indicates that **young people have an ambiguous relation to information on the Internet**.

4.3.5. Influence on users of challenging information

So far, we have observed that the majority of the users studied are within the age range of 12-24 years old and mostly attending educational institutions, with some of them also working part-time. Being a representative sample, it is also necessary to see how this particular age group handles critical information. In this question, we asked the users about their information behaviour when exposed to information that requires critical thinking, decision-making or creates anxiety, tension and grief. To reply to the question, the respondents were given a 5 point Likert scale from strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree. This question is likely to indicate how tolerant the young generation is towards information that is challenging and how they react to it.

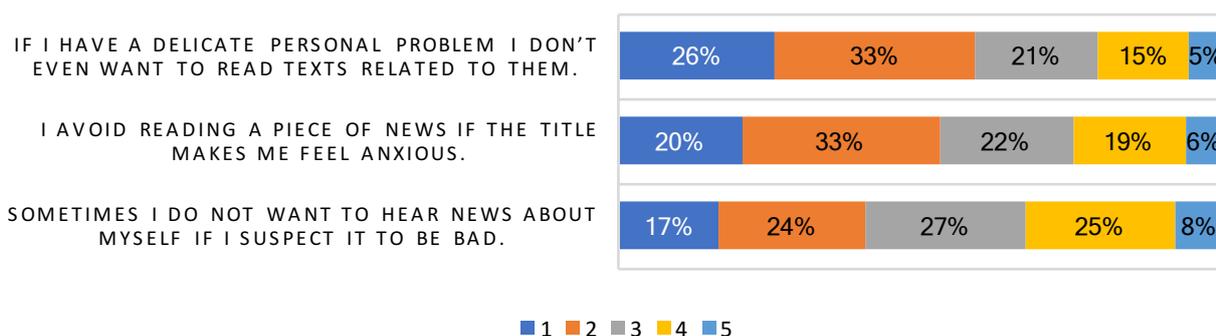


Figure 18: Influence on users of challenging information
5 points Likert scale: 1 strongly disagree – 5 strongly agree

The graph shows a clear distinction of two groups persistent in all three questions. Around 60% of the user group surveyed disagree that they avoid information related to their personal problems. In the last question, avoidance of information when it is related to the users, shows that **41% of the users disagree that they avoid negative information related to their problems, while up to 33% of users agree that they do avoid such information**. The interesting part of these three questions is the group avoiding information, and that can be interpreted as a part of a young person's strategy to information mastering in a complex

2 Information avoidance defined in Sairanen, A. & Savolainen, R. (2010). Avoiding health information in the context of uncertainty management. Information Research, 15(4), 8; Poirier, L. & Robinson, L. Informational balance: slow principles in the theory and practice of information behaviour. Journal of Documentation, 70(4), 687-707.

information landscape.² It has been shown that a person might hide his or her information needs, although they are aware of the usefulness of the information for his/her well-being and comfort. However, the shame and stigma might work as hindrances to the information (Buchanan & Tuckerman 2016; Lingel & Boyd 2013). This is a complex matter and needs further research to understand the phenomenon in more detail.

4.4. Summary on the user group results

From the discourse around the questions asked to the users of youth information and counselling services, we can conclude that the sample group we studied are largely a **student population between the ages of 12-24 years old and living in large and medium-sized cities**, with a smaller part of this group working on a full-time or part-time basis. Most of the users were aware of youth information and counselling services and have been using it for 1-5 years, and have used the services multiple times. They have largely been very positive towards youth information and counselling services, at the same time they have displayed that access to information and counselling in areas such as **entrepreneurship, housing and employment, are perceived as difficult**. The picture demonstrated that the user group surveyed is more inclined to source information about personal dilemmas and intimate relationships from family and friends, although they demand **more information in the areas of education and employment**. This indicates the immediate need of the sample group, since they are mostly students and/or are about to join the workforce very soon.

As well as identifying information needs in several areas, users also expressed the **preference for face-to-face support** over online search engines and social media. While discussing service satisfaction and information reliability, the users expressed their trust in the information quality of youth information and counselling services, while showing **doubt in the reliability of the information acquired online, despite its high popularity**. Almost half of the user group consider that the services provided by youth information structures have contributed to changing their life for the better. **Over 60% of the users expressed being satisfied or highly satisfied with youth information and counselling services**. By the conclusion, we can see that it is the user group mostly belonging to the urban area who are satisfied or highly satisfied with the service. However, it also indicates less participation from smaller towns and rural areas, from unemployed youth and from youth who are not in education or in employment (NEETs) and/or taking care of their households. In this sense, youth information and counselling services should take measures to ensure a wider reach to this target group, which in some cases may highly benefit from the personalised approach and guidance of the service.

According to the results, in order to reach their target group, youth information and counselling services must ensure a high presence and visibility in online environments through different types of media, including social media. Innovative methods for online outreach must be incorporated into more traditional ones, for instance video calls, instant messaging applications or peer-to-peer youth information activities, especially in certain areas where young people show a preference for peer groups to get informed. Additionally, this service must be extended to rural parts of society, outside urban areas, so a more even and fair participation can be ensured. Over the years, the methods, resources and means of youth information and counselling services must be improved. This will allow more personalised face-to-face services, as well as a more efficient use of online media and channels, resulting in a more quantitative and qualitative outreach to the target group.

In terms of media and information literacy, the **majority of users surveyed believe that they are competent enough in sourcing and processing information for themselves**. However, it is important to highlight that, to a large extent, the same sample seems to consider ease in access to information to be more important than their level of trust in information sources. This can be observed in the sense that although they question the reliability of online sources, they collect most of their information from the Internet.

Although this survey can help us outline some interesting patterns and trends among users of youth information and counselling services, a more in depth analysis using also qualitative methods would be needed in order to better understand the results.

5. Non-users of youth information and counselling services

In the *Future Youth Information Toolbox survey*, the sample group includes both users and non-users. Including both parties creates a more representative picture of information behaviour of young people in the European context and brings the study closer to reality.

In order to design measures to improve services derived from this research, it is imperative to include non-users of youth information services in the study so potential service gaps can be identified and steps can be taken to extend the service to more young people and to all parts of society. As mentioned earlier, out of the 2,809 complete replies, 1,429 were collected from non-users. Thus, **around 50% of the overall respondents were non-users**. This again gives us the opportunity to compare both groups constructively.

In the following phases, we will describe the non-users group in the same manner we have discussed the replies of the users. In order to highlight the differences between the two groups, the users' replies will be discussed along with the non-users' as and when appropriate. As with the replies of the users group, we have segmented the non-users' questions into three different clusters: Demographics, Quality of youth information and counselling services, and Information reliability and evaluation.

5.1. Demographics: Non-Users

Maintaining the same pattern as in the users' chapter, in this phase we will discuss the demographic profile of the non-users. The information about demographics collected were **age, gender, educational attainment, residence, and current status**. We will discuss these in connection to the users group and use the reference to discuss the following phases of the non-users' replies.

5.1.1. Age and gender of non-users

Out of the 1,429 non-users, **832 were female and 559 were male**. 30 individuals selected 'other' in reply to this question. The male/female ratio in the non-users group was similar to the users group. In this section, **58% of the respondents were female, which was 66% in the users group**. Interestingly, the age composition of the non-users was quite different from the users.

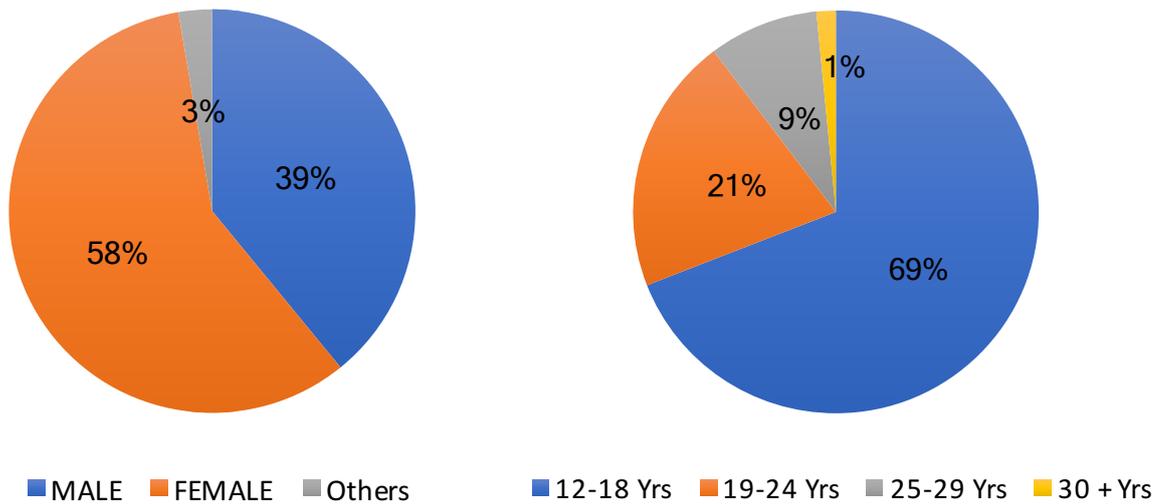


Figure 19: Age and gender of non-users (%)

Unlike the users group, the **majority age group for the non-users was 12-18 years old**. While in the users group, this age range was 46%, in the non-users group it is almost 70%, leaving only a space of 21% for the age group of 19-24 years, meaning that **90% of the non-users are within the age range of 12-24**. The age group of 25-29 is also comparatively smaller than that of the users, only 9%. The last two age groups comprised 26% of the users but only 11% of the non-users. This indicates that a significant number of young people between the ages of 12-18 may not be aware of the existence of youth information services or may opt for not using them. In order to draw more conclusive reasons for the prominence of this age group among the non-users group, a more qualitative analysis would be needed.

5.1.2. Current residence of non-users

The next question asked to the sample group was about their current residence. The choices were large cities, medium-sized cities, small towns, and rural areas. In this regard non-users were quite evenly scattered across the choices. However, unlike the users group, **45% of the entire non-users group resides in small towns and rural areas**. In the users group it was 37%.

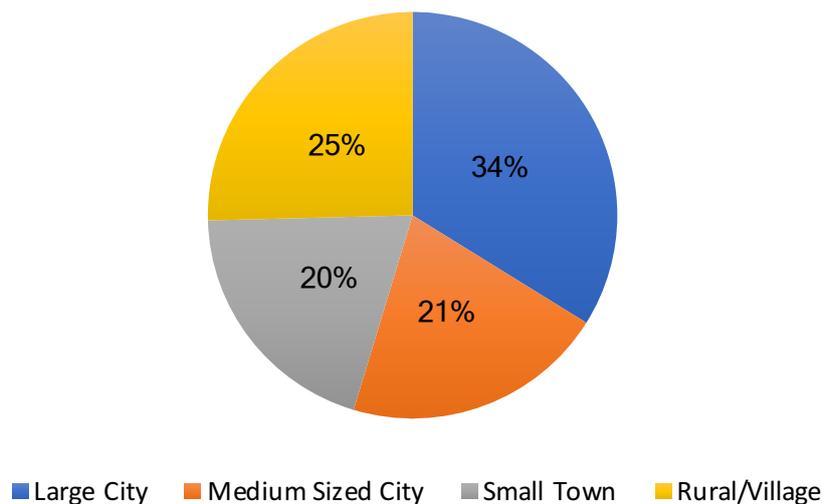


Figure 20: Current residence of non-users

Among the non-users, **55% of the respondents resided in large and medium-sized city**. This contradicts the assumption that residents of large and medium-sized cities are likely to be more aware of youth information and counselling services. However, it must also be remembered that almost 70% of these non-users are below 18 years old and the perceived urgency to find youth information and counselling support may be lower among this age group. Their school and immediate peer group are likely to be

their main source of information. On the other hand, 45% of the non-users live in small towns and rural areas, which may indicate less access to youth information services. A more in depth analysis using qualitative methods would be needed in order to better understand this result.

5.1.3. Educational attainment of non-users

The next question to the respondents tries to collect the educational qualifications of the non-users. Like the users, the choices were elementary school, middle school, vocational secondary school, general secondary school, bachelor's level, and Master's or higher level of education. It was observed that **half of the non-users have attained elementary or middle school qualifications**. Out of 1,429 non-users, 15% attended vocational schools and 20% attended secondary school.

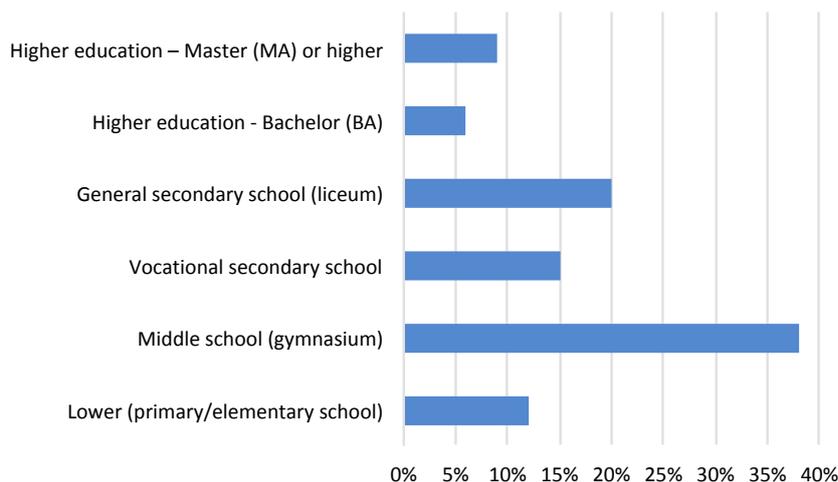


Figure 21: Educational qualifications of non-users

On the other hand, **only 15% of the non-users have completed a higher education level**, such as Bachelor's or Master's. This aspect of the demography of non-users is also substantially different from that of the users. In the users group, the respondents who have completed higher education comprised 30% of the users group, while in the non-users group it is half of that. This indicates that the majority of the students who have progressed to higher education have used or are at least familiar with youth information services, while students who have never used youth information and counselling services are largely completed elementary and/or middle school, aged between 12-18.

5.1.4. Current status of non-users

The current status of the non-users asks about the current job status and lifestyle of the respondent. The statements described different scenarios such as 'Attending school', 'Studying in a university', 'Working and studying', 'Unemployed' and so on. The objective is to observe whether we can segregate the non-users according to their current lifestyle to see potential connection to 'not' using youth information and counselling services.

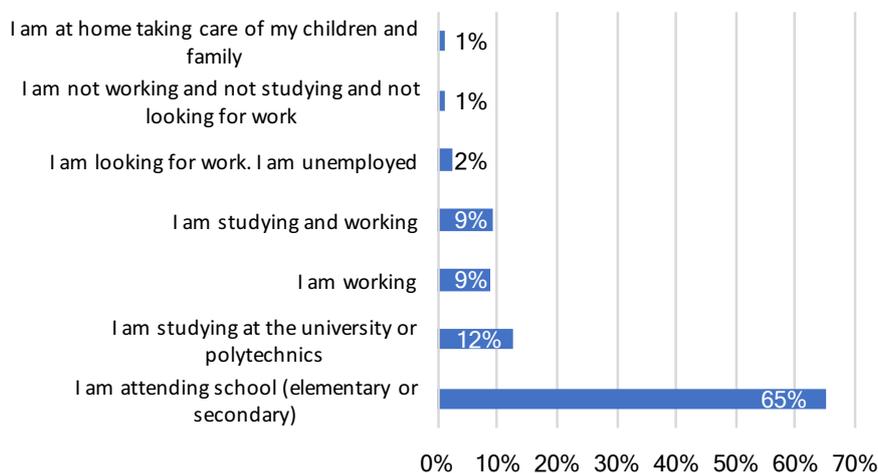


Figure 22: Life situation (socio-professional status) of the non-users (%)

The graph that plotted the replies of the respondents clearly shows that only a small portion of non-users are working, while 65% of them are at school and 12% at university. Within the users, the proportion of school attendees is 41%. **77% of the non-users group attend school or university. Only 9% of them are working in this group**, as opposed to 20% of the users group. 9% are studying and working, which is 14% in the users group. On the other hand, 34% of the users were either working or working and studying. Only 8% of the users and 2% of the non-users are looking for jobs. This clearly explains that the young age and perceived lack of need have discouraged the young non-users from seeking help in youth information and counselling services.

From the discussion about the demographic attributes of the non-users, we can see a group of young individuals attending school and living both in cities and in towns or villages/rural areas. The majority are between 12-18 years old and attending middle to secondary school (65%). The following phase will discuss the rest of the questions in connection to these demographic features of the non-users.

5.2. Quality of youth information and counselling services: Non-users perspective

In this phase, the discussion will encompass all the questions that asked about ease of access to information, the non-users preferred choices, their perceived reliability and areas they would like to have more information available. To measure the perception of the non-users, a 5 point Likert scale was used.

5.2.1. Access to information by non-users and level of difficulty

In this question, the non-users were asked about their perceived level of ease in finding information in different fields. The non-users' perception about ease or difficulty in accessing information showed a certain level of parity. While **entrepreneurship and international mobility were identified amongst the fields with difficult access**, leisure, health and education were fields that had easier access.

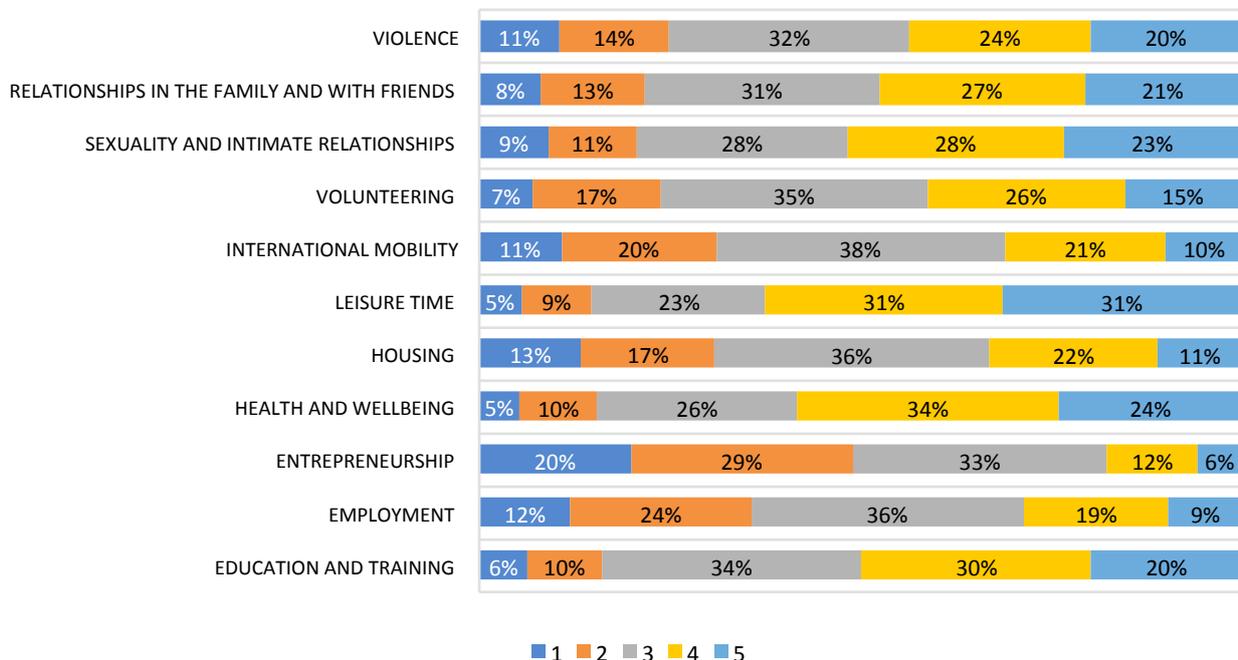


Figure 23: Ease of access to information of non-users
5 points Likert scale: 1 very difficult - 5 very easy

Despite the similarity, there are a few differences as well. For instance, 30% of non-users find accessing housing information difficult, as opposed to 40% of users. **Around 20% of the non-users find accessing information regarding violence, relationship and sexuality difficult.** Due to the age range and other demographic similarities, the perception of ease of access to information is quite similar between the users and the non-users.

5.2.2. Non-user information demand

The objective of this question was to identify the areas where young people would appreciate having more information, which is easily accessible. It is necessary to study the areas where more information flow may improve the lives of young people. Amongst the choices offered, education and employment were the areas the non-users demanded most information.

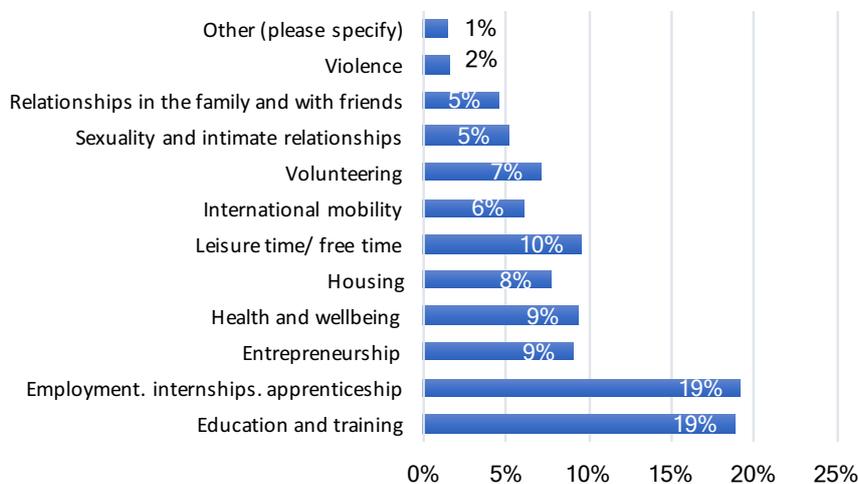


Figure 24: Information demand of non-users

In terms of demand of information, the non-users show a similarity with the users. Like the users, they wish for **more information on education and employment**. The age and the educational phase explain why young people are demanding more information in these areas. According to the need, the demand is created and at this age, the above-mentioned areas are likely to be the most important.

5.2.3. Information presentation: Non-users preferences

Today it is possible to search multiple channels to source information and in many different forms. The non-users in this question were asked about their preferred information channel and form. More knowledge about the preference of the non-users will be instrumental in designing information services to reach them in the appropriate channel and form. The choices were ranged from interpersonal to technological, from online search engines and social media to traditional mass media. Each respondent was asked to mark a maximum of two choices.

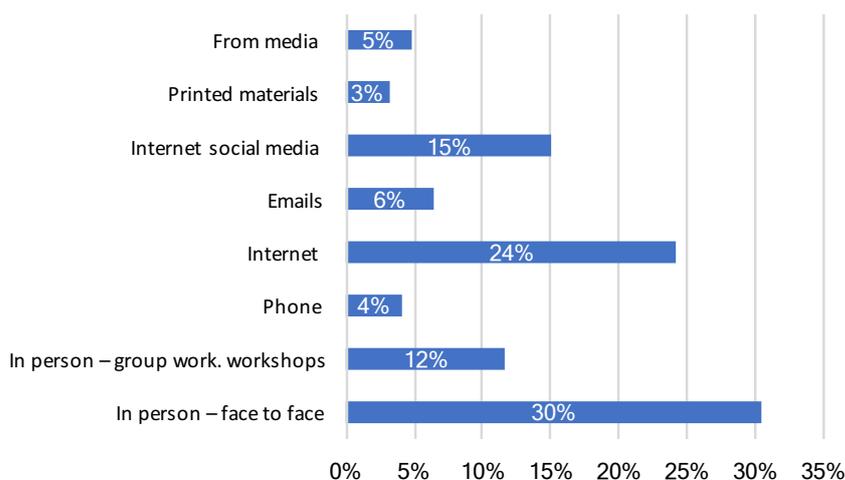


Figure 25: Preferred channels by non-users to access information

The young non-user group demonstrated a large demand for face-to-face information sourcing, **30% of the non-users prefer face-to-face communication to get informed**. Online search engines and social media were equally popular, 24% and 15% respectively. Printed materials, such as booklets and flyers, were the most unattractive source of information to this group, only 3%. Traditional mass media and hotline phone calls were equally unpopular, 5% and 4% respectively.

The young respondents, who are not currently using youth information and counselling services, show that sourcing information regarding education, health, and leisure is comparatively easier for them. The group of 12-18 years old find information regarding **entrepreneurship and international mobility as difficult areas**. This may be due to not having had the experience of looking for information in these particular areas. As for the user group, a qualitative analysis would be needed in order to better understand whether it is a matter of difficulty, or rather of relevance or interest in these particular areas. They also chose the online information and face-to-face youth information and counselling as their preferred channels to find information. However, in terms of reliability, they were sceptical about online-sourced information, and had more trust in the information sourced from youth information and counselling services, even if they do not use them.

5.3. Information reliability and evaluation: Non-users

In this phase we will discuss the answers provided by the non-users about their level of media and information literacy, the sources they rely on according to the information area, and their competencies in handling information in different situations. The discussion will give us a clear idea about the media and information competencies of the non-users and thus we will understand if these competencies determine the information behaviour of the respondents. This will also help us to design youth information and counselling services according to the needs of the target group.

5.3.1. Reliable sources of information for non-users per area of interest

After asking about reliable sources in general, we wanted to know more about the level of popularity of each of these information sources against different information areas. This can help to identify which areas can be further exploited by youth information and counselling services. In a few of the information areas the picture was different between users and non-users.

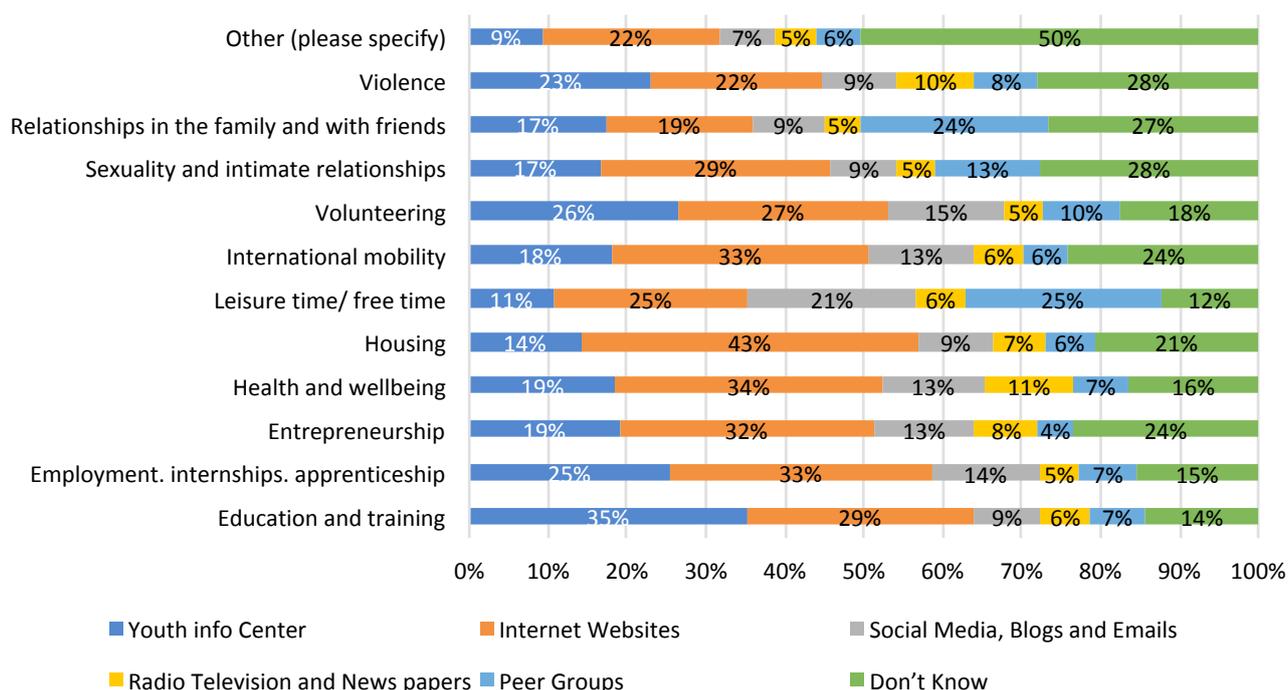


Figure 26: Most reliable information sources per area of interest according to non-users

60% of the non-users consider youth information services as a reliable source of information regarding education and employment. 43% of the non-users consider the Internet as a primary source of information about housing. Another important remark is that 26% of non-users believe youth information and counselling services are a reliable source of information about volunteering, while 46% of the users think the same. The gap in trust has been determined by the use of the service. And this trend resonates in the area of employment, entrepreneurship, and education as well. **Young users of youth information services have more trust in the service than those who do not use them.**

5.3.2. General reliability of information sources for non-users

The most popular channels do not always provide the most reliable information, which is more the case today than ever before. Therefore, it was necessary to find out the perceived level of reliability the non-users associate with different information sources. The choices included youth information and counselling services, Internet, teachers and peer groups, among others.

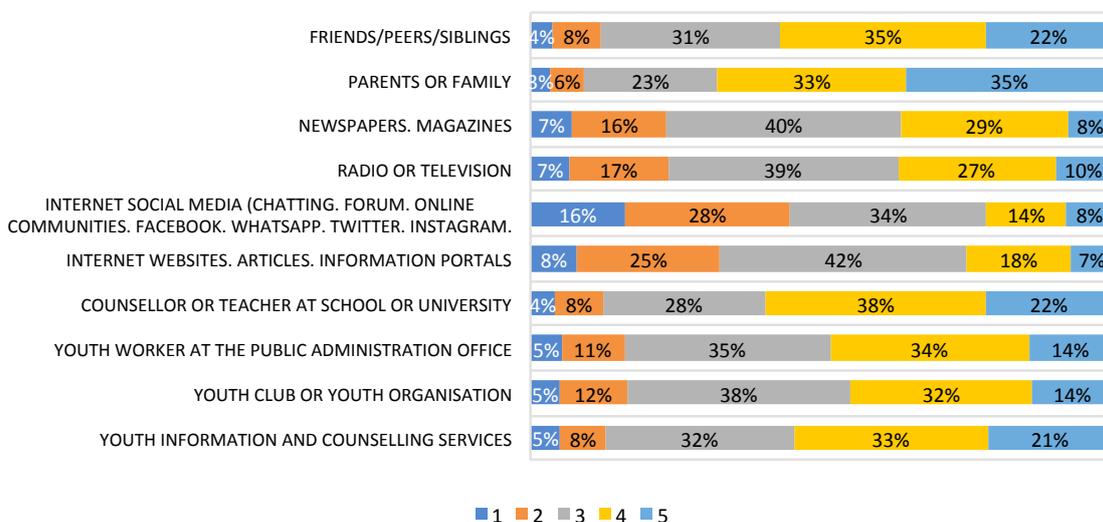


Figure 27: Reliability of information from different sources according to non-users
5 points Likert scale: 1 less reliable - 5 more reliable

The non-users have a positive perception about youth information services. **Around 50% of the non-users believe information from youth information services is reliable.** Around 60% of the respondents believe that teachers are a reliable source and so are parents and friends. This group, along with youth workers, have long been identified in the youth information field as important multipliers, more efforts could be made to reach out to them. Trust in traditional media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television) is not very high across both groups. Another similarity is that young people from both groups were not sure about the reliability of information available online, particularly on social media.

5.3.3. Media and information literacy of non-users

This question was intended to understand how the respondents handle information that they access through different media and channels. The basic components of the concept ‘media and information literacy’ were presented as statements to study the competency of the young people. To measure the competency, a 5 point Likert scale was implemented, where 1 represented definitely disagree and 5 represented definitely agree.

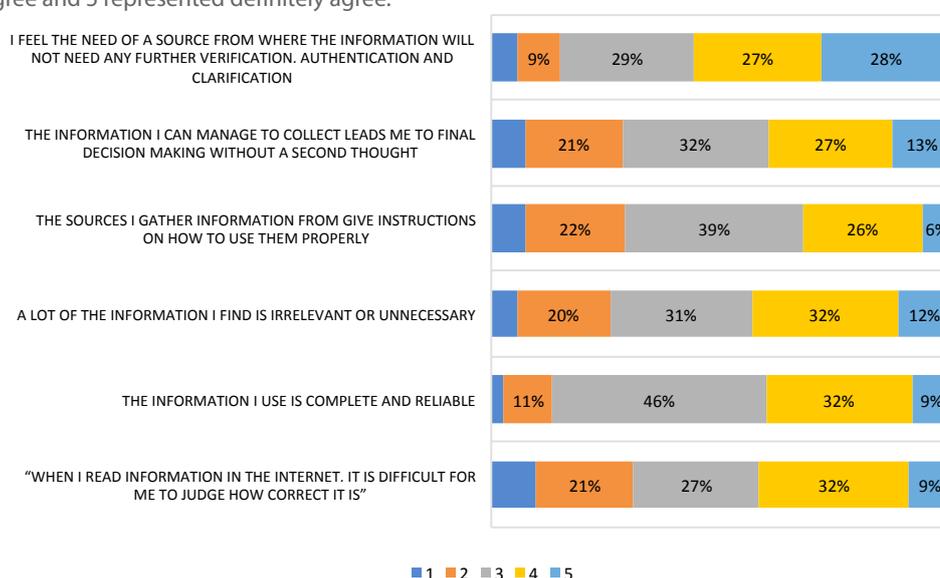


Figure 28: Information evaluation competencies of non-users
5 points Likert scale: 1 strongly disagree – 5 strongly agree

The respondents show quite a similarity with the users in terms of media and information literacy. Both groups have shown concern about the reliability of information collected from the Internet. Around 46% of the respondents do not think that the information they use is complete and reliable, and an almost equal number of respondents think a substantial amount of information is irrelevant or unnecessary. Among the non-users, **55% would like sources where information does not require a further verification**. This reflects the need and scarcity of reliable information sources among the non-users. Visibility and access to youth information and counselling services must be ensured for the young population who are currently outside the boundary of the service.

Apart from information sourcing, it is imperative to successfully evaluate the information that has been sourced. The non-users were asked whether they are able to identify appropriate information needs, evaluate the scope and content, compare it with various sources and identify alternative viewpoints. This was an attempt to test the critical thinking of the young respondents.

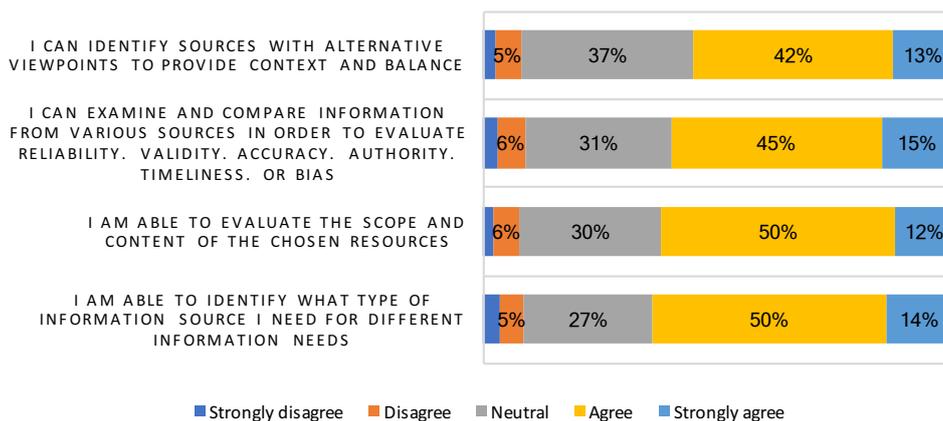


Figure 29: Media and information literacy of non-users

Despite the difficulties mentioned earlier, over half of the young non-users believe they can identify information sources to address their needs and can evaluate the scope and content of the information sources. This picture of self-efficacy in information evaluation is similar to the user group as well. However, to some extent, **the user group was found more confident in terms of information evaluation compared to the non-users**. While around 70% of the users stated they are competent to identify, examine, compare and validate information sources, around 55% to 60% of the non-users show that level of confidence.

5.3.4. Influence on non-users of challenging information

Apart from information overload and lack of media and information literacy, information anxiety contributes heavily in shaping information behaviour. These sorts of anxiety could result in information avoidance and difficulties in sharing problems. The measurement was done against a 5 point Likert scale.

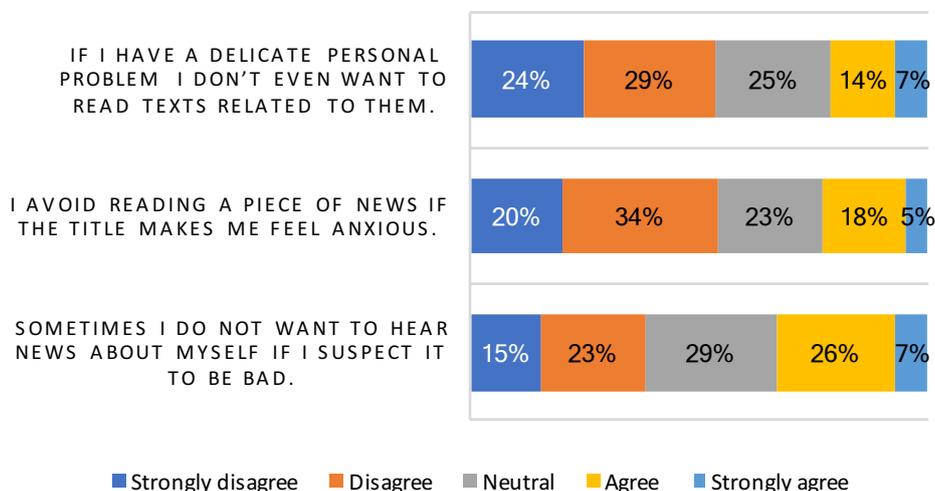


Figure 30: Influence on non-users of challenging information

The graph of the non-users shows a substantial similarity with the users group when it comes to encountering information in a challenging situation. The parity in the demographics of both groups might be responsible for this. The graph says that **almost half of both groups disagree that they deliberately avoid information**. On the other hand, over 20% of the young respondents believe they do avoid information. Over 30% of both groups stated that they try to avoid challenging or negative information that concerns them or about an issue that they have when they suspect it to be negative. This can be a growing concern in the changing landscape of information and should be addressed by information and counselling services.

5.4. Summary on the non-user group results

By the end of the discourse around the replies of the non-users, we can conclude that **the non-users group have quite a lot in common with the users group**. The majority of the non-users that were surveyed are young people between the ages of 12 and 24, dispersedly living in cities and in villages. The majority of them go to school.

The non-users group of young people source most of their information from the Internet and social media, but would prefer to also get their information face-to-face. They seem to possess enough conviction and confidence in their media and information literacy skills and information evaluation. With they displayed that it is easier to collect information regarding education and employment, while information about entrepreneurship is difficult to access for them.

The user group believes that **more information should be provided about employment**. Online channels of information are highly popular among the non-users group, but at the same time they doubt the reliability of news and information they access online, especially through social media. **Ease in access to information** seems to be more important than their level of trust in information sources to a large extent. This was observed in the survey for both groups: despite the questionable reliability that they expressed towards online sources, young people collect most of their information from the Internet. **The unpopularity of printed materials and booklets** was clearly expressed compared to other means. The majority of this group would like to receive and access information that does not need any further verification.

6. Comparison between users and non-users

At the demographic level, both groups had some similarities and a fair share of differences. **The users group was slightly older** than the non-users, with gender slightly skewed towards a female majority.

In terms of current life status, the majority of non-users go to school (65%) or higher education (12%), while only 9% are working. The majority of users are also studying at school (41%) or at higher education institutions (15%), although the main difference is that the second highest portion of users is working (20%) or working and studying (14%). Most of the users currently reside in urban areas, while non-users are quite evenly scattered across bigger cities, urban towns and their outskirts.

In the chapters on quality of youth information and counselling services, both users and non-users displayed a similarity in ease of access to information. **The majority believes information related to health, education, and leisure is easy to access. Entrepreneurship and employment information was difficult to access** according to respondents from both groups. Housing was considered a difficult area to access information for users, while it was not a remarkable concern for non-users. This is again expected because non-users are less likely to be aware about the difficulty in seeking housing information, considering their age and life situation (60% between 12 and 18 years old). In fact, **non-users highlighted the difficulty of accessing information about international mobility opportunities as much as housing**, which was not the case among users. However, other aspects could be related to the fact that there are more non-user respondents residing in smaller towns and urban areas where housing obstacles may not be as present as in bigger cities.

Despite these differences, both groups showed similar choices in information channels and information demand. **Both groups stated that their preferred way of extracting information is through face-to-face information and counselling and through online sources** i.e. search engines and social media. Both groups demanded **more reliable information in the areas of education and employment**. Having a large number of student workers and young students likely to be looking for a job in the near future, such a demand could be expected. The question asks for a maximum of two choices, and these were the priorities.

While discussing the chapter on information reliability and evaluation, we observed some differences in perceptions of the two groups. More respondents from the users group considered youth information and counselling services as a reliable source of information in almost all areas than the non-users group. This indicates that the **young people who have used youth information and counselling services place more trust in the service providing reliable information**. The non-users lack this strong conviction and are found comparatively more dependent on Internet sources. They also turn more to their peers to source information about relationships and leisure time. The users chose youth information and counselling services as the most reliable source of information regarding volunteering (46%), education and training (46%), and employment (39%). When asked about the same areas of interest, non-users rated youth information services lower in these specific areas – 26%, 35% and 25% respectively. Another interesting aspect to highlight, which also relates to media and information literacy, is that a higher

percentage of non-users replied that they did not know how to evaluate the reliability of information sources per area of interest. This choice may also be due to a higher representation of younger respondents in the non-users group.

When asked about the perceived reliability of the information they source from different channels, the same difference was noticed. **More users believe youth information and counselling services are reliable sources compared to non-users.** The majority of the non-users were unsure of whether they would turn to youth information services, and entrusted more reliability in the information sourced from parents, siblings, and friends compared to the users. This tendency was possibly because of the younger age of the non-users and the lack of experience using the service. In the comparison of service user satisfaction and information recipient satisfaction, both groups displayed similar tendencies in their responses.

Online channels of information are highly popular for both groups, but at the same time they both doubt the reliability of news and information they access online, especially through social media. **Ease in access to information seems to be more important than their level of trust in information sources to a large extent.** Despite the questionable reliability that both groups of young people expressed towards online sources, they collect most of their information from the Internet. The unpopularity of printed materials and booklets was clearly stated compared to other means.

In terms of validating information, perceived reliability and relevance, both groups were similarly split. The same tendency resonated in information use as well; both groups were almost equally split among agreement, disagreement, and uncertainty. However, in the same question, over **half of the non-users confirmed they require a source where reliability will not be questioned.** On the other hand, the users, when asked about their level of satisfaction with youth information and counselling services, show an overwhelming level of satisfaction with the experience, believe the service has improved their lives, and are likely to recommend the service to a friend.

The users and non-users showed an expected picture in evaluating themselves and the information they source. About a third of both users and non-users replied that they avoid challenging information or negative information about themselves. This is a complex matter and needs to be studied further as a possible strategy for young people to master the challenging information landscape. The awareness of information avoidance is important from an information and media literacy perspective, as well as for youth information and counselling. The trend of similarity continues to the last point of comparison between the users and the non-users. In the self-efficacy test of information evaluation, both groups displayed the same level of self-confidence and conviction. Over half of the population surveyed agreed they are competent in realising their own information needs, identifying multiple sources and viewpoints, and successfully verifying the information. While assessing the ability of the respondents to assess the reliability of information, more users claimed to be competent in identifying, examining and evaluating the reliability of information. In fact, **around 70% of the users stated they are competent in identifying, examining, comparing and validating information sources, around 55% to 60% of the non-users show that level of confidence.** A larger number of respondents were neutral in the non-users group. However, at the same time, the respondents experienced difficulties in evaluating information on the Internet. This highlights the situation of a complex information landscape and the importance of information and media literacy skills.

Although this analysis can help us compare some interesting patterns and trends among users and non-users of youth information and counselling services, a more in-depth study also using qualitative methods would be needed in order to better understand the differences and the overall results of this survey.

7. Conclusions

Users

The result of the survey provides an encouraging picture for youth information and counselling services. The result not only portrays the satisfying picture of users of youth information services, but also recommends improvement in multiple areas.

Among the 2,809 participants, 1,380 were users (49%), while 1,429 were non-users (51%). The conclusion and recommendation phase will therefore discuss the two groups separately.

The young user group had most respondents using youth information and counselling services for no longer than three years with a frequency of between 1 and 5 times. The user group mentioned leisure, education, and health-related information as the most easily accessible, while **information regarding housing and entrepreneurship are difficult to source**. However, the users were very positive regarding the assistance provided by youth information and counselling services. Due to their current age and level of education, the user group was more focused on their immediate and near future needs of information. Therefore, **the majority of the users demanded more information on education and employment**. It could be recommended that youth information and counselling concentrate more resources in ensuring the outreach and visibility of the information that they provide in these areas of interest. This includes more and more visible information through online channels and blended outreach methods (combining online and face-to-face methods).

In connection to information needs come information channels and new media. The user group selected face-to-face youth information and counselling, Internet search engine, and social media for accessing information. The reality is that the Internet has turned into a quick source of information over the years and is now available on almost every device, particularly those used by young people. It is possible to assume, as long as the user can access the information by him or herself anytime and anywhere, the Internet is the preferred channel, while if it is necessary to pay a visit to a centre for a more personalised service, face-to-face communication is more desirable. Youth information providers must acknowledge this fact and innovate following young people's trends in order to ensure the visibility and relevance of the service. This indicates that a substantial amount of the services and information provided by youth information and counselling services must be available online, to cater to the needs of young people. Since face-to-face youth information and counselling is still more popular than most of the online options, counselling via video calls or instant messaging applications could also be added to the service and bring a more personalised and human approach to online media.

One of the questions revealed that users do not place an equal level of trust in all sources of information, and that the source heavily depends on the area of information. The users chose youth information services to source information about volunteering, education, international mobility, and employment. However, **they seem to depend more on the Internet while looking for information related to housing, and to some extent health**. Information related to relationships, sexuality, and leisure time are also sourced from peer groups and not so much from youth information and counselling services. These are the areas where youth

information and counselling services could contribute more, by **providing relevant information not only to young people in need, but also parents or peer educators**, so they could provide reliable information when young people turn to them to discuss certain issues. From another angle, the lack of interest or experience in requesting information in a particular topic could also determine the areas of interest that young people consider important.

Innovative peer-to-peer youth information activities could be another effective way of increasing the outreach and access to reliable information, especially in the areas where young people show a preference for peer groups to get informed. For instance, the involvement of young multipliers and influencers in youth information activities are not only an effective means of increasing the outreach of youth information services, but also a genuine way of **empowering young people and ensuring their participation in youth information provision and promotion**.

The results on the user sample analysis also reveal less participation from smaller towns and rural areas, from unemployed youth and from youth who are not in education or in employment (NEETs) and/or who are taking care of their households. In this sense, youth information and counselling services must take measures and gain support to ensure a wider reach to this target group and to disadvantaged groups, which may highly benefit from the personalised approach and guidance of the service.

One clear success of youth information and counselling services is that the **majority of users believe the information sourced from any of the information services is reliable and genuine**. More importantly, despite the overwhelming popularity of the online sources, a considerable number of users were uncertain about the reliability and accuracy of the information sourced from there. This indicates a brilliant scope for the youth information services to grow and contribute to providing reliable information. Proper utilisation of this service gap could create a unique selling proposition for youth information and counselling services.

Regarding the overall service satisfaction, almost half of the users stated that information services had improved their lives. **Most of the users were satisfied with the services and confirmed they are likely to recommend the service to their friends**. Nevertheless, the survey on the users contributes to identifying the areas where more information is required, suggesting improvements in information presentation and channels, and above all recommending a broader reach to extend the service to more young people, especially those that need it the most.

Non-users

The respondent in this survey who had never used youth information and counselling services was also substantially big and collected across Europe, ensuring adequate demographic parity with the user group. Apart from the fact that the non-users were comparatively younger than the users group, the rest of the demographic features were more or less the same between the two groups.

Therefore, it was noticed that **65% of the non-users had attained elementary or middle school**.

The non-users mentioned **entrepreneurship, employment, international mobility, international mobility opportunities and housing** as more difficult information areas to access, while leisure, health, and education were selected as relatively easier areas to access information. Quite similar to the users group, the non-users demanded **more information in the areas of education and employment**. This was expected because both groups had such similarities in demography. The non-users shared the same taste of the users in information presentation and media used. Like the previous group, the **non-users preferred in person face-to-face for receiving information over all other means**. The other most popular choices were Internet search engine and social media.

The major differences between the users and the non-users were visible in terms of the perception of the reliability of information in different areas, collected from different sources. Unlike the users, the non-users showed less trust in youth information services. It was observed that the **majority of non-users believed youth information and counselling services are only appropriate**

in providing reliable information in the areas of education and employment. The non-users showed higher dependency towards Internet websites, particularly in the areas of housing, health, international mobility, and employment. This indicates that in order to bring the non-users to the service network, it is essential that the **youth information and counselling services are increasingly visible and available online**, and play the role of a trustworthy alternative for retrieving accurate information. A measure such as that is highly relevant in the contemporary information landscape.

Among the non-users, 44% stated they doubt the reliability of information collected from online social media, while 33% doubt the same about information sourced from Internet search engines. The non-users did not show the same level of trust in information sourced from youth information services as the users. However, **they placed more trust in youth information services over the Internet and mass media or printed sources.** Due to the younger age and lack of experience with the service, the non-users placed much stronger trust in their teachers, parents, and peer groups.

Nevertheless, over half of the non-users, despite the popularity of the Internet, stated they are in need of an information source which does not need any further validation. This again indicates that despite the widespread access to online information, there is a growing need of **reliable sources of information.** Youth information and counselling services therefore must take measures and be resourced enough to increase the outreach of their service and to ensure the **visibility and availability of information**, particularly in the areas of high demand and on the most popular channels of information and media.

In terms of media and information literacy, the **majority of respondents from both groups believe that they are competent enough in sourcing and processing information for themselves.** However, it is important to highlight that, to a large extent, the same sample seems to consider ease in access to information to be more important than their level of trust in information sources. This can be observed in the sense that although they question the reliability of online sources, they collect most of their information from the Internet. It is important to bear in mind that although young people use the Internet on a huge scale to seek information, they do not necessarily possess the critical thinking skills to determine the relevance and veracity of what they find. Thus, apart from providing information and guidance according to the needs of their target group, youth information and counselling services must deepen in their mission of advising young people on how to research and evaluate information in a critical manner. **Building up young people's autonomy through media and information literacy is a key part of youth information and counselling work in the post-truth era.** In this sense, youth information providers must be also proactive in developing and strengthening their own media and information literacy skills in order to ensure that this important function of the service is properly covered.

According to the findings of the survey, we can draw a conclusion that **youth information and counselling services have contributed to the improvement of the lives of young people that used them** and they are perceived as providing **accurate and reliable information.** Nonetheless, youth information and counselling services must also plan measures to accommodate more young people into their service by **raising awareness** and visibility. Youth information and counselling providers must initiate providing information and counselling through **many different and innovative channels and forms.** Indeed, they have to adapt constantly and quickly to a very changing media landscape.

As mentioned in the Executive summary of this report, a similar [survey](#) was conducted by ERYICA in 2013, although with a smaller sample group and not including non-users of youth information and counselling services. When looking at the comparison between the 2 surveys, it is clear to see that young people still have the same kind of priorities when it comes to areas and sources of information. 5 years later, young people still rely very strongly on youth information and counselling services, and their place in society remains crucial across Europe and beyond.

Although this study can help us compare some interesting patterns and trends among users and non-users of youth information and counselling services, a more in depth analysis using also qualitative methods would be needed in order to better understand the service gaps, and the overall results of this survey.

8. Recommendations

Below we have suggested a few recommendations consistent with the needs and wishes of young people displayed in the survey. The following initiatives are expected to **improve awareness, usage frequency and better service delivery**. In order to be effective, some of them will also require more sustainable funding and institutional support.

Areas	Recommendations
1. Service outreach to less represented groups	Many young people are still beyond the reach of youth information and counselling services, namely those from smaller towns and rural areas, unemployed youth and youth who are not in education or in employment (NEETs). In this sense, youth information and counselling services should develop specific strategies to increase their visibility and outreach among young people with this profile. This includes more personalised and adapted face-to-face outreach activities, as well as a more efficient and targeted use of new media and online channels.
2. Usage frequency and outreach	In order to increase the frequency of usage of users and to attract more non-users, youth information services must be easily accessible, attractive and more visible to young people. Mobile applications and online services should be enhanced and promoted among those who are reluctant to visit the centres. Furthermore, important stakeholders such as youth workers, parents, teachers and peers should be used as multipliers, especially to attract non-users of the services.
3. Areas of interest	Considering the main areas of interest rose by both groups of respondents and the perceived difficulty of access assigned to each area, youth information and counselling services must ensure more and more accessible information and counselling on entrepreneurship, housing, employment, and education. This includes also the development of strategic partnerships and collaboration with relevant stakeholders from these sectors.
4. Information channels and new media	Youth information and counselling services need to explore and apply innovative ways to inform and build young people's autonomy and resilience. This includes seizing the opportunities offered by emerging communication trends and new media. Presence on social media and search engine optimisation needs to be enhanced and effectively developed. Since face-to-face youth information and counselling is still more popular than most of the online options, youth information and counselling via video calls or instant messaging applications could also be included as channels to inform and bring a more personalised and human approach to online media.
5. Youth empowerment and participation	Innovative peer-to-peer youth information activities could be another effective way of increasing the outreach and access to reliable information, especially in the areas where young people show a preference for peer groups to get informed. For instance, the involvement of young multipliers and influencers in youth information activities are not only effective means of increasing the outreach of youth information services, but also a genuine way of empowering young people and ensuring their participation in youth information provision and promotion.

6. Media and information literacy	Youth information services are fully equipped to advise young people on how to research and evaluate information on how reliable it is. Media and information literacy must occupy an important part of youth information and counselling work. Workshops and training materials, which use youth-friendly media and methods, could be further developed to enhance the media and information literacy skills of young people. This will help young people to look at content with a critical eye, validate the quality and reliability of the information they access, evaluate the strategy and interest of those producing it, and create and multiply content in a responsible manner. "Fact Check" services and resources could be extremely effective.
7. Competence development of service providers	The exchange of good practices with peer youth information workers and the participation in training activities are milestones in the provision of quality youth information services. Apart from developing the service, youth information workers have to be equally trained to adapt to the upcoming changes and challenges. Constant and regular training on key and new areas, such as media and information literacy, innovative outreach methods, or digital competencies, must be ensured and part of the curriculum of youth information providers.
8. Further research on youth information and counselling services	Youth information is an under-researched area and it is important to invest more into understanding youth information trends and young people's information behaviour. This area is rapidly developing because of technological innovations and changing information and media landscapes. The survey highlights several issues that would need further research. The already collected data should be analysed further, using more advanced analytical methods. New data should be collected, using other data collection methods, such as interviews, to better understand motives behind young people's information seeking patterns.

In the era of mobile technology, wireless communication, and clouds of nonstop content, providing reliable information and appropriate counselling using popular online media and platforms is complex yet essential. Youth information services must build on their capacity to provide personalised and face-to-face services. This genuine characteristic and added value of the service must be combined with more efficient use of online media and channels. This approach will result in a more quantitative and qualitative outreach to the target group. In order to do so, the resources and means available for youth information and counselling services must be ensured and improved. In this way, they can truly contribute to making a difference to young people's lives.

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