

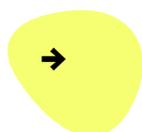
# Educational Briefing 2021

**Going digital together:  
pathways to inclusive citizenship  
education online**



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## **Glossary**

A glossary can be found on our website

# Introduction



Digital tools and ways of communication play a large role in the lives of most young people and their importance was amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic. From one day to the other, education, social activities, sports – all had to be moved from the physical to the digital space if possible. At Understanding Europe, too, we suddenly could no longer hold workshops in schools and organize trainings in the ways we were used to. And also we decided to move our activities online, to ensure that, especially in times of a global pandemic, we could continue to offer spaces for young people to connect, debate and empower each other. So, in spring 2020, an amazing team of Peer Trainers started to develop a digital EU-Crash-Course, which was implemented all around Europe in Fall 2020.

Even though the online setting, with its many new tools and ways of collaborative working, provided a great opportunity to continue our Network's mission, it also raised many new questions. In the wake of the pandemic, studies started to come out highlighting that in most cases, inequalities had increased due to online teaching,

with the most marginalised groups not having access to the tools and resources to successfully access quality digital education. We started to wonder how we could ensure that our non-formal workshop offers meet our aspiration to be diversity-sensitive and inclusive. Which tools work for most young people? How can trainers create a safer space digitally? And how can we make our digital workshops participatory?

The first part of this Educational Briefing deals with exactly these questions. In her article, Alicja Pawluczuk looks at the (lack of) digital inclusiveness in Europe and the inequalities in access to digital tools and Internet in particular. She shares tips for educators on how to digital access and competencies can be co-investigated together with young people. What we can learn from experiences of non-formal educational in the digital space is the focus of the article by our network members Ema Gonçalves and Henrique Rosário from Understanding Europe Portugal. They encourage educators to try out and use digital tools that can improve the learning experiences of students. More insights into digital participation formats can be gained from the interview with Daniela Toutpati, coordinator of Understanding Europe Belgium. She explains how digital citizenship assemblies work, what challenges may arise and how educators can overcome these.

Reflecting on how to design and provide access to digital formats is the first step to more inclusive digital education and participation. It is, however, equally important that young people have the skills and knowledge to navigate and participate in the online world. How to evaluate information, to interact, to share content, or to respond to hate speech online – these are all topics for which young people need room to share, reflect and debate. How this can be achieved in a (non-formal and formal) educational setting is what the second part of this Educational Briefing is about.

The article of Kansu Tanca Ekin, former Fellow of Understanding Europe, provides an introduction into what digital citizenship means and how this can be discussed with young people. She thereby highlights the important role that Peer Trainers can play in relating this topic to young people's own lived realities. How young people can learn how to identify and deal with misinformation is at the centre of the article of Thomas Nygren. Based on extensive research, he argues that games on misinformation and teaching fact-checking skills can "vaccinate" against misinformation. How these methods are received by young people can be learned from the article of Malik Eminoglu from Understanding Europe Germany. He shares his experiences in the classroom and stresses the importance of safer spaces, discussing definitions, and diversifying methods when talking about misinformation and fake news.

**We wish you a great read!**

STIFTUNG  
MERCATOR

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# Youth digital inclusion and democratic education: leaving no one behind

DR ALICJA PAWLUCZUK

## Introduction

In 2020, education was put on hold. The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the way young people accessed their learning environments, sourced and created knowledge, and interacted with their peers. To continue their work during the lockdown, educators had no choice but to 'go digital'. For some, this meant learning digital technologies from scratch. For others, it was all about taking their digital youth engagement to another level. Emerging from the stillness, education had to reinvent itself – and so had the European educators.

As an educator (and a non-formal digital education researcher), I've used digital technologies in teaching for just over a decade – and let me tell you, it's been and continues to be a bumpy learning journey. Over the years, I have experienced enjoyment and excitement related to the positive impact of technologies on students' learning and their self-development journey. Seeing young people embrace digital technologies to exercise their citizenship and strengthen their local communities has been inspiring. From using digital storytelling smartphone apps to raise awareness of local knife crime problems to co-creation of educational online materials on equal rights, with each project I had an opportunity to learn from young people - and to witness them learning from one another.

However, I have also faced challenges related to the use of digital technologies in education. I experienced issues related to young people's safety, digital skills (or lack thereof), learning difficulties, and/or access to digital devices and Internet connection, just to name a few. I had to consider these when designing and managing digital education initiatives. As new challenges and opportunities continued to arise in my education practice, I wondered: are all young people on board when it comes to the use of digital technologies in education? If not, how can I make it happen? Is it possible to make digitally enabled pedagogies inclusive? I will explore these questions in this article and provide tips for educators with the aim of building inclusivity into their digital education practice.

## Digital youth participation: the complex web of empowerment and disempowerment

Youth participation is about a meaningful transfer of power to the younger generations. From fundraising for a local skate park to influencing international policymaking, young people's engagement can be seen in Europe. Regardless of their aims, youth participatory projects have one thing in common – they aim to empower young people to find and sustain their agency. With many people involved, youth participation can also be seen as a complex web of interactions whereby different actors (e.g. educators, policy makers, young people) work towards a common goal: the co-creation of a more inclusive, just, and democratic society.

Just like its traditional forms, digital youth participation is not a fixed exercise, but a dynamic, responsive, and continually evolving practice. Youth digital participation can be understood as a process whereby young people use digital technologies (e.g. smartphones, social media) to participate in their societies. Youth digital participation can take place both offline (e.g. coding workshops, digital photography) and online (e.g. using smartphone to share their voices). There are the more formal types of youth digital participation (e.g. e-voting) and those often considered less formal such as online dance challenges. Both are equally important for young people's development.

Through the use of digital technologies, young people can develop their democratic skills such as tolerance for ambiguity, appreciation of diversity, self-efficacy (trust in one's own ability to act), flexibility, empathy, the ability to listen and a critical understanding of the world. In particular, through digitally mediated peer learning, young people can (and do) co-create social spaces and communities that share similar interests and experiences with each other. Examples include an integration peer learning platform for disadvantaged youth and refugees at

school level or a youth-centred participatory media project focusing on highlighting young people's views on media. If meaningful, youth digital participation can lead to young people's improved self-efficacy and agency.

Let's not forget that youth digital participation can also be disempowering. While some aspects of digital technologies can amplify young people's voices (e.g. online campaigns), others can disfigure or silence them (e.g. algorithmic selection). Young people's digital participation (or lack thereof) might be affected by intersectional factors such as social class, race, ethnicity, gender and disability. Barriers to disability related digital participation include a lack of subtitles on videos for deaf young people, the inability to magnify text/images or lack of spoken explanations for young people with visual impairments<sup>1</sup>. Young people living with low-income families are also at risk of **DIGITAL DEPRIVATION**<sup>2</sup>. Informed and meaningful youth digital participation require young people to also have sufficient digital competencies and the ability to exercise their human rights both offline and online<sup>3</sup>.

### **DIGITAL DEPRIVATION**

also called digital exclusion, digital deprivation refers to the situation in which parts of the population do not have access to suitable devices and internet connection, and/or insufficient digital skills.

- 1 Laura Lundy et al., "Two clicks forward and one click back: Report on children with disabilities in the digital environment", Council of Europe (2019).
- 2 Sara Ayllón, Halla Holmarsdóttir, Samuel Lado, "digitally deprived children in Europe", DigiGen – Working paper series, 3 (2021).
- 3 See, for example, this article on the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the rights of children online.

## Digital inclusiveness and education in Europe

Not all young people are able to equally benefit from digital technologies. In 2020, it was [estimated that over 15%](#) of young people have insufficient digital skills. Young peoples' quality of digital participation varies greatly across Europe. It is estimated that 5.3% of children in Europe were digitally deprived – living in a household that could not afford to have a computer. There are striking differences across Europe when it comes to digital deprivation – in Iceland, only about 0.4% of children are digitally deprived, while in Romania and Bulgaria the figure reaches 23.1% and 20.8%, respectively<sup>4</sup>. Young people's digital literacy levels also vary across Europe. For example, in countries such as Estonia, Lithuania, and the Netherlands, 93% of people aged 16 to 24 have [basic digital skills](#) while in Romania only 56% of young people do. There are still areas of Europe where up to 20% of students cannot use a computer for school<sup>5</sup>.

These digital inequalities might have a significant impact on the quality of digitally facilitated education. As indicated in the [European Digital Education Action Plan \(2021–2027\)](#), the pandemic revealed the importance of meaningful digital inclusion among educators and learners. They argue that on the European level, it is essential to ensure that all learners have equal access to digital education regardless of their geographical location or socio-economic status.

While many aspects of young people's digital participation strategies are beyond our control, we can try to make some areas more inclusive on a smaller scale. Below, I provide some tips on how to gain an understanding of 'where people are at' when it comes to digital access and tools. These tips are in no way exhaustive or set-in-stone and it is important to acknowledge their limitations. Please think of them as points of references that can be adjusted, remixed, and repurposed in different socio-economic and cultural settings. Most importantly, it is not about getting these tips right but to use them in a playful and responsive manner. In other words, feel free to experiment, play, learn and fail, if needed to.

### What are barriers to equal and effective online participation?

#### Sociocultural barriers



#### Political barriers



#### Financial barriers



#### Digital barriers and threats



#### Logistical barriers



#### Legal barriers



#### Physical barriers and threats



Infographic of the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub "Civic Participation of Youth in a Digital World" (2021), which focused on young civic actors in Europe and Central Asia.

4 Sara Ayllón, Halla Holmarsdóttir, Samuel Lado, "digitally deprived children in Europe", DigiGen – Working paper series, 3 (2021).

5 European Commission, "2nd Survey of Schools: ICT in Education." (2019).

# Inclusive digital education: areas for consideration

TIP  
**1**

## CO-INVESTIGATE YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIGITAL ACCESS

To begin with, we need to learn about young digital realities. Information such as young people's learning preferences, access to digital devices and reliable Internet connection are crucial when it comes to the design and delivery of teaching plans. As it might be difficult to expect all educators to have the skills and knowledge to measure learner's digital access levels, I propose that this type of initial assessment should be done with/by the young people in a co-creative manner. What are some of the most exciting aspects of using digital technologies in learning? What are some of the issues you face when using digital technologies? If you had all the power in the world, how would you fix them?

TIP  
**2**

## ADDRESS YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIGITAL NEEDS

When thinking about meaningful digital access we need to consider factors such as access to digital tools, reliable internet connection, and accessible content. As educators, we can try to provide young people with access to digital tools (e.g. computers, tablets). We might want to consider offering in-house devices or explore a loan system (especially for young people at risk of digital exclusion). The same goes for Internet access. Here we can consider taking some realistic steps to provide young people with internet connection and access to learning content within and outside the learning environment (e.g. pre-paid data cards, free Wi-Fi on site, learning content that can be used offline). Meaningful digital accessibility also includes understanding if our learning activities cater for different language and learning needs and disabilities. Tips for accessible learning content might, for example, include a transcription for video and audio resource.

TIP  
**3**

## CO-EXAMINE YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIGITAL COMPETENCIES

As educators we should try to get to know if and to what extent young peoples' digital competencies vary. To do this, we might want to facilitate a participatory exercise whereby people get a chance to reflect on their existing competencies. For young people the results of the exercise could serve as a basis for peer learning activities aiming to identify gaps, and then finding ways to address them. Educators can gain important information for learning design and implementation. To this end, you might want to ground your exercise in the Digital Competence Framework for Educators (DigCompEdu) or Data Citizenship Framework's visuals.

TIP  
**4**

## ADDRESS YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING NEEDS

Once you have gathered information about young people's digital competencies and their learning needs, you might want to explore options to address it. While many areas of digital competencies might be outside of your area of expertise, it might be useful to explore peer learning or invite experts with digital competencies to participate. There are also digital literacy resources that you can use. Examples include the Media Smart's lesson plans, LSE's Data and Privacy Toolkit, Tactical Tech's Data Detox Kit for Young People and **UNDERSTANDING EUROPE'S MATERIAL** on Fake News & Hate Speech.

**All the educational material developed by our fellows can be freely downloaded from our website.** It is also possible to book a Media-Crash-Course, in which our Trainers discuss with young people topics related to basic media skills. For more information, visit [our website](#).

## Conclusion: embracing our inadequacies, guilt, and failure

Let's face it, digital education can be overwhelming. In my previous research, I found out that many educators struggle with the use of digital technologies in their practice<sup>6</sup>. I learned about educator's' guilt, shame, and fear of failure when using digital technologies in their work. On many levels, I could relate to it myself. What if my skills are not adequate? What if our project fails? While it is important to consider these questions, we should not feel limited by them. As modes of learning are changing in unpredicted ways, we should try to cultivate an agile mind-set and learn from young people.



### Further reading

**If you'd like to read more about research, guidelines, and practice use of digital technologies in education,** you might want to take a look at [Developing Digital Youth Work](#), a EU publication exploring some of the risks and opportunities of digitalisation for youth, youth work and youth policy. Then there is the EU's [Digital Education Plan \(2021–2027\)](#), an European Union (EU) policy initiative to support sustainable and effective education in the digital age. Practical examples of digital youth transformation topics and good practice can be found in [SALTO-PI's Flagship Projects](#) as well as the [European digital youth work platform](#).

#### About the author

**Dr Alicja Pawluczuk** is an ICTD Research Fellow at the United Nations University and the Strategic Consultant in defining Digital Transformation in EU Youth Programmes at SALTO PI. Alicja's research and community education practice focuses on digital youth work, youth digital inclusion, and gender digital inclusion. Using participatory, critical, and multidisciplinary approaches, she aims to examine the power dynamics associated with the digital and data divides.

<sup>6</sup> Alicja Pawluczuk et al., "[Digital youth work: youth workers' balancing act between digital innovation and digital literacy insecurity](#)", Information Research 24, no. 1 (2019).

# Challenges and opportunities for peer education in the digital space

EMA GONÇALVES & HENRIQUE ROSÁRIO

For the past year and a half, we have been forced to change the way we live our lives, perhaps permanently. Granted, these changes affected everyone differently, but it was the educational sector that took one of the largest blows. At Understanding Europe, we suddenly found ourselves not in classrooms but in digital Zoom rooms instead. So what was it like delivering non-formal education online?

## The digital world can make learning more dynamic

Like in formal education, at Understanding Europe Portugal, we too had to find **NEW DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND TOOLS FOR ALL OUR ACTIVITIES**. And we are proud to say that it worked!

We noticed that oftentimes these digital platforms are not used to their fullest potential. But with features such as hand raising or live notes on presentations, they can make learning more dynamic. For example, as an ice-breaker we usually play the game “The Map of Europe” where students have to locate themselves. In a classroom, students would position themselves in the physical space, moving through the room. Now that we have moved to the digital space, we wander around a digital map and use virtual pins to mark our homes. Similarly, we used the hand raising tool and different symbols in Zoom to make **“EUROPE IN 4 CORNERS”** happen digitally. As it turned out, these new ways of doing exercises online actually made some students feel more at ease and willing to participate.

### DIGITAL EU-CRASH-COURSE

Thanks to our working group “Digital EU-Crash-Course” we now also offer an interactive digital version of the [EU-Crash-Course](#).

### EUROPE IN 4 CORNERS

The activity „Europe in 4 Corners” is used to create an atmosphere of recognition and can offer space for discussing controversial issues. More information and example questions can be [downloaded here](#).

While we are on this subject, it is important to talk about what we believe to be one of the best digital collaboration methods: to work collectively on a single document such as on Miro, Jamboard, Mural or Google Docs (which was also used to write this very text). Creating content together proved to be a very simple way of increasing ownership over the process and increasing students' engagement as well as being great for group projects. This worked especially well in the **"HISTORY WORKSHOP"** as the students could move around the history cards freely and contribute as much as they wanted to towards the final result. In other words, there's a lot of freedom to be gained in this digital transition as students have a more hands-on approach to their educational process.

#### **HISTORY WORKSHOP**

Understanding Europe's "History Workshop" is part of the EU-Crash-Course. All Timeline Cards used during the workshop can be downloaded [here](#).

## **Making European citizenship education truly European**

There is another great advantage that online classes have: they eliminate geographical barriers. This means that there is nothing preventing someone who previously might not have been able to attend due to distance or time-limits (such as an expert or field worker) from joining in and giving insight or sharing their expertise. For example, we managed to have two MEPs join us for a digital session, enabling the students to interact with them and present their ideas and doubts.

The digital world also allowed members of Understanding Europe Portugal to facilitate an EU-Crash-Course together with Understanding Europe Belgium, an amazing experience that wouldn't have been possible if not for distance learning. We exchanged different points of view about our political realities, compared our countries' history as well as the situation related to Covid-19. It was also interesting to see what kind of activities work better in each country. Such cross-border exchange enabled us to see and exchange different realities and even different solutions to deal with similar problems. Having trainers from different countries holding courses together is therefore something that we should keep on doing even when courses can take place in the classroom once again.

### **To summarize:**

There is no substitute for live, face-to-face interaction between trainers and students. Masks and screens make it hard to interpret body language and we have all experienced the lack of connection and interaction because of self-isolation. This is where good digital programs and platforms as well as communicative and engaging trainers are needed.

From trainers to students, the digital transition affected everyone, forcing us to teach or learn from a distance. The pressure is on us as young people, but if we put in the effort, we are also the ones who will get the most out of it.

TIP  
**1**

## CREATE A PERSONAL ATMOSPHERE

It is important that students can interact and feel connected. Use breakout rooms in the workshops so students can feel closer and more comfortable to share. Engage students with different types of icebreakers.

TIP  
**2**

## EXPLORE DIGITAL TOOLS

Irrespective of the Covid-19 pandemic, it seems likely that the digital space will become more and more important in the education sector. Through this process, many new innovative and useful tools may be developed. There are plenty of opportunities out there, you just have to look!

TIP  
**3**

## AFTER EXPLORING COMES COMMITMENT

Sometimes we tend to want to explore every single tool there is and there's nothing wrong with that. But in the end, a few good tools and applications can be the right answer. It's important to know an application in depth and to be able to work with it effectively. That way, you can answer any questions or doubts the students might have and make them confident in the tool.

### About the authors

**Emma Gonçalves** is a 22-year-old International Relations student who joined Understanding Europe last year in hopes of inspiring civic participation among her peers and to try to demystify the bridge that separated them from the EU's decisions and functions. Although two years of online learning has been difficult, she still believes in the amazing advantages it has, especially for amplifying the exchange of ideas.

**Henrique Rosário** is a 19-year-old Mechanical Engineering student from Porto University who joined Understanding Europe in 2019 and the European Youth Parliament in 2018. Although he is interested in many areas, he is especially motivated to learn and raise awareness about European affairs. He believes we must now learn to do our best on the digital format and keep being active citizens!

# Understanding Europe Belgium and its Assemblies of Solidarity: a talk with Daniela Toutpati

**In the framework of the EU's "Conference on the Future of Europe", you organized two online Assemblies of Solidarity in cooperation with Citizens Take Over Europe. Can you tell us a bit more about the format?**

**Daniela Toutpati:** The two **ASSEMBLIES OF SOLIDARITY** that Understanding Europe Belgium organised took place on the 23rd and 25th of June this year. As you said, they both took place online and went really well! The first assembly was a debate about the environment and climate change. The second was a debate about democracy and fundamental rights. Both assemblies enabled the participants to generate recommendations on the matter, which were published on the [digital platform for the Conference on the Future of Europe](#) and will feed into the debates at the Citizen Panels of the Conference. For example, a common recommendation from both assemblies was investing in education as a lifelong commitment to fight climate change and discrimination. The EU should support its member states equally to include pressing topics in their curriculums and educate people about them from a very young age.

## ASSEMBLIES OF SOLIDARITY

The Assemblies of Solidarity take place alongside the EU's ongoing Conference on the Future of Europe. They were initiated by Citizens Take Over Europe and aim at placing a diverse group of citizens, and especially young people, at the centre of the conversation about the future of Europe. For more information, visit [this Website](#).

**Often, such participation events take place in person. What was different in the digital space?**

**Daniela Toutpati:** The most special aspect about both Assemblies of Solidarity was their accessibility. Online events give participants a great opportunity to join from remote places on the planet. As such, it is very inclusive and practical. Our participants joined from different countries. This added to the debate because the participants often had different opinions and perspectives depending on the country where they were based. Often, it is thought that diverse audiences are difficult to monitor. However, in our case, the discussions went very smoothly. We set a few discussion rules at the beginning of the meeting and we used the 'raise hand' option provided by the platform. Thanks to this, the discussion was still very organised and respectful, despite participants not always agreeing with each other. I was therefore very happy to host the assemblies in this format and enable all the interested participants to take part in it.

**That sounds really interesting. I could also imagine that digital events come with some difficulties. Did you experience any of those?**

**Daniela Toutpati:** While being quite practical in terms of accessibility, online events like the two assemblies can be less interesting for people who are used to doing things online. In fact, in such restricting times like the Covid-19 pandemic, people get easily bored of online events or they forget about them. Out of curiosity, I asked for the participants' opinions on the matter, and they all shared this feeling. For example, in our second assembly, there were a few people joining the event late because they forgot about it. For the assemblies, we were planning to get around 15 people for the first one and 20 people for the second one. Yet, only seven and nine people were present respectively. Therefore, if you are planning

to organize special events like the Assemblies of Solidarity, always make sure that you have enough people and that you give them enough time to prepare and adapt the setting to their needs.

### **How did you respond to having a much smaller group than expected?**

**Daniela Toutpati:** Although it was frustrating at first and discouraging to only have a few people, I would say both assemblies were a success. We had invited experts to join us, and it was actually very nice for the participants to be a small group as they had the opportunity to ask more questions. It was also a lot easier for us to work on the recommendations with fewer people. So don't worry if you end up with a smaller group! It is often easier to work with fewer people than with larger groups.

### **The Assemblies of Solidarity aim to collect opinions and ideas of EU citizens and to foster a debate about the vision for the Future of Europe. How did that work out in your digital assemblies?**

**Daniela Toutpati:** In both assemblies, I noticed that the participants were interested in each other's opinions and in what the experts had to say on the matter. Whenever one of them raised a question, the others would react to it. But I also have to say that formulating recommendations turned out to be a bit difficult, because the time was very short, and people found it challenging to formulate complete recommendations. For future formats

like these, I would consider concentrating on brainstorming and debates. Furthermore, although experts can be very helpful and interesting to listen to, next time I would rather invite them at the end of the event, to fully enable participants to be the 'experts' themselves during the brainstorming.

### **You already started yourself, but do you have further recommendations for other young (peer) educators who would like to organize such a digital participation event?**

**Daniela Toutpati:** Firstly, be a realist! Always make sure that you have enough time to organise the event. Rushed things are never ideal, especially in a digital setting! Secondly, invite more people than expected, because you will always have a few participants who will not be able to join. Ask participants to be honest about their attendance, by telling them how important it is for you to know. Send reminders about the event, with all the practical information needed to join. Next, be yourself and do the things that make you feel comfortable. It is good to challenge yourself, but dare to do so only if you really feel like doing it, especially in the digital setting. Furthermore, always make sure that there is someone else present to help you with the technical aspects of the platform. It is really difficult to answer technical questions and lead the event at the same time! Also, you might get people who will encounter difficulties while joining the event. Someone needs to be able to assist them through the various steps. Always ask the participants if they understood the content. You need to make sure that what they have to do is clear. I always like to make small summaries of what has been said in the discussion. Lastly, encourage participants to talk as much as possible, but never force them to do something they do not want to do. This counts for both in-person and digital settings. Balance your power as a leader in the discussion. The participants need to fill the event with their ideas, you need to guide them through the process. Ask questions like, what do you think? Would someone who has not spoken before also like to express their thoughts on the matter? Does anyone want to add anything else on the matter? Does everybody agree with what has been said? Etc.



**Thank you, Daniela, I am sure that will be very helpful for other educators, too!**

**Are there any last things that you would like to tell the readers?**

**Daniela Toutpati:** In such uncertain times, the internet has turned out to be our best ally. Not only has it enabled us all to keep in touch, but it has also helped us to continue our dream at Understanding Europe: to educate ourselves and others about Europe and our society. The EU's Conference on the Future of Europe' is a truly wonderful opportunity that we have to change our society. With this, I would like to encourage all the brave young people out there to value and fight for education in our society because we have the power and time to change what is broken. To conclude, I would love to cite a dear Professor from KU Leuven, Steven Van Hecke, whose words deeply inspired me at our last assembly, "read, learn, teach and repeat!". Wishing you all the very best, I hope you will take good value from it.



**Daniela Toutpati**

**Daniela Toutpati** is a 22 year old master's student in Educational Sciences at the VUB. She has been active in the project Understanding Europe Belgium since 2018 and is currently coordinating the project. Daniela strongly believes in the power of non-formal education for change and strongly supports youth activities. She has hosted two Assemblies of Solidarity with young people in Belgium, alongside the Conference on the Future of Europe.

# Digital citizenship for young people from a peer education approach

KANSU EKIN TANCA

## Overview of digital citizenship

**DIGITAL CITIZENS** are active and responsible members of the digital world. A better understanding of digital citizenship comes not only with a focus on the preconditions of digital citizenship, like regular access to the internet and digital technologies and skills, but also with a critical reflection on the reasons for and costs of being offline, such as digital inequality, **DIGITAL DIVIDE**, and digital exclusion.

Concentrating on self-efficacy and digital participation in particular digital citizenship goes hand in hand with the Council of Europe's "Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (CDCs)"<sup>7</sup>. The CDCs were developed to foster "a set of attitudes and behaviours that emphasise dialogue and cooperation, solving conflicts by peaceful means, and active participation in public space"<sup>8</sup>. The values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding specified in CDCs also apply to the digital space and they are fundamental if we aspire to become a pluralistic and democratic digital society. Not enough focus has yet been given to the CDCs and their application in the digital world<sup>9</sup>, yet with increasing online engagement, it is necessary to consider how digital participation and self-efficacy can be achieved online.

### DIGITAL CITIZENS

- use digital technologies regularly and effectively,
- appreciate the opportunities and acknowledge the challenges online,
- interact, communicate, socialise responsibly and contribute positively,
- exercise critical digital literacy skills while navigating and participating online,
- realise, protect and respect rights online.

### DIGITAL DIVIDE

The term "digital divide" refers to the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard to both their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities."

In OECD, <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=4719>, last access 04.11.2021

7 Martyn Barrett et al.: "Competences for Democratic Culture - Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies", Council of Europe (2016).

8 Sjur Bergan, "About the project Competences for Democratic Culture and Intercultural Dialogue," Council of Europe, last accessed 04.11.2021.

9 Janice Richardson and Elizabeth Milovidov, "Digital Citizenship Education Handbook," Council of Europe (2019).

## Digital participation as an empowering and inclusive experience

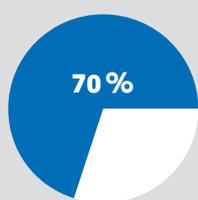
The internet has increasingly become an integral part of our lives and each young internet user has unique experiences while participating online. When examined broadly, “digital participation” can bring many definitions to mind. However, from a rights- and resilience-based approach, digital participation pertains to **inclusive, engaging, empowering, inspiring and nourishing experiences online**. This means that young people can enjoy their rights and benefit from the opportunities online, are protected against risks and can tackle the challenges they face online<sup>10</sup>.

In learning settings, peer trainers can introduce ‘digital participation’ as an opportunity to dig deeper into digital citizenship and to show how digital citizenship is linked to an awareness of how to participate online. While talking about digital participation, it is the trainers’ role to take a holistic approach, in which participation is not only talked about but also experienced in the classroom. This requires the trainer to be open to learning about young people’s thoughts and experiences without generalising their participation online. It is important to give young people an open space to reflect on how they interact on the internet and on social media, how they use information and communication technologies and how they consume and create digital media online. The trainer can provide visuals, caricatures, data-based

graphs to facilitate discussion, help young people share their perspectives and observations, and talk about prejudices or misconceptions online.

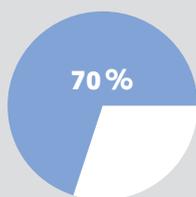
Based on young people’s own thoughts on and experiences with digital participation, a discussion can be held on the impacts of digital participation (in a broader sense and also in the context of digital citizenship) on individuals and on societies. As shared experiences build connections among young people, a peer trainer can initiate and facilitate the discussion on digital citizenship. By building on the CDCs and the definition of digital citizenship, it is important for the trainer to highlight how informed, skilled and responsible citizens can enhance democracy in digital spaces.

### How do young activists use digital realm and social media platforms?

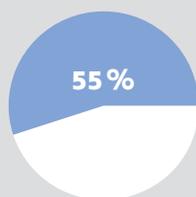


Up to **70%** agreed that online activism gave higher visibility to important issues

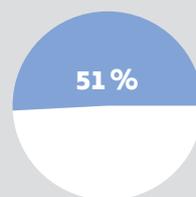
#### Most promoted causes online



Education



Human rights and social justice



Activities for youth

Infographic of the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub “Civic Participation of Youth in a Digital World” (2021), which focused on young civic actors in Europe and Central Asia.

<sup>10</sup> Stoilova, Mariya, Sonia Livingstone and Rana Khazbak, “Investigating Risks and Opportunities for Children in a Digital World: A rapid review of the evidence on children’s internet use and outcomes,” Innocenti Discussion Papers no. 2021-01, (Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, 2021).

## The role of the peer trainer while discussing rights and responsibilities online

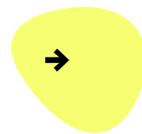
In formal and informal learning settings, a peer trainer plays an important role in encouraging fruitful conversations and promoting self-efficacy in young people. Rights and responsibilities online are better understood when young people are given a chance to discuss each point in relation to concrete examples from their daily lives. Considering this aspect, the trainer takes on the role of door-opener, introducing them to the topic, motivating them to speak, helping them connect the concepts to their lives, prompting questions to further generate ideas and ensuring that diverse opinions are reflected.

Having possibly lived through similar experiences, the peer trainer is better equipped to react to the concerns raised by young people and to address them without portraying a dystopian version of the digital world. During the discussion, the trainer should acknowledge that online risks (e.g. cyberbullying, phishing) exist and recognise the challenges faced in the digital space (e.g. digital security, privacy, and well-being). At times, it might be tempting to accuse social media platforms, malicious actors or users that deliberately damage the digital space of creating threats and risks online. However, this should not mean that young people have to be excluded from the digital world in an attempt to 'protect' them.

On the contrary, the direction of the conversation should be towards digital citizenship and youth empowerment, rather than self-censorship or exclusion. Digital participation should be prioritised and attention should be given to what digital citizenship offers. Here, reminding young people of their own agency in contributing to a safe, inclusive, empowering and democratic digital space can increase their feeling of self-efficacy and make them better equipped to navigate our digital world.

### To summarize

For most young people, the offline and online worlds have become inseparable and intertwined. Yet the bridge between those is still being built. Reflecting on how citizenship, rights and responsibilities apply online has the power to bring democratic culture online.



### Further reading

The workshop “A Path to Digital Citizenship: Our Rights and Responsibilities Online” developed by Kansu Ekin Tanca can be accessed [here](#).

#### About the author

**Kansu Ekin Tanca** is interested in digital citizenship and youth participation in the digital world. Her master's degree is from the Centre International de Formation Européenne where she studied the rights-based approach to children's digital literacy. She voluntarily contributes to the Journal of Media Literacy Education as an editorial assistant and currently works as the Head of Education at the independent fact-checking organisation, Teyit, based in Turkey where she leads educational projects and conducts workshops on critical digital literacy, mis/disinformation and fact-checking. She is a Fellow in the Digital Europe Programme (2021) by Schwarzkopf Foundation and Alfred Herhausen Gesellschaft as part of the Educational Network Understanding Europe.

# Research-based education against disinformation

THOMAS NYGREN

In today's digital world, there are ample opportunities for people to engage with news from all corners of the world. The opportunity for people to meet and actively participate in various actions online is a democratic opportunity that can work in an inclusive and engaging way. People may, for instance, connect with friends across the globe in actions to promote human rights and ecological sustainability. However, in order to exploit this potential, one must also be aware that digital information flows can be misleading and create problems. Ten years ago, the Internet was seen primarily as a democratic resource that could be used to overthrow tyrannical dictators<sup>11</sup>. Activists for democracy and human rights were able to gather forces on social media and act more forcefully, not least in closed societies where the men in power also controlled the information through state propaganda apparatus.

Since then, technology has increasingly been used for the opposite. It is used, for example, to silence and oppress minorities and dissidents. Free speech is challenged through disinformation campaigns aimed at creating conflicts and undermining democracy<sup>12</sup>. The challenge exists throughout the world and even stable democracies in Europe need to defend themselves against misleading information and fake news in the form of texts, images and videos<sup>13</sup>.

It is often emphasised that it is important at the national and supranational level to ensure that hatred and lies on social media are counteracted. But legislation and efforts from large Internet companies can only partially protect citizens, not least because automatic fact-checking has difficulty identifying misleading information. It is also a threat to freedom of speech to ban everything that seems untrue. Therefore, the defence of democracy must also include citizens who can manage their news feeds in a way that keeps them informed instead of misinformed<sup>14</sup>.



<sup>11</sup> Zeynep Tufekci, "How social media took us from Tahrir Square to Donald Trump". MIT Technology Review 14, no. 18.

<sup>12</sup> European Political Strategy Centre, "Election interference in the digital age: Building resilience to cyber-enabled threats". (Brussels: European Commission, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> European Commission, [Action plan against disinformation](#). Joint communication to the European parliament, the European council, the council, the European economic and social committee (2018).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

## Knowing what information to trust and where to find it

Research shows that it can be difficult to stay informed. For example, misinformation about Covid-19 has spread around the world and people who download their news from social media seem to believe more in these myths<sup>15</sup>. Unfortunately, there exists a digital divide between groups with better knowledge and skills to handle digital news and those with less who are more gullible<sup>16</sup>.

Good subject knowledge makes us better at assessing credibility. If you have good knowledge about a certain topic then it is harder to mislead you. Therefore, researchers advocate for education with a focus on subject knowledge in combination with knowledge of how and where to find good information<sup>17</sup>. Knowing where good information is and what is a credible source, is as important as source criticism in order to be a well-informed citizen<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, it is good if teaching in all subjects highlights where information can be found, and who can be trusted.

## Nobody is exempt from misleading information

Having a trustworthy news feed is a good basis for being able to identify when something does not seem to be right in discussions on various topics. But we can all be deceived by misleading information. Even professors and students at elite universities can have great difficulty distinguishing credible information from nicely packaged misleading information<sup>19</sup>. New technology makes it possible to manipulate videos, so-called deepfake, and deceive even those with good knowledge of digital technology<sup>20</sup>. One reason why it is easy to be fooled is that today's social media presents information in a nice way. Moreover, the speed of news flow means that we rarely stop and think about whether something is true or not before sharing misleading information<sup>21</sup>.

When we become emotionally involved, it can easily go wrong<sup>22</sup>. Excessive self-confidence has also been linked to people's inability to distinguish between more and less credible information<sup>23</sup>. Being completely certain can thus be about ignorance, not least among teenagers<sup>24</sup>.

15 Jon Rozenbeek et al., "[Susceptibility to misinformation about COVID-19 around the world](#)", *Royal Society open science* 7, no.10 (2020): 201199.

16 Thomas Nygren & Mona Guath, "[Students evaluating and corroborating digital news](#)", *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* (2021): 1-17.

17 Thomas Nygren. "Fakta, fejk och fiktion : Ämnesdidaktisk digital kompetens för lärare." (2019).

18 Jutta Haidar & Olof Sundin. "[Information literacy challenges in digital culture: conflicting engagements of trust and doubt](#)", *Information, Communication & Society*, (2020): 1-16.

19 Sam Wineburg & Sarah McGrew. "[Lateral Reading: Reading Less and Learning More When Evaluating Digital Information](#).", *Stanford History Education Group Working Paper*, no.2017-A1 (2017).

20 Nils Köbis, Barbora Doležalová & Ivan Soraperra. "[Fooled Twice—People Cannot Detect Deepfakes But Think They Can](#)." (2021).

21 Pennycook, Gordon, and David G. Rand. "[Lazy, not biased: Susceptibility to partisan fake news is better explained by lack of reasoning than by motivated reasoning](#)." *Cognition* 188 (2019): 39-50.

22 Martel, Cameron, Gordon Pennycook, and David G. Rand. "[Reliance on emotion promotes belief in fake news](#)." *Cognitive research: principles and implications* 5, no. 1 (2020): 1-20.

23 Köbis et al.; Lyons, Benjamin A. et al.. "[Overconfidence in news judgments is associated with false news susceptibility](#)." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 23 (2021).

24 Nygren, Thomas, and Mona Guath. "[Swedish teenagers' difficulties and abilities to determine digital news credibility](#)." *Nordicom Review* 40, no. 1 (2019): 23-42.

## Battling disinformation through new educational strategies

Research on education against disinformation emphasises that we all benefit high quality education that is accessible for all. It is also important that people have access to media that conveys credible news, including public service media that can support well-informed citizens. The European educational tradition is thus an important contribution to the defence against misinformation. Yet, new digital environments also require new types of education that enable critical thinking and new technical skills.

Assuming the role of manipulator in a [game about fake news](#) (“Bad News Game”) can make young people in different European countries more critical of misleading information<sup>25</sup>. A small dose of bad intentions can make us better at dealing with this – this is called pre-bunking. Being able to play around with various forms of disinformation can provide an improved resilience to this. Games can be used as an opportunity to ‘vaccinate’ against misinformation about politics ([“Breaking Harmony Square”](#)) and coronavirus ([“Go Viral”](#))<sup>26</sup>.

Another updated way to deal with misleading information is to think and act as a fact checker. Teaching where young people can use cognitive strategies and digital tools to verify information has been shown to have good effects on their ability to distinguish between credible and misleading information. Through a [short self-test with video-tutorials and built-in feedback](#) (“The News Evaluator”), it is possible to learn about debunking in just 20 minutes<sup>27</sup>.

Relying on digital tools to identify manipulated images and videos has also proven to be good in classrooms in different parts of Europe<sup>28</sup>. Students in France, Romania, Spain, and Sweden who learned to use the video verification tool InvidWeVerify became clearly better at identifying fake photos and videos after two hours of teaching. Especially those students who, after the self-test or teaching, used digital tools, such as text searches or reverse image search, to debunk misleading news.

Leaving a page with questionable information and doing text and image searches with various digital tools is an ability that all citizens need to possess. It is impossible nowadays to see what is genuine or manipulated if it is well-made fake news. Those who think they can distinguish a fake video from a real video are fooling themselves<sup>29</sup>. Instead, critical thinking, in combination with technical skills, is required to double-check information like fact-checkers, and this can be learned through education.

Thus, there are many challenges with misleading information that can and should be addressed in education. Given the complexity of this threat to democracy, young people today need a broad and good education that ensures that they then have strong subject knowledge and awareness of which sources to trust. Given the digital divide in society, it is important that young people, especially in socio-economically vulnerable environments, have access to education that stimulates their intellectual, emotional and digital skills. Unfortunately, there is no quick and easy solution to the problem of digital disinformation but teaching that ‘vaccinates’ (pre-bunking) and teaches science-based strategies for fact-checking (debunking) is a good start.

25 Roozenbeek, Jon, Sander van der Linden, and Thomas Nygren. “Prebunking interventions based on the psychological theory of ‘inoculation’ can reduce susceptibility to misinformation across cultures.” *Harv Kennedy Sch Misinformation Rev* 2020b 1 (2020).

26 Rakoen Maertens, Jon Roozenbeek, Melisa Basol, and Sander van der Linden. “Long-term effectiveness of inoculation against misinformation: Three longitudinal experiments.” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied* 27, no. 1 (2021): 1.; Roozenbeek, Jon, and Sander van der Linden. “Breaking Harmony Square: A game that ‘inoculates’ against political misinformation.” *The Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review* (2020).

27 Carl-Anton Werner Axelsson, Mona Guath, and Thomas Nygren. “Learning how to separate fake from real news: Scalable digital tutorials promoting students’ civic online reasoning.” *Future Internet* 13, no. 3 (2021): 60.

28 Nygren, Thomas, Mona Guath, Carl-Anton Werner Axelsson, and Divina Frau-Meigs. “Combating Visual Fake News with a Professional Fact-Checking Tool in Education in France, Romania, Spain and Sweden.” *Information* 12, no. 5 (2021): 201.

29 Kóbis et al. (2021).



## Resources to support prebunking

### **Bad News Game**

<https://www.getbadnews.com/#intro>

### **Breaking Harmony Square**

<https://harmonysquare.game/en>

### **Go Viral**

<https://www.goviralgame.com/books/go-viral/>



## Resources to support debunking

### **The News Evaluator**

<https://newsevaluator.com/>

### **YouCheck!**

<http://project-youcheck.com/toolkit/>

### **Civic Online Reasoning**

<https://cor.stanford.edu/>

### **About the author**

**Thomas Nygren** is Associate Professor at the Department of Education at Uppsala University. His research interests focus on history and civics education, the digital impact on education, critical thinking and human rights education. More information about Thomas Nygren and his work can be found [here](#).

# Understanding Fake News – Insights into the origins and consequences of misinformation

MALIK EMINOGLU

## Development of a new media course format

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we not only digitized our Understanding Europe courses for students, but also took the opportunity to make digitization itself the content of new courses. As part of the project “Peer Education And Gamification Against Polarization (PEGAP)”, we developed a new online course format together with our project partners Diversion, DROG, Fryshuset, AEGEE and Uppsala University, focusing on the topic of “Fake News & Disinformation”.

During the preparation, we noticed that for us as co-developers of the project, this subject was highly relevant. Whilst doing research for the course, each member of the team found several examples of false information we had encountered ourselves. In some cases, these were supposed facts that we had believed to be true until we were only made aware otherwise through our research. But would the participants have similar experiences?

## Including personal experiences

During the first few courses, it quickly became apparent that the choice of focus was a success. Despite the course being digital, there was a high level of interest and the participants were very engaged. In fact, they felt the same way we did, and they had personal stories and experiences to share on almost every topic. These ranged from gossip about celebrities to pictures on political news that were taken out of context. We noticed that the participants’ engagement and attention increased significantly after the first personal experiences were shared, which is why we decided to provide ample room for this.

## Safer spaces

At the beginning of some of the courses, participants were somewhat shy when it came to sharing personal experiences of the topic. In these cases, it turned out to be especially helpful if the trainers had thought about and prepared their own stories on the topic before and could share these during the course. This created a much more open discussion where many participants felt comfortable to share their own stories, vulnerabilities and problems of understanding.

To facilitate the sharing of personal experiences, we always tried to maintain a safe and sensitive atmosphere. At the beginning of the course, we introduced a few rules, such as the importance of respectful treatment of other experiences and drew attention to those rules throughout the whole course.

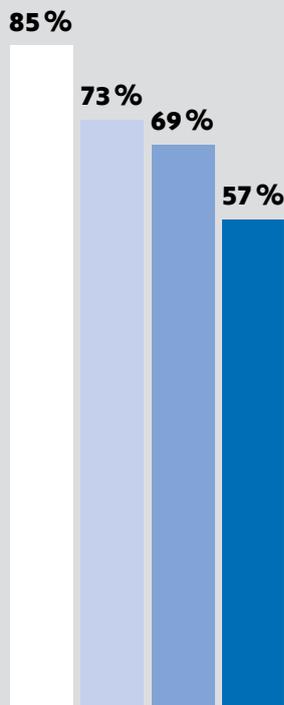


## Varying prior knowledge

In terms of content, it became apparent that the course participants had very different levels of prior knowledge on the topic. On average, however, most of them had some understanding of fake news and disinformation and had heard of most of the terms at least once before. However, a closer look revealed that much of the knowledge was only rudimentary, and that it was worthwhile to deepen it. It turned out to be important to define the terms precisely, since they were often used very differently by young people. For example, many used the term “fake news” to talk about intentionally false information, while others used the term for any kind of false information (even unintentional). For this topic, it is especially important to pay attention to the exact terminology in order to understand and clarify the intentions and consequences of misinformation.

### What are the challenges young activists face when they participate and engage online?

- There is a lot of fake news on social media
- I am worried about extremist content online
- The internet creates polarisation of opinions and public discourse
- Data is not protected and views could be used against them



Infographic of the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub “Civic Participation of Youth in a Digital World” (2021), which focused on young civic actors in Europe and Central Asia.



60% of women say gender impacted how others reacted to their civic views, compared to men.

## Diverse teaching methods

It also turned out that, despite many breaks, the scheduled four hours was perceived to be rather long by many participants. To counteract this, it was important that we used different teaching methods.

The first block of the course includes a game in which the participants put themselves in the role of spreaders of fake news aiming to gain as many followers as possible. They learn about different motives and practices of spreading fake news and how to recognize them. The game was particularly popular with participants. Already after the test round, most of them were very motivated and started to strategize how to gain a large reach by spreading fake news. In their feedback participants told us that a game like this is perfect for introducing new content in a digital setting, as they felt they gained a lot of insight in a playful setting.

The video examples in the second block proved to be particularly helpful in bringing the content to a more personal level. They illustrated that it is quite normal to fall for fake news and that this also happens to more experienced peers. Moreover, they provided an opportunity for participants to share similar stories. In the third block, we worked on methods to recognize fake news more quickly and easily and discussed how young people can deal with situations in which other people have not identified fake news as such. In this block, we could see how relevant the topic really is for the young people. Despite the more classical teaching format of this block, they participated actively and were eager to develop methods to deal with fake news in everyday life.

### BAD NEWS GAME

The single-player version of the “Bad-News-Game” can be tested [here](#).

## Discussing Fake News in the classroom – what to consider:

TIP  
**1**

### DON'T BE INTIMIDATED BY ITS COMPLEXITY

The topic of fake news and disinformation is very complex. It is therefore especially important to clarify that it is okay or even normal not to understand each and every aspect of it or to be able to explain all terminology accurately. It is also common that terms related to digital media are used in different ways. It is therefore worthwhile defining the terms you use at the beginning of a course to avoid any misunderstandings.

TIP  
**2**

### COMPLEX TOPICS NEED A SAFE LEARNING SPACE

Creating a safe learning space and a confidential discussion space is essential when working with young people's everyday experiences. Participants tend to only share their personal experiences if they know they will not be judged or laughed at. It is important to create this space as personal experiences are essential to maximizing learning potential.

TIP  
**3**

### ATTENTION SPAN IN THE DIGITAL FORMAT IS SIGNIFICANTLY SHORTER

It is therefore advisable to keep courses short and concise. Alternating between different teaching methods and settings turned out to be extremely helpful in extending the attention span of the participants.

TIP  
**4**

### SHARING LIVED EXPERIENCES IS KEY

All in all, the topic has great potential, as it resonates strongly with young people. It is worthwhile to use your own experiences as entry points to enable experiential learning on a more personal level and thus arouse greater interest among the target group.

#### About the author

**Malik Eminoglu** has been working with the Schwarzkopf Foundation since 2017 as a trainer and supports the development of new teaching formats. His focus is on media education and he has worked with national and international projects such as "Good News" in cooperation with SpiegelEd and "Under Pressure", a project of the PEGAP consortium. As a Peer Educator of Understanding Europe, he is also involved in the training of trainers. Malik is studying IT Management & Consulting at the University of Hamburg.

# Understanding Europe

*Understanding Europe* is an educational network by and for young people committed to civic participation and to a democratic and open-minded Europe. At the centre of the project are young peers aged between 16 and 27. Active in youth-led organisations in thirteen European countries, they form the project's [European network](#) and shape it on many levels and in different capacities. The project creates a safe space for learning and collaboration, offering young people opportunities to explore, get to know themselves and better understand other world views.

The peers facilitate workshops on politics, media and democratic participation in schools and other educational settings in their countries. Currently, there are two digital and in-person workshops available for students and young people aged 14 and older: the [EU-Crash-Course](#) and the [Media-Crash-Course](#). The formats are based on the approach of Peer Education, which aims to strengthen participation and self-determination. The peers act as role models and mediators at eye level with young people in and out of classrooms.

Peers are prepared for their work in classrooms through a qualification programme. Following the concept of [democratic citizenship education](#), it provides knowledge and skills to enable young people to actively participate in society. Engaging with inclusive, diversity-sensitive and racism-critical approaches plays a central role.

As part of a [fellowship programme](#), young educators, supported by experts, develop new workshop formats for the network. The project's educational materials and publications are freely available and are aimed at peer trainers, teachers and multipliers in school and in non-formal education.

*Understanding Europe* is a project of the [Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe](#), funded by the [Mercator Foundation](#).

[www.understanding-europe.org](http://www.understanding-europe.org)

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