

## Building a culture of respect online: young people take the lead!

In today's hyper-connected world, being online doesn't always mean being safe. Across Europe, many adolescents experience anxiety, social pressure, cyberbullying and exposure to harmful content linked to the intense use of social media and digital platforms.

But what happens when young people are not only seen as vulnerable users, but as part of the solution?

The Erasmus+ project Youth Digital Leaders – European youth workers as active agents in the promotion of digital resilience and online safety of vulnerable adolescents (nr. 2024-1-IT03-KA220-YOU-000243926) explores this question by empowering youth workers and adolescents to promote digital well-being and build a culture of respect and responsibility online.

According to UNICEF, suicide is now the second leading cause of death among young people in the EU. Factors such as excessive screen time, social comparison, cyberbullying and exposure to harmful online content are increasingly recognised as risks for adolescent mental health. Vulnerable groups, including young people with emotional difficulties, disabilities or those identifying as LGBTQIA+, are particularly exposed.

In response, the LED project brings together organisations from Italy, Belgium, France and Czechia to strengthen youth work in the field of digital resilience. The project focuses on training youth workers, co-creating a modular and gamified training programme with young people, establishing digital support hubs, and developing a European certification framework aligned with EQF standards. A policy roadmap will also support the integration of digital leadership within youth work systems.

One of the most meaningful activities took place on 16 July in Rome, during the co-creation event “What if you regret it?”, organised by the project coordinator The Apartment APS in collaboration with EDI Onlus. The event brought together young people aged 13–18 from Cooperativa Sociale onlus Santi Pietro e Paolo and Il Muretto Youth Centre for a day dedicated to listening, creativity and participation.

Instead of traditional lectures, the event offered an open and participatory space where young participants could freely share experiences, emotions and reflections about their digital lives. Together with writer Christian Bergamo, participants explored topics such as digital identity, web reputation and the consequences of unconscious social media use through the storytelling format “Portraits in Words”. The activity helped participants reflect on the power of language — how words can hurt or heal, distort or honour. Inspired by the workshop, the young participants even created and performed an original song.

The Portraits in Words storytelling format, developed during the event, will now become one of the official outputs of the project and will be available to the partnership as a training tool for youth workers.



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Similar co-creation workshops are taking place across Europe: in Belgium, led by [YEU International](#); in Czechia, led by [Vice Versa](#); and in France, led by [Tralalere](#), as well as in other Italian cities including Trento and Palermo. These workshops are not only training activities, but collaborative spaces where young people actively contribute to shaping the training modules currently under development.

The project has also reached an important milestone with the definition of the European certification framework for Youth Digital Leaders, which will recognise youth workers trained to promote safe, ethical and responsible digital environments for young people.

As the project progresses, youth workers and educators will soon gain access to innovative tools, resources and training opportunities designed to strengthen digital resilience and foster a healthier online culture across Europe.

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