



SUPPORTING YOUTH TO MANAGE THEIR DIGITAL & SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

## GUIDELINES FOR YOUTH WORKERS WORKING WITH DIGITAL MEDIA

**Project Name:** Supporting youth to manage their digital & social media presence

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## INTRODUCTION

The digital media are changing every day. The moment we master one, a new one, more advanced, appears. This is true in all kinds of digital media and also for the media we use in Youth Work.

However, all the partners in the project TRACES consortium have witnessed a gap in Continuous Professional Development programs for youth workers and youth trainers/ facilitators in the use of Digital Media in Youth Work. The project TRACES is an attempt to fill this gap.

The Guidelines proposed here are complementary to all the resources created by the project.

The purpose of the Guidelines is:

- To be used as a reference document by all the youth professionals who need guidance and support when working with digital media.
- To offer advice on the role organisations and youth workers can play in supporting young people to use digital media and new technologies safely and productively.

The contents include:

- An Introduction to Digital Youth Work;
- Using Digital Media and Technology Safely and Productively in Youth Work;
- Using Social Media in Youth Work;
- Tools & Resources for Digital Youth Work.

The Guidelines have been produced as an e-book because we want the readers to be able to follow the hyperlinks to other resources and references. The link to the Guidelines has been circulated to the partners networks and their social media. It has also been uploaded as online publication on the ISSUU platform. The presence of the publication on ISSUU means that anyone who will search with related terms will be able to find the Recommendations for a long time after the project end.

Two pages of the Guidelines for Youth Workers working with Digital Media will be printed in paper as a Summary that can be used by youth organisations and youth workers for quick reference. The summary will be distributed during the dissemination events of the project in the partner countries but also during events, conferences and where the partners are participating in relation to the topics of Digital Citizenship and Digital Youth Work. It will be also posted to other youth organisations, managers of youth organisations, and policy makers.

## INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

Digital literacy is crucial in the 21st century modern-day citizenship, and youth work should be able to encourage this. In order to do so, youth workers need an agile mindset, and be adequately supported to cultivate skills through success but also failure.

Digital Youth Work refers to the proactive use of digital media and technology in youth work, and can be included in any youth work setting, addressing paid and volunteer youth workers. The fundamental goals, ethics and values of Digital Youth Work and broader Youth Work are the same, and the latter ought to support the first. Another characteristic of Digital Youth Work is that it can take place both face-to-face and online, or a combination of the two. In the aforementioned environments, technology and digital media can be utilized as tools, activities, or content.

In the context of planning, developing and implementing Digital Youth Work activities and projects, it is important to not only focus on the skills related to digital media, but also highlight what is needed to ensure an engaging and meaningful Digital Youth Work experience. Cultivating and maintaining an agile mindset is crucial for youth workers in order to succeed in a modern, dynamic society.

The consortium of the TRACES Project has identified three key dimensions that hold a crucial role in the success of digital youth work:

**ENGAGE:** Fostering the participation of young people with fewer opportunities in democratic life

**CONNECT:** Bringing young people with fewer opportunities together across the EU and beyond to foster voluntary engagement, learning mobility, solidarity and intercultural understanding.

**EMPOWER:** Supporting the empowerment of young people with fewer opportunities through quality, innovation and recognition of youth work.



## USING DIGITAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY SAFELY AND PRODUCTIVELY IN YOUTH WORK

The safe and productive engagement of young people lies at the core of digital youth work, as it provides important resources and skills to function in contemporary societies. Technological competence is already a prerequisite in most professional settings, and will be even more so in the future of most people. An agile mindset is essential for young people, as it will allow them to utilize media and technology to their full extend. The field of youth work, but also professionals in the field should ensure the equal provision of opportunities to young people. These opportunities will allow young people to develop their technology skills, in order to be competitive in the labor market of the future and to function productively in their communities.

Amidst the era of digital natives, technology is an integral and more diverse part of our everyday lives – and will continue to develop in the years to come. Due to the significant role of digital media and technology, it is important to promote knowledge regarding their operative mechanisms. In this regard, youth work's role in technology education becomes of great value, as it can encourage young people's creative technological thinking, help them understand how technology and different media operate, and how to develop digital craftsmanship. Through the methods utilized by digital youth work, young people realize their creativity and abilities, while simultaneously experimenting and developing their skills. As in all forms of education, it is vital to draw young people's interest, which leads to voluntary participation. One simple way to achieve this is by conducting daily discussions about media and technology with young people in various contexts.

As mentioned above, a person's digital and media skills can have an important impact on the career opportunities they gain. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that all young people have equal access to opportunities to develop their media literacy and digital skills. In addition, at this point it is important to note that these media and digital skills are not limited to the simple ability to use digital media or to press the right button. Instead, they include a basic knowledge of the underlying media technologies as well as a greater understanding the possibilities of digital media. Additionally, they include the ability to utilize the presented opportunities in a productive and responsible manner.

As self-responsibility is cultivated, young people become more conscious of their media use, and therefore make better-informed decisions about how they want to integrate media into their lives.



The process of the aforementioned critical evaluation enables young people to make conscious decisions, and digital youth work can provide an excellent setting for these discussions.

In order to utilize digital media and technology safely and productively in youth work, it is important for professionals working in the youth field to have experience and appropriate education in the use of different online tools, as well as media literacy training. The continuous professional development and training of the youth workers is the cornerstone in achieving the greater aim of digital youth work, as young people and technologies continuously evolve. As the development of online environments is fast, youth themselves could be utilized as professional guides, so the youth workers could get a better understanding of the online behavior of the young people. That way, they will be better able to help youth to protect themselves online.

Within this context, it is vital to ensure that youth workers have a good understanding and awareness of using digital media, both their positive and negative aspects. Education, practice and training is the only way that youth workers will be able to protect themselves and protect the young people they work with in online environments. Undoubtedly, support is needed for youth workers, so that they can develop the digital skills they need to engage with young people on the platforms that they use – especially seeing as these platforms are always changing – and so that they really know what is happening online and what young people are getting up to online, so that they can protect them from potential dangers and risks.



## USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN YOUTH WORK

The nature of youth work has been fundamentally altered by social media. Social media platforms and their rapid popularity enable the mobility of youth information and counselling work. Moreover, social media offer unlimited opportunities for discussions and the power to reach people and influence opinions. In order to use social media responsibly and safely, young people need to get familiar with the code of online conduct. It is also important to know how to perceive media contents and assess them critically, in order to be able to recognize the intentions behind them. Thus, one of the most critical roles of digital youth work is to promote resources for independent and safe use of digital media and technology.

Youth workers have the unique ability to work with young people on their own territory, in their own spaces and places. It is only natural for this to extend beyond physical contact, to digital spaces and places. Having an agile mindset is crucial in the context of using social media in youth work. It is important to experiment with different platforms freely, and explore their social and educational potential. In the experimentation phase, it is important for youth workers to be personally motivated on learning and educating themselves on new applications, tools, or platforms that young people use. Therefore, personal initiative is crucial in the context of social media within the practices of digital youth work. In this regard, keeping in mind both the negative and positive aspects of social media use is also a factor to consider, especially when they are used in working with young people. While social media may have various positive attributes, such as providing the ability to approach hard-to-reach young people, youth workers should be informed regarding the risks of engaging with young people in online environments, and ensure the existence of appropriate boundaries.

Another aspect to consider in the topic of using social media in youth work is ethics. Within the context of the rapid development of digital youth work and the increasing use of social media by young people and consequently youth workers, it is important to keep in mind to maintain the core values of youth work. Most importantly, face-to-face contact and support lie at the core of youth work, which are also what many young people need. Despite the vast benefits of digital youth work, it should be noted that working with young people in digital environments is most effective when it functions as an extension of a solid face-to-face relationship. Therefore, it is crucial to strike a balance between engaging young people through social media, and not replacing tried and tested youth work practices of engagement with social media and online communication.

## TOOLS & RESOURCES FOR DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

The increasing emphasis of the incorporation of a digital approach in youth work is addressed with the creation of dedicated projects to digitality and the production of online services and websites. However, it is undeniable that the challenging part of incorporating digitality in youth work lies in the aspect of the day-to-day interactions. Young people, otherwise characterized as digital natives, have grown up in the digital era and perceive the online world as a concrete part of their lives. In this respect, youth work needs to adapt to a twofold approach, comprising of both face-to-face and digital interactions. Since the environments that young people operate in have evolved, youth work follows along. Youth work is based on social activities and encounters, and it is natural for young people to utilize online tools for these purposes.

The introduction and incorporation of new tools and operating methods, albeit essential, is a challenging task for youth work. In this respect, the role of the youth worker is crucial, as an open attitude and willingness to experiment and learn new tools, applications, methods and platforms is a prerequisite for the successful operation of digital youth work.

Setting clear, feasible and quantifiable goals is a crucial aspect of achieving broader change in operating practices on an individual but also a collective level. On a collective level, digital youth work should incorporate clear goals, as every other aspect of youth work. On an individual level, the use of new tools and practices lies upon the motivation and competencies of the youth workers. In order to set goals, an assessment process is needed, which examines the content and quality of operations within the context of digital youth work. In light of this process, the availability of necessary tools and resources is essential for the support of the set goals.

The partners of the TRACES Project wish to do their part to offer guidance and support to youth professionals working with digital media, and to offer advice on the role organisations and youth workers can play in supporting young people to use digital media and new technologies safely and productively. To achieve these objectives, the partners have compiled a list of freely available tools and resources that pertain to digital youth work.





## **TRACES Collaborative Online Learning Database**

The TRACES Collaborative Online Learning Database supports the delivery of all online learning components of the project and supports a range of interactive tools such as forums, social networking applications, and mini games. Through the e-learning section of the Collaborative Online Learning Database, users are able to access the full range of the online training material developed and to fully use the interactive and collaborative tools provided.

The Collaborative Online Learning Database will be constantly updated all through the project life and will continue to be updated and reviewed for a period of 3 years after the lifetime of the project.

Visit the Collaborative Online Learning Database by following the link:

<https://www.tracesproject.online/en/learn/>

## **TRACES Digital and Social Media In-Service Training Programme Handbook**

The capacity of youth workers to embed digital and social media literacy resources into their daily practice is critical to address the needs of today's young people. The project partners have developed a training Handbook for Youth Workers who wish to Support Young People to manage their Digital & Social Media Presence.

The Handbook introduces the 16 digital and social media literacy resources available and 8 thematic areas:

1. Secure Online Engagement
2. Real & Virtual Identity
3. Online Communication
4. Cyberbullying
5. Your Digital Trace
6. Credit & Copyright
7. Information Literacy
8. Online Safety

The partners have piloted and validated the material with youth workers in the partner countries; Cyprus, Ireland, and Finland, before including them in the final training programme.

Read the Handbook by following the link:

<https://tracesproject.online/en/outputs/io2/>



## **SALTO Toolbox for Training & Youth Work**

Created to help people find and share useful training Tools, the Toolbox is an online catalogue you can browse through freely or even contribute to.

More on SALTO's Toolbox for Training & Youth Work can be found in the following link:

<https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/>

## **Verke**

Verke is the national Centre of Expertise for Digital Youth Work in Finland, and is a good source of training and best practices in Finland. Verke's vision is to provide everyone who works with young people with the opportunity to use digital media and technology as part of their work.

More on Verke can be found in the following link: <https://www.verke.org/>

## **Digital validation of learning**

In the current digital era, youth work faces new challenges, as young people's lives overflow with digital media and technological tools that enable them to access every piece of information imaginable. Additionally, recent health concerns that have risen due to the COVID-19 pandemic obligate youth work to use primarily virtual and online methods. Therefore, youth workers need to be well-prepared to implement these 21st-century tools into their work, leveraging the available tools that engage and individualize the different learning experiences of young people. Setting the emphasis on the authentication of learning and acquired skills, digital validation tools promote the demonstration of experience and ability of young people and youth workers.

## **Youthpass**

**Youthpass** is a documentation and recognition tool of learning outcomes from youth work and solidarity activities. The tool is available for projects funded by Erasmus+: Youth in Action and European Solidarity Corps Programmes. The European Commission's strategy incorporates this tool to foster the recognition of non-formal learning, putting policy into practice and practice into policy.



More information about the Youthpass tool can be found in the following link:  
<https://www.youthpass.eu/>

## Open badges

A digital badge is a tool that visually symbolizes a definable accomplishment and can be earned in various learning environments, games, or even at the workplace. An **Open Badge** is a specialized type of digital badge, containing verifiable metadata regarding specific achievements. Moreover, they highlight the interests, accomplishments and capabilities of the badge holder and can even serve as stepping stones on a learning pathway. The data are based on a common format, which is the Open Badges specification. Due to the fact that these badges follow an open standard, it is possible for recipients to combine badges from various sources into common collections of badge systems. Then, upon sharing, these badges can be checked by any compatible system to verify that they represent accurately the earner's experiences. Each Open Badge specifically indicates a skill or an experience valued in the community, such as:

- interest and engagement
- participation or attendance
- proficiency, competency, or skill
- knowledge or dispositions
- formal certification (degrees, certificates)
- membership

Learners can earn digital badges in different educational contexts across informal and formal learning, by individuals, employers and educational institutions.



## SUMMARY

As with all tools, digital tools and resources have the possibility to be used in a variety of ways and in different contexts. In this context, the **attitude** demonstrated holds a significant role in the efficient use of each tool and resource. Within the framework of digital youth work, an agile and open-minded attitude is needed from youth workers when working with digital and media tools and technologies in order to achieve a grip and impact on youth. As mentioned already, youth work and digital youth work in particular needs to evolve as young people evolve, and to respond to their needs based on their realities. **Ethics** also play a critical role, most importantly maintaining a balance between the use of digital and social media and traditional youth work practices. Additionally, **professional development** of youth workers should be the main aim of all trainings in the field of digital youth work, which also encourage and enable them to **practice** new tools and acquired knowledge. For this reason, a common approach and quality training models are needed in digital youth work. Finally, the practice and tools of **digital validation of learning** showcase and increase the recognition of the impact of Digital Youth Work.

The summary of the guidelines presented below can be used by youth organisations and youth workers for quick reference in relation to the topics of Digital Citizenship and Digital Youth Work.

### **Attitude and Ethics:**

- Cultivate an agile mindset and be open to experimentation.
- Adapt offline practice fundamentals and decision-making procedures of youth work into digitalized environments, while keeping in mind the challenges they entail.
- Get educated and keep in mind the risks associated with online environments and keep professional relationships and boundaries with young people.
- Empower young people and helps them know and defend their rights.
- Promote critical thinking and guide young people to practice it in taking control of their relationship with digital and social media and technology.
- Maintain balance: Know when it is appropriate to use social media and when traditional youth work approaches are more appropriate.



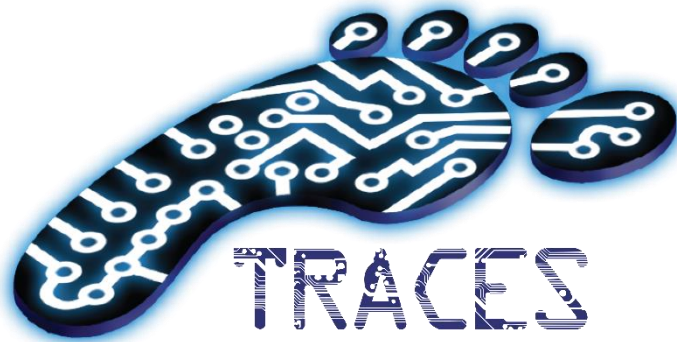
### **Professional Development and Practice:**

- Strive for continuous professional development and training opportunities to acquire new knowledge and develop existing and new skills.
- Experiment with different digital and social media tools, platforms and technologies and focus on how they can benefit your daily work in order to make informed choices on the choices you make.
- Use innovative methodologies to introduce young people you work with to your selected digital and social media, tools and technologies and involve them in the evaluation process.
- Engage in peer learning, knowledge sharing and international collaboration
- Strive to deliver Digital Youth Work based on the general goals of Youth Work and young people's needs and realities, while simultaneously prioritizing their rights, safety, accessibility and enjoyment.
- Facilitate enquiry-based learning by enabling young people and youth workers to discuss and explore the possibilities of digital and social media and technologies together.

### **Digital Validation of Learning:**

- Set the emphasis on the authentication of learning and acquired skills.
- Use digital validation tools that promote the demonstration of experience and ability of young people and youth workers, such as Youthpass and Open Badges.





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