

# Information, Dialogue and Difference

## What are the challenges young people are facing?

Today news and information is received by young people from a variety of sources most notably the online world. Sources includes anything from professionally produced, official or state news sites and channels, to information and content shared online between commentators and by young people themselves.

Whilst young people in the consultation felt it was positive they have access to a huge range of information, **verifying the accuracy and reliability of sources** was said to be challenging. Young people felt this had the potential to lead to the **spread of inaccurate or misleading news sources**. Some consultation responses highlighted young people's concerns over **manipulation of social media** by private corporations and political actors, or simply problems with individuals mistakenly sharing inaccurate information.

Young people identified their role as both consumers of news and information, and also as **sharers and reproducers of information**. Online, the distinction between accessing information sources and engaging with online debate is not black and white. Young people feel that the online world is framed by **confrontational dialogue, unreliable information, sensationalism, hate speech, contact with extremist views** and general negativity. The potential anonymity of the online world was said by some to promote this. Some consultation responses highlighted that what constitutes 'good' or 'bad' online dialogue is not a universally shared idea, and in the same way others raised concerns that the idea of one **official narrative of accurate news was problematic**.

Importantly for young people, there was also a sense that the **online world is not fully understood** by youth professionals and adults around them, and that young people today are more heavily engaged in this world than previous generations.

## What is young people's vision for the future?

Young people wish to have access to news and information that is **understandable, youth friendly and not misleading**. They would like to be able to **cross-check information** with other sources, and see **transparency** in the production of content. This requires by more **fact-checking platforms** and tools available, and an increase in the **media literacy** of young people. Ideally, they wish to be able to evaluate information critically, assess the credibility of the media sources and distinguish between accurate and inaccurate information to form their own opinion.

**Consultation responses were divided** on the way negative speech and inaccurate information should be dealt with online, some felt it was an unavoidable part of free speech, whilst others called for greater prosecution, censorship and removal, both by network providers and the state.

In general, most consultation reports placed value on **young people learning to accept and deal with difference of opinion**. This meant taking personal responsibility for engaging in *positive* debates using tools such as nonviolent communication. There was a sense of a need for online society to develop **respect and tolerance for a diversity of opinions** and accept that difference was part of human life. Some identified that this was unlikely to be learnt online, and young people would need to develop these skills in a real world setting.

### **What solutions did young people propose in the consultation?**

Suggestions included;

- **Promotion of information verification platforms** - that enabled young people to cross check the accuracy of news sources. There were differences of opinion on whether these should be state based or independent.
- Opportunities and spaces to **practice debate and dialogue skills** from a young age. E.g. debate clubs in schools, or space to debate in youth centres.
- Opportunities to **develop face to face relationships** with young people from different backgrounds. e.g. intercultural exchanges.
- **Educational programmes** to develop media literacy and critical thinking. E.g. through schools, non-formal education and youth organisations.
- Measures to develop young people and adult's resilience to criticism as well as promote **respect and tolerance for diversity of opinions**.
- **Better education of youth professionals** - to address the lack of knowledge and skills amongst youth workers, teacher and others of the online world.

## The Survey Data

### **How important is this issue to young people?**

This issue ranks sixth and eight among the priorities, as rated by the young people. It has been measured by two separate items: item focusing on information management ranked eight among priorities of the young people; and item focusing on non-violent communication ranked sixth as rated by young people.

### **What are the priorities for young people?**

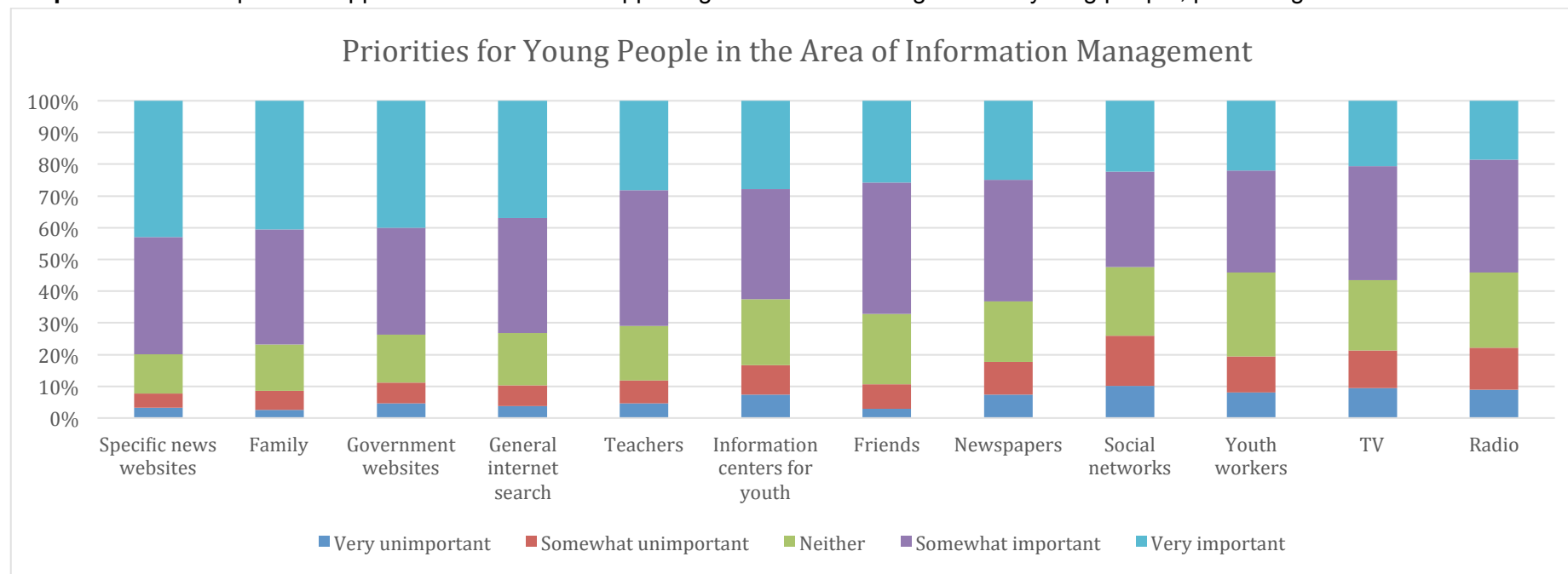
We see an interesting trend of considering the internet sources as important as family by the young people.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, certain reflectivity of this view can be seen in putting the social networks on the last place in importance of the mechanisms they consider when battling with information overload. It is also important, that today's youth considers the internet sources more important than the traditional mass media, such as the newspapers, TV, or radio. All of this points to the direction of highly necessary information and ICT literacy to get high on youth policy agenda.

The graph below shows more in detail, that the traditional mass media are considered rather unimportant by the young people today, in comparison to the internet sources. Notably, even teachers are in this respect very much behind the internet-based sources of information.

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<sup>1</sup> The item read: „ Could you tell us how important are the following sources to you when you are trying to find truthful information (e.g. on everyday events, on upcoming elections, on EU affairs, etc.)?”

**Graph:** The most important support mechanisms for supporting information management in young people; percentages.

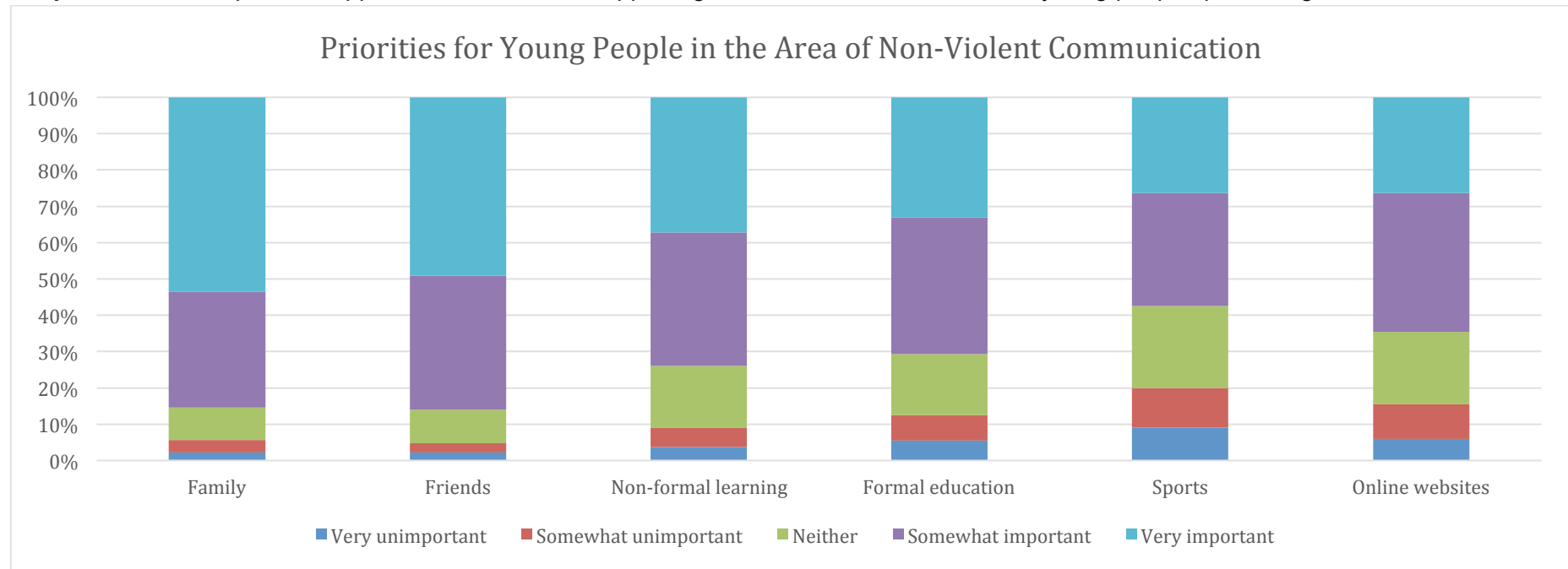


The inner circle of friends and family is, once again, seen as prominent, when talking of learning specific soft skills, such as communicating respectfully and in a non-violent way. Interestingly and importantly, non-formal learning opportunities are even by the young people themselves considered to be a good source of such competences; and it should be further enhanced as such.<sup>2</sup>

Again, the detailed graph below provides deeper insight into the profound difference between the inner circle of the young person (family and friends), and the outside world supporting mechanisms.

<sup>2</sup> The item read: “How important are the following options when learning how to discuss things peacefully with people who hold very different opinions (e.g. on upcoming elections, on EU affairs, etc.)?”

**Graph:** The most important support mechanisms for supporting non-violent communication in young people; percentages.



**Where does this report come from?**

This report is based on responses to consultation question *'What would enable young people to navigate their way through today's information overload? and 'What would enable young people to have a respectful and non-violent dialogue with those who hold very different opinions from them?'*. This question was developed from harvesting tools submitted at the first conference.