

Junior researcher K. Berksun: “Youth representatives in Lithuania agree – media literacy education should be a necessity, not an option”

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One of the objectives of the **BECID** (Baltic Engagement Centre for Combating Information Disorders) project is to find out how different groups in the Baltic societies assess their media literacy skills, which sources they trust, and whether they think they are able to identify misinformation and manipulation. To this end, a survey is already underway (the initial results can be found **here**), as well as individual interviews with one of the vulnerable groups – youth workers, leaders and activists in Lithuania. **Kristina Berksun**, a Junior Researcher at Vytautas Magnus University, who conducted the individual interviews, explains what the research revealed.

What was the purpose of these interviews with youth workers, activists and leaders? What did you seek to find out?

Media and information literacy has become an integral part of everyone's life. However, certain groups, such as youth workers, are particularly closely affected by this topic, as it relates to their daily work. That is why we invited them to talk to us, to find out what they are currently doing, what problems

and challenges they are facing, how they feel in the face of constant change, and what worries them most. We invited youth representatives to openly share their experiences, opinions, concerns and insights on how media and information literacy education could be improved, what else is needed and how it could be implemented.

What topics and issues did you discuss in your individual interviews with youth representatives?

We asked young people how they feel about their knowledge, skills and ability to communicate media and information literacy to others. Also, what tools and methods do they use in their work with young people, are they easily accessible, understandable and effective? We tried to find out what challenges they face when talking to young people about media and information literacy. Is it interesting and relevant to young people? How do they rate their ability to identify fake news?

We also asked about trust – which channels and sources of information do youth representatives trust the most, how do they evaluate the information they receive from their relatives (colleagues, friends, family members), what is the most difficult thing for them to do when trying to assess the reliability of information? Additionally, we discussed the issue of cities and regions – we tried to find out how the opportunities and accessibility of tools differ between Lithuania's big cities and smaller towns, what problems and perhaps unused opportunities youth leaders see in this area.

What interesting or unexpected insights did you get from these interviews?

What problems have emerged?

Interestingly, those who choose to work with young people come from a wide range of backgrounds – art, education, clinical psychology... Therefore, they have a wide range of knowledge, and when working with young people, they try to make use of the areas in which they have the most knowledge. Most of the youth representatives interviewed are not specifically interested in media and information literacy, and prioritise other topics that are currently considered more relevant to young people, such as emotional health, entrepreneurship, etc.

It appears that the topic of media and information literacy is only indirectly put on the agenda, through other activities or individual conversations with young people on everyday topics, such as the news of the day and why it was of interest, what young people think about it, why they think it is of interest, etc. In these cases, youth workers aim to encourage young people to think critically, to think about the issue at hand from a different perspective and to consider possible alternatives. However, in general, there is only one other single event or conversation specifically on the topic of media and information literacy, e.g. a lecture and discussion on artificial intelligence.

Interestingly, while youth workers, activists and leaders rate their media and information literacy knowledge as good or fair, youth workers do not feel empowered to pass on their knowledge. They lack training on how to do this in an attractive and effective way, in terms of activities and methods. Thus, there is a lack of specific training in media and information literacy. Although youth workers say that they do not actively seek information on media and information literacy, they do not receive any offers for training, unlike other topics. It is also noticeable that there is little discussion with colleagues on

this matter and even a lack of discussions that would be considered really valuable and useful.

Another prominent problem is the gap between cities and regions, where it is argued that there are more opportunities in the cities, while those in the regions do not have access to them. It also highlights the uneven levels of media and information literacy knowledge and skills among different young people. Although we often talk about artificial intelligence and other innovations, it turns out that some young people often lack basic information literacy skills, such as how to use Word, how to write an email correctly, etc. However, it is encouraging to see that, although there are young people who are highly susceptible to misinformation, there is also a rational view that anything can happen.

Youth leaders agree that media and information literacy is an important and relevant issue, and that the risks involved are many and varied, from data security to identifying fake, reliable information. It is agreed that more activities on this topic should be included in a working with youth process. However, this is not currently being done due to the lack of knowledge and skills mentioned before.

What experiences and challenges have youth workers, leaders and activists identified when working with young people on media and information literacy?

The main challenges identified are the lack of knowledge and skills in media and information literacy, as well as the lack of specific training to empower youth leaders to pass on existing or acquired knowledge. Equally challenging is the abundance of topics relevant to young people, and the lack of time and

expertise to convey them all. This often leads to a situation where a youth worker prefers to talk to a young person rather than to develop their competences due to lack of time.

It is also often difficult for youth workers to explain why a topic is important to young people. There is also a generational divide in terms of which media and information channels are preferred by the youth worker and which are preferred by young people. It is noticeable that trends among young people are changing very quickly, which is where the challenge comes in – work becomes a process of constant exploration and learning, which is challenging, but nevertheless really necessary and valuable for young people.

What recommendations have you received from youth leaders and activists on how to stimulate young people interest in media and information literacy and improve their education? What could be improved and what measures in their opinion would be the most effective?

Youth representatives agree that media and information literacy education should not only be an option, but a necessity – it should be integrated into the education system, the curriculum, the subjects and the training of teachers. Youth representatives argue that informal education alone is no longer enough, but that more formal education is needed, with consistent explanations about data security, deep fakes, etc. It is noted that young people in general need more content, especially in English, that is interesting and relevant.

Regarding non-formal education, one of the ways mentioned to educate young people is by applying the principle of “youth teaching youth” or “youth to youth”, thus creating content and learning. It is also important that education

takes place through activities that appeal to young people. However, it is the quality of the content itself that is important, not just who broadcasts the content. According to the youth representatives, a lecture by an expert can also be of great interest to young people if it is of high quality and engaging.

Interviewed and written by – Austėja Vaičiulevičiūtė