



# WP2. EQF of Youth Digital Leaders

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The “Youth Digital Leaders – European youth workers as active agents in the promotion of digital resilience and online safety of vulnerable adolescents” project (nr. 2024-1-IT03-KA220-YOU-000243926) is funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Agenzia Italiana per la Gioventù. Neither the European Union nor the Agenzia Italiana per la Gioventù can be held responsible for them.



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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The LED Erasmus+ project and the scope of the EQF

The [Youth Digital Leaders](#) – *European youth workers as active agents in the promotion of digital resilience and online safety of vulnerable adolescents* (“LED”) project (nr. 2024-1-IT03-KA220-YOU-000243926), co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, is aimed at enhancing the digital competencies of youth workers across Europe. Recognizing the increasing digital challenges faced by adolescents—namely cyberbullying, misinformation, digital addiction—the project seeks to equip youth workers with the necessary skills to foster digital resilience and promote online safety among young people.

Central to the LED project is the development of a European Qualification Framework (EQF) Level 5 profile for Youth Digital Leaders. Such a framework, proposed in this document, outlines the specific knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy required for youth workers to effectively guide and support adolescents in navigating the digital landscape.

According to Cedefop, the learning outcomes relevant to EQF Level 5 are:

- knowledge: comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge;
- skills: a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems;
- responsibility and autonomy: exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others.

In the context of the LED project, the EQF Level 5 profile for Youth Digital Leaders reflects the multi-dimensional role of youth workers who operate at the intersection of digital facilitation, mentorship and social inclusion. The



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competence framework has been organised into nine interrelated units, each including specific learning outcomes classified under the three EQF descriptor categories. This structure allows for modular training design, outcome-based assessment and alignment with national qualification systems across Europe.

Indeed, by aligning with EQF standards, the project ensures that the qualifications are recognized across EU member states, facilitating mobility and professional development for youth workers.

To do so, the project encompasses several key components:

- Modular online training: A flexible, interactive, and gamified online training pathway designed to equip youth workers with practical tools and methodologies for digital education;
- Certification: Upon completion of the training modules, participants receive a certification aligned with EQF Level 5 learning outcomes, acknowledging their expertise as Youth Digital Leaders;
- Policy roadmap: Development of strategic guidelines to integrate digital leadership into youth work policies at local, national, and European levels;
- Youth Contact Points (“YCP”): Establishment of dedicated centers to provide ongoing training, resources and support for youth workers and adolescents in the realm of digital education.

## 1.2 Relevance in the contemporary digital landscapes in Belgium, Czechia, France, Italy and at the European level

The relevance of the LED EQF is rooted in a comprehensive multi-country research effort that mapped the digital challenges faced by youth and the corresponding readiness of youth workers in Belgium, Czechia, France and Italy – the countries directly covered by the project implementation. These national contexts, though diverse, revealed strikingly similar needs: a growing digital divide, rising mental health concerns linked to social media use and a lack of structured, professional training for those supporting adolescents online.

The research phase combined both desk and field research methodologies:



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- The desk research examined national qualification frameworks, digital literacy policies and ongoing initiatives related to online safety, digital resilience and youth empowerment;
- The field research included interviews and focus groups with over 84 stakeholders across the four countries, primarily youth workers but also digital educators, psychologists, adolescents, NGO representatives and public authorities.

In parallel, the LED project implemented nine co-creation events across the four countries, involving young people, youth workers and other stakeholders in participatory workshops focused on key thematic areas (e.g. digital identity, media literacy, online safety, emotional well-being). These events served as living laboratories, where practical needs and competences were explored collectively through experiential activities, peer exchanges and creative facilitation. Insights from these sessions strongly influenced the iterative development of the competence areas and learning outcomes presented in this EQF.

This methodology enabled the consortium to identify both cross-cutting needs and country-specific gaps. Key findings include:

- In Czechia, digital education efforts are fragmented, with a need for unified certification for youth workers to tackle issues such as cyberbullying, misinformation and media addiction;
- In Belgium, there is strong institutional backing for digital education, but youth workers still lack structured tools and qualifications to respond to emerging risks, especially among vulnerable youth;
- In France, although there is robust infrastructure for digital awareness (e.g., through “Internet Sans Crainte”), the focus tends to be child-centered, with insufficient attention to adolescent autonomy and peer-to-peer learning.
- In Italy, a pronounced gap exists between the fast-evolving digital landscape and the limited training resources available for frontline educators and youth professionals, particularly concerning emotional wellbeing and digital ethics.



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At the European level, the LED research findings are consistent with recent EU research and policy frameworks, including DigComp 2.2, the Better Internet for Kids (BIK+) strategy and the European Youth Strategy 2019–2027. These initiatives collectively underscore the urgent need to enhance digital literacy, critical thinking, emotional resilience and responsible online behavior among young people. The BIK+ strategy in particular emphasizes the right of every child to enjoy age-appropriate digital experiences, including protection from harmful content, empowerment to make informed decisions online and access to digital spaces that support their participation and well-being. The DigComp 2.2 framework further outlines a comprehensive model of digital competence, which includes safety, communication and content creation, going beyond basic digital skills to include awareness of AI, algorithms and digital well-being. Meanwhile, the European Youth Strategy promotes active citizenship and inclusive participation, with a strong call for digital education systems to address the growing gap in access, capacity and support—especially for vulnerable or marginalized youth. EU-level studies, also cited in the LED research, reveal that nearly 40% of young Europeans aged 16–24 have experienced cyberbullying or harassment online, and that digital exclusion remains a serious barrier to participation in democratic and social life. These findings justify the need for structured, competence-based training for youth workers—like the one offered through the present LED EQF framework—to help them guide young people through these complex challenges and foster a safer, more inclusive and empowering digital environment.

### 1.3 Alignment with European frameworks and policies

The LED EQF is aligned with key European frameworks and strategic policies in the fields of digital education, youth work and online safety. It supports the implementation of European values such as inclusion, equity, participation and lifelong learning, while addressing critical needs identified by recent EU research and policy. In particular, the EQF Level 5 profile for Youth Digital Leaders is directly anchored in the following European frameworks:



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The European Qualifications Framework (EQF): The LED project contributes to the EQF's objectives of increasing the comparability and recognition of skills across Europe. The Level 5 profile for Youth Digital Leaders (YDLs) establishes a competence-based learning outcome structure that supports transparency, mobility and career development in youth work.

The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp 2.2): The profile integrates DigComp's five competence areas—information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety and problem solving—focusing in particular on digital safety, critical thinking, content creation and well-being in the digital space.

The European Strategy for a Better Internet for Kids (BIK+): The EQF profile operationalizes BIK+ priorities by equipping youth workers with the skills to protect, empower and engage young people in online spaces. It emphasizes online safety, age-appropriate participation, digital rights and youth empowerment in line with BIK+ principles.

The European Youth Strategy (2019–2027): The YDL EQF framework supports the Strategy's three key action areas—Engage, Connect, Empower—by enabling youth workers to foster informed participation, digital citizenship and inclusion among adolescents. It contributes to several of the 11 European Youth Goals, particularly those related to Information & Constructive Dialogue, Inclusive Societies and Mental Health & Well-being.

The Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027): The project supports Priority 2 of the Action Plan—Enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital transformation—by designing a structured training and certification pathway for youth workers, with a focus on lifelong learning and inclusion.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Digital Services Act (DSA): The YDL curriculum includes knowledge of digital rights, data privacy and



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ethical content management, contributing to legal awareness and responsible facilitation in digital spaces.

## 1.4 Target audience and beneficiaries

This qualification framework is designed for professionals engaged in youth work who are increasingly called upon to support young people in navigating the digital world. It addresses the needs of those who, in their daily practice, create spaces for learning, participation and personal development—online as well as offline.

The primary audience thus includes European youth workers, educators and trainers working in non-formal and informal contexts. These practitioners often operate without a clearly defined reference point for digital education and resilience-building despite being the first line of support for adolescents facing online risks. The framework also speaks to peer mentors and young leaders who, through lived experience and proximity to their peers, play a critical role in shaping online behaviours and fostering digital inclusion.

Beyond these direct users, the framework is intended to benefit a wider circle of stakeholders. Young people, especially those in vulnerable situations, are the core beneficiaries of the competencies developed by Youth Digital Leaders. Indeed, the framework helps ensure they are supported by adults who are not only digitally competent but also emotionally attuned and ethically grounded.

At an organizational level, youth organizations, community centres and educational institutions stand to gain from having staff who are better equipped to design and deliver relevant digital education activities. The profile also provides a concrete reference point for policy-makers and training providers who are working to professionalize youth work and create sustainable pathways for competence recognition.



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Finally, the presence of trained Youth Digital Leaders contributes to building trust and continuity with families and caregivers who often feel left out of their children’s digital lives. By supporting intergenerational dialogue and promoting safe, inclusive and responsible online behaviour, Youth Digital Leaders become a valuable link between adolescents and the adults around them.

## 2. Profile of a Youth Digital Leader

### 2.1 Core mission and tasks

The Youth Digital Leader (YDL) is an emerging professional figure dedicated to empowering adolescents to navigate digital environments safely, critically and confidently. The role is grounded in the recognition that young people today grow up immersed in digital ecosystems that deeply affect their identity, relationships and well-being—yet they often do so without structured support, especially in vulnerable or underserved communities.

The core mission of the YDL is to foster digital resilience, emotional literacy, and ethical engagement in online contexts. This goes far beyond technical assistance: it requires the ability to build trust, facilitate meaningful learning, and create inclusive spaces—both online and offline—where young people can explore their digital experiences without judgement. The YDL supports adolescents in understanding how digital tools and platforms work, how they affect emotions and behaviours, and how to exercise agency in shaping a healthier digital culture.

The figure of the Youth Digital Leader operates at the crossroads of digital education, peer mentoring, emotional support, inclusion, and advocacy. The co-creation events confirmed the need for a profile capable of supporting youth in:

- regulating their emotions online,
- recognising manipulation and disinformation,
- making ethical decisions when creating and sharing content,
- navigating risk and crisis situations,



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- fostering a sense of belonging and participation in digital communities.

This requires an approach that is multidisciplinary, relational, trauma-informed and community-based at the same time.

YDLs are expected to work closely with youth in both formal and non-formal learning settings, acting as facilitators, mentors and connectors. They respond to real-life challenges such as cyberbullying, self-image distortion, social exclusion, and digital fatigue, while promoting critical media literacy, safe online habits and self-expression. As highlighted during the co-creation activities, the most valued competences included digital literacy and ecosystem awareness, emotional intelligence and self-regulation, ethical and legal awareness in digital contexts, inclusive communication and mentoring, and risk awareness and crisis response.

Their core tasks include:

- Facilitating structured digital literacy pathways, enabling young people to reflect on their online rights, digital identity, media influence, and safety;
- Identifying, preventing and responding to online risks, using youth-friendly methods such as motivational interviewing, restorative dialogue, or crisis referrals;
- Promoting emotional intelligence, helping youth regulate their digital emotions and recognise stressors such as comparison, exclusion or information overload;
- Designing inclusive and participatory activities, co-creating digital campaigns, narratives or artefacts that give voice to the perspectives and creativity of young people;
- Mentoring individual youths and peer groups, supporting their development of confidence, self-efficacy, and critical thinking;
- Modelling responsible digital behaviours, including digital well-being, boundary-setting, and ethical storytelling;

- Collaborating with families, educators, psychologists, and community actors to ensure a coherent and supportive response to digital challenges;
- Creating safe spaces and managing digital facilitation, particularly in hybrid or online-only youth engagement environments.

## 2.2 Work contexts and environments

Youth Digital Leaders (YDLs) operate in a wide variety of educational and social ecosystems, where formal institutions often intersect with non-formal and informal learning practices. Their role is most impactful when embedded in environments that young people already frequent, trust and engage with—whether these are physical, digital or hybrid.

Common physical spaces include youth centres, schools, libraries, community hubs, cultural centres, after-school programmes, sports clubs and municipal youth services. These are often the settings where adolescents feel safe enough to explore personal challenges, develop soft skills and engage in dialogue with adults and peers. Within these spaces, the YDL may facilitate creative workshops, co-design safe digital charters, or offer one-to-one digital mentoring.

Equally important are digital-native contexts: online platforms such as social media groups, private messaging forums, Discord channels, streaming services (e.g. Twitch, YouTube), gaming communities, and virtual classrooms. In these environments, Youth Digital Leaders serve as trusted facilitators of dialogue and reflection, helping young people decode what they experience online and develop healthier digital habits. These spaces often require YDLs to adopt blended facilitation strategies that balance visibility with discretion, structure with informality.

In several of the co-creation events, youth workers underlined the importance of working in hybrid environments, where digital tools are used to complement in-person engagement. For example, WhatsApp groups used to continue discussions after workshops, or collaborative platforms used to co-create campaigns or storytelling outputs. These hybrid models allow for continuity,



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accessibility and youth-led initiative, especially among groups who are geographically dispersed or socially isolated.

Furthermore, Youth Digital Leaders often act as connectors between systems: they collaborate across schools, NGOs, mental health services, local institutions and grassroots youth networks, adapting their approach to the specific cultural, social and emotional context in which young people live. In some cases, they also operate within underserved or rural territories where digital poverty, lack of access to services or low institutional trust makes their presence even more essential.

A key structural element of the LED project is the creation of Youth Contact Points (YCPs): dedicated hubs designed to provide continuous support, training and peer learning opportunities for Youth Digital Leaders and the wider youth work ecosystem. These contact points will serve as anchoring environments for YDLs, offering not only resources and tools but also opportunities for community-building, collaborative action and ongoing professional development. They represent a long-term strategy to embed the role of the YDL in both the digital and territorial fabric of youth engagement.

The environments in which YDLs operate are not static. They evolve in response to:

- the emergence of new platforms and technologies,
- the shifts in youth culture and online language,
- the appearance of new risks and forms of digital violence,
- and the changing emotional landscapes of adolescents.

As such, Youth Digital Leaders must remain highly adaptive and reflexive in their practice. They are expected to meet young people where they are—not only in a geographical sense, but also in terms of digital fluency, cultural identity, emotional readiness and socio-economic background.



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## 2.3 Stakeholder engagement and collaboration

The work of a Youth Digital Leader is inherently collaborative. Digital resilience and safety cannot be promoted in isolation. They require the active involvement of multiple actors who play complementary roles in the lives of young people. For this reason, YDLs are trained to engage with a broad range of stakeholders, building trust and promoting shared responsibility for youth well-being in digital environments.

At the centre of this collaboration are the young people themselves. Youth Digital Leaders apply participatory methods that value young people's voices, experiences and digital cultures. They create space for co-creation and dialogue, empowering youth not only as learners but also as contributors and changemakers.

YDLs also work closely with:

- Families and caregivers, by supporting them to understand digital trends and risks, and by strengthening their confidence in communicating with their children about technology;
- Teachers, educators and school staff, by aligning digital education strategies, facilitating workshops and contributing to whole-school approaches on online safety and well-being;
- Health and social care professionals, such as psychologists or child protection workers, especially in cases where young people experience harm, isolation or distress related to their online experiences;
- Youth organisations, community centres and municipal agencies, to coordinate interventions, share resources and ensure continuity of support;
- Policy-makers and public authorities, to advocate for inclusive digital education policies and sustainable investment in youth work.



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### 3. Competence framework and Units of Learning Outcomes of Youth Digital Leaders according to EQF Level 5<sup>1</sup> descriptors

The competence framework developed within the LED project is articulated through nine interconnected Units of Learning Outcomes that reflect the multifaceted role of Youth Digital Leaders. These units respond to the core competences identified during the project’s research and co-creation phases, and together they form a comprehensive and modular structure aligned with the EQF Level 5 descriptors.

Each unit addresses a critical dimension of digital youth work, combining specialised knowledge, practical facilitation skills and ethical responsibility. They cover areas such as digital inclusion, online safety, emotional well-being, peer learning, media literacy and professional ethics—equipping Youth Digital Leaders to act with autonomy and impact across diverse youth work settings.

The units are designed to translate field realities into structured learning outcomes that are transferable, assessable and relevant in both non-formal and informal educational contexts. Each one culminates in a clear set of descriptors that articulate what a Youth Digital Leader is expected to know, do and be responsible for, enabling consistent pathways for training, certification and recognition across Europe.

What follows is a descriptive overview of each unit, outlining its purpose, scope of application, and the relationship between knowledge, skills and autonomy within real-world youth engagement contexts.

AREA OF COMPETENCE	LEARNING OUTCOME	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	RESPONSIBILITY & AUTONOMY
<b>1. Understanding digital</b>	Support adolescents in navigating digital	Understands media dynamics, platform logic,	Guides reflection on digital participation;	Promotes active youth engagement;

<sup>1</sup> The learning outcomes relevant to Level 5 foresee comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within the field and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge.



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<b>ecosystems and citizenship</b>	spaces critically and constructively, as active and informed digital citizens.	and algorithmic influence.	facilitates activities on digital citizenship.	models civic digital behaviours; monitors digital participation inclusivity.
<b>2. Ethical use of technology and digital rights</b>	Promote responsible, ethical use of technology and empower young people to exercise their digital rights.	Knows GDPR, BIK+ and digital rights frameworks.	Facilitates discussions on digital responsibility; addresses online behaviour dilemmas.	Acts as a role model; supports youth in ethical decisions; advocates for youth digital rights.
<b>3. Critical media literacy and online expression</b>	Enable youth to assess credibility of online content and produce meaningful digital expression.	Understands misinformation, polarisation and media manipulation.	Teaches fact-checking; supports youth-led campaigns; encourages ethical storytelling.	Coordinates awareness initiatives; empowers critical media use; upholds freedom of expression.
<b>4. Digital risk awareness and online safety</b>	Identify and respond to online risks affecting young people's well-being.	Knows 4Cs framework and psychological impacts of digital harm.	Screens for online risks; educates on safe behaviours.	Develops safety protocols; collaborates with safeguarding actors; responds to digital harm.
<b>5. Preventive action and crisis response</b>	Apply early prevention and referral methods to support youth facing online crises.	Understands trauma-informed approaches and digital prevention strategies.	Uses motivational interviewing; manages digital risk conversations.	Implements prevention plans; refers to professionals; evaluates intervention effectiveness.
<b>6. Emotional intelligence and digital well-being</b>	Promote emotional literacy, well-being and digital balance	Understands emotional development, digital stressors, and screen-time effects.	Facilitates self-regulation practices; observes emotional signals online.	Maintains group emotional safety; models digital well-being; supports mental

	among adolescents.			health promotion.
<b>7. Peer mentoring and psychosocial support</b>	Provide informal peer support to youth experiencing emotional or identity-related challenges online.	Knows informal support strategies and early signs of distress.	Offers empathetic listening; maintains peer group cohesion.	Fosters trust; mentors peers in safe digital conduct; supports psychosocial resilience.
<b>8. Inclusive digital facilitation and co-creation</b>	Design and facilitate inclusive digital activities that reflect youth diversity and needs.	Understands accessibility, participatory methods and digital learning design.	Co-creates with youth; adapts digital tools to different learners.	Champions inclusion; ensures access and safety for marginalised youth.
<b>9. Ethical storytelling and digital identity building</b>	Empower young people to shape their digital identity through safe, authentic and ethical storytelling.	Knows digital identity theory, boundaries, and safe expression frameworks.	Supports youth in content creation; facilitates ethical storytelling workshops.	Promotes positive self-image; protects dignity; fosters safe narrative spaces.

## Area of competence 1: Understanding digital ecosystems and citizenship

Youth Digital Leaders are equipped with the foundational understanding and facilitation skills to support adolescents in navigating digital ecosystems critically, ethically and safely. They demonstrate a solid grasp of how digital environments function—including media dynamics, platform logics, and algorithmic influences—and how these affect young people’s access to information, self-perception and decision-making processes.

Their work is grounded in promoting digital citizenship. This means not only supporting young people to become competent users of technology, but also active, conscious and responsible participants in digital societies. YDLs foster



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civic awareness and youth engagement online, particularly in contexts where disinformation, polarisation and passive consumption dominate digital practices.

Through their facilitation, YDLs help adolescents understand their roles as digital citizens, the influence of algorithms in shaping their worldview, and the importance of being intentional and reflective when interacting with content or others online. They are especially attentive to the ethical and emotional implications of AI-generated tools, which many young people now use for self-reflection, decision-making or emotional support.

They operate in schools, youth centres, libraries and digital communities, enabling structured conversations about digital rights and responsibilities and promoting collective exploration of how young people’s lives are shaped by digital environments. They often work in groups to encourage collaborative meaning-making and peer learning.

Youth Digital Leaders act with autonomy and responsibility by modelling ethical digital behaviours, advocating for youth digital rights and coordinating peer-led initiatives. They guide the co-creation of digital charters, awareness campaigns and participatory media projects that promote democratic values, inclusion and digital equity.

Youth Digital Leaders can:

- Demonstrate understanding of digital ecosystems, media cultures and algorithmic influence on youth behaviours.
- Identify and evaluate disinformation, media manipulation and online propaganda.
- Facilitate youth-led discussions on digital rights, such as GDPR and BIK+, and civic participation.
- Guide adolescents in ethical content creation and responsible digital engagement.



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- Act as role models by promoting digital inclusion and modelling safe online behavior.
- Coordinate peer-driven digital campaigns to support youth expression and democratic engagement.

## Area of competence 2: Ethical use of technology and digital rights

Youth Digital Leaders play a key role in supporting adolescents to understand and uphold their rights and responsibilities in digital environments. They guide young people through the ethical dilemmas of digital life—ranging from data protection and consent to respectful communication, digital harassment, and the social consequences of algorithmic bias. Their task is not to moralise, but to foster an active ethical mindset in young people and equip them with the tools to navigate complex choices online.

YDLs are familiar with key European and national frameworks such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Better Internet for Kids Plus (BIK+) strategy. They know how to translate these abstract policies into accessible, age-appropriate conversations and interactive activities that resonate with the realities of adolescent digital life. They also encourage critical reflection on how online platforms handle personal data, what digital responsibility means in peer-to-peer communication, and how power is distributed in algorithm-driven environments.

As reported during the co-creation events, youth workers expressed a strong need for practical tools to engage young people in understanding the consequences of online actions—such as sharing inappropriate content, engaging in toxic comment threads, or overlooking privacy settings. Equally, young participants highlighted their desire to know more about their rights—not only to protection, but also to participation and agency in digital spaces. YDLs are positioned to bridge these gaps by making digital rights both visible and relevant.



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YDLs foster ethical digital communities through example and relational work. They model respectful behaviours, facilitate open dialogues about online norms, and de-escalate conflicts with empathy. They support youth-led initiatives that promote digital dignity, safe participation, and collective accountability online.

In diverse youth work settings—from workshops in schools to informal conversations in youth centres or online platforms—YDLs help adolescents internalise the values that sustain inclusive and respectful digital cultures. These include fairness, privacy, transparency, and mutual respect. Their presence becomes especially critical in marginalised communities, where digital rights may be violated more often and digital citizenship is less supported by external institutions.

Youth Digital Leaders can:

- Explain digital rights frameworks (e.g. GDPR, BIK+) in accessible, youth-friendly ways.
- Facilitate workshops and discussions on ethical dilemmas in everyday digital life.
- Support youth in understanding data privacy, consent, and digital traceability.
- Promote and model respectful behaviour in online interactions and communities.
- Mentor youth in developing personal ethical guidelines for their online engagement.
- Co-create digital charters and campaigns that advocate for online safety, equity and responsibility.

### Area of competence 3: Critical media literacy and online expression

In an era dominated by algorithmically filtered content and rapid information flows, Youth Digital Leaders play a vital role in developing adolescents' media literacy. Their goal is to enable young people to interpret, question and respond critically to the digital content they encounter daily—whether it's a trending meme, an influencer's video, a piece of fake news or an AI-generated image.

YDLs guide young people to understand how content is created, selected and circulated online. They help them develop the ability to evaluate credibility, identify manipulation techniques and distinguish facts from opinions. Drawing from the feedback of co-creation events, this competence area is strongly tied to young people's need to make sense of information overload, as well as their desire to have safe spaces where they can express themselves without being judged, trolled or manipulated.

This area of competence is closely linked to digital participation: media literacy is not just about protecting oneself from disinformation, but also about enabling young people to become content creators with a sense of responsibility and civic engagement. During the workshops, youth participants expressed their enthusiasm for co-creating digital content such as podcasts, stories, or awareness campaigns—especially when these allowed them to speak out about issues they care about (e.g. mental health, discrimination, environmental concerns). YDLs support this process by providing creative facilitation, ethical guidance and technical mentoring.

Through this work, YDLs empower adolescents to use their voice in ways that are authentic, safe and constructive. They encourage them to think about audience, intention and impact; to consider whose stories are told and whose are missing; and to reflect on the emotional and social consequences of what we publish and share online.

This competence area is especially relevant in schools, youth media labs, libraries, and digital storytelling workshops, but also in informal peer-led



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settings. It reinforces young people’s sense of agency while reducing vulnerability to manipulation, polarisation and performative pressure.

Youth Digital Leaders can:

- Facilitate discussions on content creation, representation and power in digital media.
- Teach techniques for identifying disinformation, emotional framing and algorithmic distortion.
- Support adolescents in designing and producing inclusive, ethical and meaningful digital content.
- Guide youth-led campaigns that raise awareness of social issues through digital channels.
- Foster a culture of online expression that is safe, respectful and representative of youth diversity.
- Help young people reflect critically on their own digital consumption and production habits.

#### **Area of competence 4: Digital risk awareness and online safety**

Youth Digital Leaders are often the first adults that young people turn to when they feel unsafe, uncomfortable or overwhelmed in digital environments. Their ability to detect, address and prevent online risks is therefore a core dimension of their role. This competence area is rooted in a deep understanding of the 4Cs risk model—Content, Contact, Conduct and Contract—and in the capacity to translate this model into action through education, prevention and support.

Digital risk awareness requires more than technical knowledge. YDLs are trained to read the emotional and behavioural signs that may point to underlying distress—such as withdrawal, anger, avoidance or fixation on digital activity. These signs often emerge subtly in informal settings, especially during group



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activities or one-on-one mentoring, and must be interpreted with care and contextual understanding.

The co-creation events revealed that youth workers and participants alike recognise the growing complexity of digital threats, from exposure to violent or sexualised content, to manipulative behaviour in chats, to algorithmic reinforcement of harmful norms. Adolescents also voiced the importance of talking about “grey zones”—such as joking about suicide, sharing private content without consent, or normalising verbal abuse in online games—which often go unreported but have real psychosocial impacts.

Youth Digital Leaders operate in this space of ambiguity with a trauma-informed approach, supporting young people to develop awareness without inducing panic or shame. They offer early screening, enable open conversations, and teach adolescents to set boundaries, identify red flags and look out for peers. In doing so, they contribute to creating a culture of digital vigilance and mutual care.

YDLs are also bridges between the informal digital experiences of adolescents and the formal support systems that exist at community level—such as psychologists, educators, safeguarding authorities or helplines. They know how and when to refer, how to document risk safely, and how to stay engaged in follow-up support without overstepping their role.

Youth Digital Leaders can:

- Detect early signs of risk related to harmful content, unwanted contact, peer aggression and exploitative contracts.
- Apply the 4Cs framework to assess and respond to risk in group and individual contexts.
- Facilitate risk-awareness workshops that are youth-friendly, emotionally safe and participatory.



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- Engage in structured observation and safe disclosure protocols with at-risk youth.
- Promote peer-to-peer support strategies and digital safety practices.
- Collaborate with safeguarding professionals and follow procedures for responsible referral and reporting.

## Area of competence 5: Preventive action and crisis response

Prevention and crisis response are not separate functions in youth digital work—they are two sides of the same coin. Youth Digital Leaders are trained to act preventively through presence, conversation, group facilitation and relationship-building, while also being prepared to respond quickly and responsibly when situations of digital harm emerge. Their dual role allows them to intervene early, reduce escalation and support adolescents through the recovery process.

This competence area builds on YDLs' ability to establish trust, read unspoken signals and create spaces where young people feel safe enough to disclose discomfort. The co-creation events revealed that most adolescents do not seek formal help when experiencing online distress. Instead, they turn to peers, mentors or youth workers with whom they already have a relationship. For this reason, YDLs must be emotionally available and equipped with basic response skills—including motivational interviewing, crisis dialogue techniques and trauma-informed communication.

Prevention also means challenging harmful norms before they escalate. Whether it's confronting normalised misogyny in gaming spaces, addressing “dark humour” that conceals suicidal ideation, or unpacking the emotional toll of always being visible online, YDLs invite young people to reflect critically and collectively. They support adolescents in building protective strategies, such as setting digital boundaries, using privacy tools, regulating screen time and practicing help-seeking behaviours.



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In cases where risk becomes harm—such as cyberbullying, grooming, exposure to extreme content or digital self-harm—Youth Digital Leaders must act swiftly, balancing responsiveness with ethical caution. They document safely, protect confidentiality where appropriate, and refer to specialised services without delegitimising the youth’s agency.

They also play a vital role in post-crisis follow-up, helping young people rebuild trust in themselves and their digital environments, often through restorative practices, narrative work or group reflection.

Youth Digital Leaders can:

- Establish trust-based communication and detect early signs of digital distress.
- Use motivational interviewing and supportive dialogue to prevent escalation.
- Apply trauma-informed strategies in responding to digital harm.
- Design and deliver workshops on digital prevention, boundaries and emotional safety.
- Respond to acute crises in alignment with safeguarding protocols.
- Refer to psychological and child protection services while remaining a supportive presence in the recovery process.

## Area of competence 6: Emotional intelligence and digital well-being

In digital spaces where appearance, comparison and validation dominate, emotional intelligence becomes a critical protective factor for adolescents. Youth Digital Leaders cultivate environments that prioritise emotional safety, helping young people recognise, express and regulate their emotions in relation to their



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digital lives. They support the development of self-awareness, empathy and social competence, all of which are vital for building digital resilience.

This competence area responds to concerns highlighted throughout the co-creation events, where youth and professionals alike described the emotional volatility of social media: the anxiety caused by likes and comments, the pressure to perform, the exhaustion from constant availability, and the emotional confusion generated by conflicting digital norms. These dynamics are often intensified in vulnerable adolescents, especially those struggling with self-esteem, identity, or exclusion.

YDLs are trained to observe group dynamics, identify emotional triggers, and facilitate conversations around digital emotions in ways that are non-judgmental and youth-led. They help adolescents connect their digital behaviours to emotional outcomes—for instance, recognising how doomscrolling affects their mood, or how online validation can fuel dependency or anxiety.

Rather than focusing solely on regulation or “digital detox”, Youth Digital Leaders guide young people to develop healthy digital habits that are sustainable and self-directed. This includes boundary-setting, screen-time reflection, curating meaningful feeds, and understanding how algorithms influence emotional states.

In group settings, YDLs model emotional literacy and guide exercises that support trust, mutual care and psychological safety. Their role is especially important in online communities, gaming groups, or digital forums where aggression and emotional suppression are normalised.

By integrating emotional intelligence into digital education, YDLs enhance young people’s capacity to care for themselves and others, both online and offline.

Youth Digital Leaders can:



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- Recognise emotional patterns and stress indicators linked to digital behaviours.
- Facilitate group discussions and workshops on emotional well-being in digital life.
- Promote self-regulation strategies adapted to youth realities (e.g. mindfulness, emotion tracking, digital journaling).
- Model empathy and de-escalation in digital peer conflicts.
- Support adolescents in identifying triggers, boundaries and digital coping mechanisms.
- Monitor group dynamics to reduce emotional harm and promote safe digital culture.

## Area of competence 7: Peer mentoring and psychosocial support

Youth Digital Leaders are not therapists, but they often act as the first line of informal psychosocial support for adolescents who face emotional, identity-related or relational struggles online. Their role is grounded in trust, presence and empathy—qualities that allow young people to open up and feel seen in moments of digital vulnerability.

This competence area reflects the growing reality that many adolescents today do not seek formal help, even when facing significant emotional distress. As highlighted in the co-creation events, youth workers repeatedly noted how young people tend to confide in peers or trusted adults from their immediate environment, especially when navigating issues related to digital relationships, online exclusion, cyberbullying, or emotional overload.

YDLs cultivate safe, non-judgmental spaces where adolescents can share their experiences and feel validated. They know how to listen actively, hold space



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without rushing to fix, and reflect back emotions in a way that helps youth build self-awareness. They are also able to support peer groups in navigating sensitive situations, such as a classmate being excluded from a chat, targeted in a meme, or withdrawing from online interactions altogether.

Equally important is the YDL's ability to support identity exploration and self-acceptance, particularly for youth questioning their gender, sexuality, cultural belonging or social role. In these cases, the digital environment can offer both opportunity and harm. YDLs help young people reflect on their digital communities and influences, encouraging critical discernment and authentic belonging.

Peer mentoring also includes modelling relational skills, such as healthy disagreement, emotional validation, mutual support and solidarity. In youth-led spaces, such as Discord channels, online forums or collaborative campaigns, the YDL often acts as a silent moderator and occasional guide—offering perspective and support when tensions rise or boundaries are crossed.

Youth Digital Leaders can:

- Build trust-based relationships with young people experiencing online emotional challenges.
- Listen actively and provide informal psychosocial support in digital contexts.
- Identify early signs of emotional distress and social exclusion online.
- Support group processes that reinforce safety, inclusion and mutual care.
- Encourage self-acceptance and critical reflection on online identity and peer dynamics.
- Refer young people to specialised services when needed, without disrupting trust or autonomy.



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## Area of competence 8: Inclusive digital facilitation and co-creation

Youth Digital Leaders are facilitators of learning—but more importantly, they are enablers of youth agency. Their task is not simply to deliver digital content, but to design and guide inclusive experiences in which all young people—regardless of background, ability, or digital competence—can participate, create, and feel represented. Co-creation and inclusivity are therefore foundational principles of their approach.

This competence area reflects lessons learned across the co-creation events, where young participants expressed a strong desire to be “creators, not just users,” and to shape the tools, content and experiences they engage with. At the same time, facilitators reported challenges in addressing diverse needs, such as linguistic barriers, neurodiversity, varying levels of tech access, or differing digital cultures within a single group.

YDLs are trained to design flexible, adaptive and participatory digital activities. They use inclusive pedagogies, accessible platforms and culturally relevant tools to engage all youth—not only the most outspoken or digitally confident. They adapt language, tempo and tools to fit the group, and use a variety of formats (e.g. visual, tactile, spoken) to support different learning preferences.

Importantly, YDLs share power in the facilitation process. They make space for youth leadership, support horizontal collaboration, and encourage feedback and iteration. Whether working on a digital storytelling workshop, a media campaign, or an interactive learning module, YDLs help ensure that young people see themselves reflected in the process and outcomes.

They are also aware of the systemic inequalities that shape digital participation, such as access to devices, safe spaces or adult support. In response, they collaborate with local stakeholders, adapt their methodologies, and advocate for inclusive practices across the broader youth ecosystem.



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Youth Digital Leaders can:

- Design digital learning activities that are participatory, adaptable and inclusive.
- Facilitate co-creation processes where youth take active roles in shaping content.
- Use diverse methods to accommodate different learning styles and accessibility needs.
- Ensure representation, equity and safety in group dynamics and facilitation strategies.
- Address systemic barriers to participation through collaboration with stakeholders.
- Model inclusive practices that support marginalised youth to take ownership of digital spaces.

## Area of competence 9: Ethical storytelling and digital identity building

Adolescence is a critical period for identity construction—and in today’s hyperconnected world, much of this process takes place online. Youth Digital Leaders support young people in exploring, expressing and shaping their digital identities with authenticity, awareness and care. They use storytelling not only as a tool for communication, but as a medium for self-understanding, recognition and social change.

This competence area responds to several key issues raised during the co-creation events: the pressure to conform to curated online images, the risks of self-exposure, the internalisation of stereotypes, and the lack of spaces where youth can explore who they are without judgement. Many young people



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reported feeling “split” between different online personas, unsure of how to be themselves and afraid of being misunderstood or ridiculed.

YDLs help bridge that gap. They guide youth through narrative practices that encourage reflection, emotional honesty and ownership of one’s voice. Whether through digital journaling, podcasting, video creation or visual storytelling, YDLs facilitate processes that help adolescents connect with their values, reclaim their narratives, and resist harmful labels or categories.

They also ensure that storytelling is ethical—that it protects the storyteller’s dignity, respects others’ boundaries, and does not expose youth to unnecessary risk. This means teaching youth to consider what to share, how to share it, and with whom. YDLs support informed choices and model narrative responsibility, helping adolescents understand the impact of their stories on themselves and others.

This competence is especially important when working with marginalised or vulnerable youth, whose stories are often distorted, silenced or tokenised. The YDL ensures that digital identity building is grounded in safety, empowerment and truthfulness, not performance or compliance.

Youth Digital Leaders can:

- Facilitate digital storytelling as a process for identity exploration and emotional expression.
- Guide youth in navigating the boundaries between public and private storytelling.
- Support adolescents in building coherent, safe and empowering digital identities.
- Teach ethical storytelling principles, including consent, representation and respect.



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- Create environments where youth feel free to explore and share their lived experiences.
- Empower young people to reclaim their narratives and challenge harmful digital stereotypes.

## 4. Suggested learning pathways and assessment methods

### 4.1 Non-formal and informal education and training programs

The Youth Digital Leader qualification is designed to be flexible, accessible and practice-oriented, supporting the recognition of competences acquired in diverse learning contexts. In alignment with the principles of lifelong learning and the EQF framework, the YDL competence profile can be achieved through non-formal and informal educational pathways, either independently or in combination, depending on the learner’s trajectory.

Non-formal education is expected to be the primary context in which YDL competences are acquired. This includes structured, intentional learning opportunities outside formal curricula, such as those offered by youth organisations, Erasmus+ mobility schemes, national agencies, NGOs and community networks. Training formats can vary widely—ranging from residential workshops and blended learning to online modules, peer-led laboratories, and simulation-based activities. These approaches enable youth workers to engage with real-world scenarios while building skills through reflection, feedback and iterative practice.

The co-creation events conducted throughout the LED project confirmed the effectiveness of non-formal learning environments in fostering key YDL competences—especially those related to emotional support, peer facilitation, ethical reflection and content co-creation. Participatory methodologies, such as



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design thinking, digital storytelling and values-based dialogue, have proven particularly suitable for developing relational and digital skills in integrated ways.

Informal learning—that is, unstructured and experience-based learning that occurs through everyday activities—is also highly relevant to the YDL profile. Many youth workers acquire competences through personal experimentation with digital tools, voluntary involvement in online communities, or mentoring peers and adolescents in digital contexts. These learning experiences can and should be recognised and validated, for example through portfolio-based assessment, reflective journaling, or digital open badges linked to the nine competence areas identified in the LED framework.

The modular structure of the YDL qualification allows for progressive, self-paced learning. Learners may focus on one competence area at a time, combining experiential, peer-based and self-directed learning, with opportunities for feedback and mentoring. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) mechanisms can further support access and inclusion, especially for youth workers without formal educational credentials.

The co-creation events also revealed the importance of allowing more time for experiential activities and peer feedback. Participants requested flexible training formats that incorporate iterative practice, accessible materials, and tools for emotional self-regulation. These preferences have been taken into account in the structure of the LED modular training offer.

#### **4.2 Perspectives for peer learning and community of practice engagement: the LED Youth Contact Points' vision**

Peer learning and community engagement are core pillars of the LED approach to competence development. The Youth Digital Leaders (YDL) qualification is not meant to be transmitted through vertical instruction alone, but rather cultivated through dialogue, co-construction and shared experience among youth workers, educators and young people themselves. This participatory philosophy is



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embodied in the creation of the Youth Contact Points (YCPs)—a central legacy of the project.

Youth Contact Points are envisioned as localised hubs, hosted by youth organisations, schools, municipalities or community centres, where YDL-related learning and networking activities can take root and evolve. These are hybrid spaces, both physical and digital, where youth workers can develop, reflect on and demonstrate their competences through peer collaboration, community events, mentoring circles and thematic workshops.

As highlighted in the LED co-creation events, practitioners expressed a strong need for continuity and community beyond one-off trainings. The YCPs respond to this need by offering structured and informal opportunities to deepen learning through collaborative reflection, hands-on practice, and mutual support. They also serve as spaces where young people can be directly involved, contributing as co-facilitators, content creators and active participants in shaping the digital culture of their communities.

YCPs nurture communities of practice where youth workers and educators can:

- Reflect on the practical application of YDL competences in diverse contexts;
- Share tools, resources and facilitation methods for inclusive and safe digital education;
- Co-create responses to emerging digital challenges, from AI ethics to new online trends;
- Mentor newcomers in the YDL framework and build local leadership capacities;
- Collaborate across organisations, sectors and borders to amplify impact.

In doing so, these contact points contribute to the territorialisation of the EQF, enabling the YDL profile to be adapted to local realities while maintaining a coherent European standard. They also support the validation of competences



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through digital badges, portfolios and peer-recognition systems, offering micro-credentialing pathways for those who engage actively in the network.

Finally, YCPs act as platforms for sustainability and policy dialogue, anchoring the YDL role within broader youth work strategies and reinforcing the systemic importance of digital resilience, emotional well-being and critical citizenship in education.

### 4.3 Assessment methods and tools

The assessment of Youth Digital Leader competences must reflect the complexity and diversity of learning pathways in youth work. In line with EQF principles, assessment should be evidence-based, transparent and designed to validate competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

The LED project adopts a holistic and learner-centred assessment approach, which emphasises the demonstration of competences in real or simulated practice. Assessment is intended not only to certify achievement, but to support reflection, dialogue and professional growth.

Examples of useful tools include:

- Portfolio assessment: Learners compile evidence of learning over time, including training certificates, project outcomes, activity reports, photos, reflections and peer feedback. This method allows youth workers to showcase their progression and contextualise their experience.
- Digital storytelling: Participants create short video or multimedia narratives to demonstrate their understanding of topics such as digital ethics, resilience or content co-creation. This method supports reflective and creative expression of learning outcomes.
- Simulated scenarios and role-play: Practical tasks simulating real-life situations (e.g. responding to cyberbullying, guiding a youth workshop, facilitating peer mediation) allow assessors to observe behaviour and decision-making aligned with YDL competences.

- Peer and self-assessment: Structured feedback processes between learners, or guided self-evaluation using checklists and rubrics, support awareness of strengths and areas for improvement. These tools reinforce key dimensions of responsibility and autonomy.
- Case analysis: Learners analyse and respond to real or fictional case studies involving digital dilemmas, risk situations or ethical challenges. This approach assesses the learner’s ability to apply knowledge and judgement critically and appropriately.
- Mentor observation and dialogue: In non-formal settings, assessment can be supported by experienced peers or trainers who observe the learner in action and facilitate structured feedback conversations.

Each assessment method is mapped to specific learning outcomes and can be used individually or in combination, depending on the training context. To ensure consistency, assessors should be trained in competence-based evaluation and provided with clear rubrics or descriptors.

## 5. Conclusion

The development of this EQF Level 5 competence profile for Youth Digital Leaders (YDLs) is a strategic and timely response to the complex digital realities that shape the lives of young people across Europe. As adolescents increasingly navigate online spaces for connection, expression, learning and identity-building, the role of youth workers in supporting their digital well-being has become not only relevant, but essential.

Grounded in extensive multi-method research and co-designed with stakeholders across Belgium, Czechia, France and Italy, the framework draws on desk reviews, field interviews, and especially on the insights generated through nine participatory co-creation events. These events highlighted the real-world needs, aspirations and vulnerabilities of young people and the professionals who support them, providing a solid basis for the nine competence areas that structure this qualification.



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The YDL profile acknowledges that promoting digital safety, emotional resilience, inclusion and agency is not merely a technical challenge. It is a pedagogical, ethical and relational responsibility. Youth Digital Leaders are not content providers or IT experts. They are facilitators, mentors, role models and trusted adults who create space for reflection, co-creation and safe exploration in digital contexts. They act with empathy, critical awareness and a commitment to inclusion, especially for the most marginalised youth.

The updated nine-unit structure of this EQF framework reflects the multifaceted nature of the YDL role—from critical media literacy and ethical storytelling, to emotional intelligence, peer mentoring and crisis response. The framework supports a modular, flexible and learner-centred training approach, aligned with EQF Level 5 descriptors. It enables youth workers to build competences progressively, validate informal and non-formal learning, and gain recognition across national systems.

Importantly, this competence profile contributes directly to the strategic goals of the Erasmus+ Programme, by:

- Supporting the professionalisation and upskilling of youth workers in the digital field;
- Advancing key priorities such as inclusion, digital transformation and youth participation;
- Facilitating mobility, transparency and recognition through alignment with EU-wide standards;
- Encouraging the use of Open Educational Resources (OERs) and micro-credentialing tools;
- Strengthening local ecosystems through the creation of Youth Contact Points and peer-led communities of practice.

By equipping youth workers with the competences to guide young people in navigating digital challenges with confidence and critical awareness, the YDL framework enhances the capacity of the youth sector to act as a transformative



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force—shaping more resilient individuals, as well as more just, inclusive and democratic digital societies.



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