DIGITAL 4ALL

BUILDING A DIGITAL WORLD FOR ALL

Module: Young Migrants' Current Digital Skills and Strategies

Additional Theoretical Information for Youth Workers

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Module 1: Young Migrants' Current Digital Skills and Strategies

Lesson 1: What are the main digital challenges of young migrants? Results from Focus Groups Discussion with Young Migrants

Main Results

Three main themes emerged from the discussion: 1) Challenges Young Migrant's face in accessing to Reliable Information; 2) Elements of young migrants' resilience in avoiding untruths online; and 3) Strategies to cultivate young migrant's experiences reflection and critical thinking competences.

Theme: Challenges Young Migrants face in Accessing to Reliable Information

The unique challenges that emerged from the focus groups discussions concentrated heavily on the inefficiency of external sources in obtaining reliable information and the need to engage with other informational tools.

Category: Inaccessible, ineffective and lengthy reliable infrastructures

In almost all of the discussions, the inaccessibility, the ineffectiveness and lengthy services from reliable infrastructures, such as the Social Security, Finances, Transport systems and the Foreign Service and Borders, was mentioned as unique challenges to young migrants. Amongst them, language barriers were the most highlighted by participants, as well as those related to bureaucratic moments. Outdated, unorganized and unstructured information was referred to from official sources.

Category: Scams, Digital Influencers and the "Dream" Ideology

Besides official and government sources and bodies, all young migrants were prompted to share that they often use social media channels and digital resources for obtaining information relevant to their integration in their foreign country. Telegram, WhatsApp, blogs, YouTube, Tik-Tok and Instagram were mentioned. However, this source of information too revealed to be ineffective, and even negative, in obtaining reliable and relevant data to most of young migrants' experiences. Scams were cross mentioned, mostly in actively finding residence and accommodation. Young migrants also experienced scams passively, when not looking for information: in e-mails, through the telephone and in social media channels. Disinformation and untruths online encountered were said to be present in images, in statistics and in misleading titles.

Digital influencers were strongly emphasized by young migrant's living in Portugal and the dream ideology that they spread, though illusory. Due to populist nature of digital influencers speech, young migrants shared that young migrants come to Portugal with unrealistic expectations based on false information that these sources share.

> **"I, at least, agree that the idea of influencers is to gain money by showing that Portugal is amazing, that everything is inexpensive, that houses are for free, that there is place for everyone, that people don't have to be worried about looking for a bedroom because it is easy, right?"**
>
> **-Portugal**

Category: Migrant Profile

Focus group led in Germany and Ukraine, who took place with nine young Ukrainians, four of which who were at, the time, under temporary protection and five in Dnipro, highlighted the impact of the migrant profile in obtaining relevant and reliable information. For example, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and forced displacement, in addition to the universal experiences of migration (i.e., language and cultural barriers) mentioned cross-focus groups, young Ukrainians shared idiosyncratic challenges related to the uncertainty of the situation – "None of the Ukrainians had gone through this before, so there are no Ukrainian articles".

Participants in Dnipro added that the accessibility of reliable information was further a barrier for refugees staying in Ukraine, as across the years of Russia's' invasion, disclosure of media information went through varies changes – blocking of television channels and opposition media – that did not include the dissemination of unbiased news.

Studies showcase our results, with findings demonstrating that **informational needs of migrants and refugees**, although somewhat similar, differentiate from one and another, and thus, so do the informational sources. **Refugees** rely more heavily on settlement service providers, experts and volunteers, likely due to the uncertainty of their situation and the trust issues arose from the trauma caused by the circumstances of their departure from their homeland (Beretta et al., 2018; Lloyd et al., 2013). In another note, migrants use, as primary sources, social networks and the internet to look for information, following teachers, classmates and settlement workers, such as intercultural mediators (Beretta et al., 2018).

"It was scary, not understanding what I would be living on"

-Germany

"As the frequency of events increased, every day there were more and more tragic and resonant events. On this basis it become easier to throw in false information and mislead"

-Ukraine

Category: Lack of Awareness and Passive-Acceptance Attitudes towards evaluating information Online

In particular from the focus groups in Portugal and Sweden, young migrants' attitudes and experiences towards RGPD and evaluation information online were passive. Participants from the focus group in Sweden viewed RGPD as a situation where they had no choice and authority to restrain from, resulting in passively accepting all the requirements. As to Portugal, one participant revealed that evaluation of information online, in their experience, depended on their motivation and interest to do so.

Theme: Elements of young migrants' resilience in avoiding untruths online

In general, all young migrants in the different focus groups revealed awareness for the unreliability of information online, specifically in social media platforms – "Online access social media, you don't know where the information comes from" (Participant from Austria Focus Group). Journalism was also envisioned as a source of misleading and biased information, in particularly to refugees in Dnipro, which highlighted low quality journalism as a source for misinformation.

"Sometimes it is whatever if it is true or false..."

-Portugal

Category: Digital Literacy and Safeness

Throughout the focus groups discussion, a wide sample of participants mentioned to depend on their digital literacy competences to acknowledge misinformation and to distinguish unreliable from reliable data. Most young migrants used strategies related to the comparison of information using different data sources (*double-checking*), on identifying reliable elements in websites (i.e., government sites, reputable sources) and of any missing information. Participants from Austria added using Artificial Intelligence as a moderately reliable tool.

In complement, participants from the focus group in Sweden strongly showed an increased use of the available social media and website tools to deal with identified scam – **Block and Report**.

"Critical thinking can save us from being blind".

-Sweden

Additionally, critical thinking, although not mentioned regularly within and throughout focus groups, was cited by some participants as a significant contributor for not falling for scams and disinformation – "I look for the information in several other pages and then I question the information and don't believe it straight away" (Participant from Sweden Focus Group).

Category: Common Sense Logic

In particular, participants from the focus group delivered in Sweden, shared to rely on their common sense logic to identify reliable information online – "Too good to be true", "They have everything you want", "They want money, this shows that they can be a scam"… (Participants from Sweden Focus Groups).

Category: External Supportive Systems

A significant portion of participants mentioned their external, more macro systems as supporters for the evaluation on information online. It included and ranged from closest migrant friends and family, their community in their new country, Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and educational institutes.

In particular, one participant from Portugal mentioned that their enrollment in Journalism has led to a good network of journalists and communication experts that he can closely contact for support in this matter. Additionally, specifically for the young migrants participating in Cyprus' focus group, as students enrolled in tertiary education, their experiences with unreliable information were scarce and easily deconstructed by their institutional supporting system. Indeed, the youth worker that delivered the focus group in Cyprus contacted the director of young migrant's college and it was confirmed that the institution has, over time, established truthfulness regarding certain misconceptions and glamorization of moving to Cyprus.

"College enrollment and the support received by institutions can act as protective factors against untruths online"

-Cyprus

Lesson 2: Digital Literacy and Digital Divide: Understanding Key-concepts

Digital Divide

The globalization of the Internet has made the spreading of knowledge and information free and accessible to almost everyone with access to a computer or a smartphone. It also offered a great opportunity from most disadvantaged groups to access to relevant information and to facilitate their learning via non-formal environments (Lesher et al., 2022). However, digital participation is far beyond dependent on the accessibility of internet and digital tools, encompassing skills, motivation and self-perceptions as well (Tinmaz et al., 2022). Therefore, just as much the Internet generates new forms of social interaction and participation opportunities, it further contributes for exclusion and social inequalities– **Digital Divide**. As Internet has become a statement in our society, with the development of new labor sectors and innovative pedagogical tools, and the default mode for active participation and social interaction, it is critical to address digital inequality.

Van Dijk (2012) stablished a framework for digital divide, considering motivation as the bottom of the pyramid (seen as both as a precedent and an outcome) for and of the use of innovations and technology. In the first level it poses physical and material access, being related to the reduction of prices for basic connections and equipment. In the second level of digital divide, we can find digital literacy and in the highest we encounter technology appropriation, measured in time and frequency, diversity and quality of used applications, and the benefits derived from this use. Studies support this framework as it has been showed that making Internet accessible in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods, with free training associated, was not as effective as considering both economic factors and motivation, willingness to learn and the benefits from internet use (Maceviciute & Wilson, 2018). Moreover, Tsetsi and Rains (2017) study showed that, despite accessibility, individuals from a more disadvantaged group used internet in less diverse manners.

Age, gender, ethnicity, educational levels and incomes have shown to be factors influencing digital divide (Méndez-Domínguez, 2023; International Organization for Migration, 2023). Migrant communities constitute one vulnerable group for digital inclusion, especially on the settlement stages. Settlement challenges include financial strains, limited social networks, lack of cultural capital, low or limited hostess language proficiency, as well as racism and discrimination (Kenny, 2016). Educational barriers such as delays in schooling, complex bureaucratic process for enrolment in schools and different starting language, as well as the lack of intercultural competences that school environments generally present are also furthered challenges when initiating a life in a new country (Lopés-Montero, 2016).

Intersectionality

The concept of digital divide is yet to account for the multifaceted and compounds of digital inequality. Digital divide does address different at-risk factors for digital exclusion but fails to identify the extent of which these interact with each other and further enhance some groups, dominance, and other groups, vulnerability (Zheng & Walsham, 2021).

Studies indeed show that the interaction between several factors, such as age and ethnicity, affect technology use namely in frequency and type of digital technology to seek information (Medero et al.,
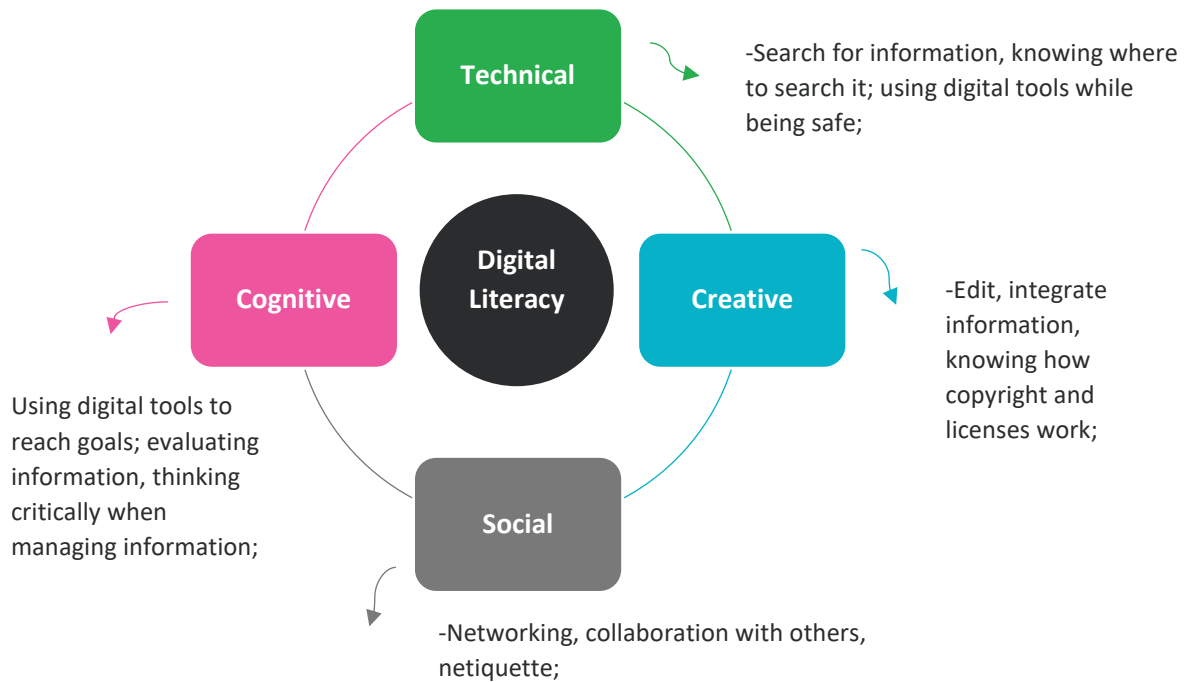
2022). Another study found that interaction between a migrant background, motherhood and poverty influence access to Information and Communication Technology (Goedhart et al., 2019).

Figure 1. The wheel of Privilege and how systems of power interact with each other.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy can be understood as a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that allow for a successful navigation in the digital world. Although there is no consensual amongst authors on what set of competencies digital literacy encompasses, consistently, across frameworks we can identify technical (i.e., Finding and Consuming Digital Content and Digital Safety), creative (Creating Digital Content), social (Communicating or Sharing Digital Content) and cognitive aspects (Problem Solving, Digital Thinking, Decision-Making) (Tinmaz et al., 2022).

Technical
-Search for information, knowing where to search it; using digital tools while being safe;

Creative
-Edit, integrate information, knowing how copyright and licenses work;

Social
-Networking, collaboration with others, netiquette;

Cognitive
Using digital tools to reach goals; evaluating information, thinking critically when managing information;

Digital Literacy

Evidence shows that cognitive and creative skills are often lacking, even in those who have access to technologies, among refugee migrants, in comparison to more technical and social skills. For example, the **berry-picking technique**, that relates to the use of different techniques online to obtain a certain information (goal), was not observed amongst refugee migrants in Stiller and Trkulja (2018) study.

Lesson 3: Recommendations and Emerging Topics

"For the others, you automatically turned rich, [they assume] that you live well in Europe. So I think that a work focused in expectation readjustment would be good, right?"

- Portugal

The fast and increased spread of Internet to almost anyone and the experiences migrant have had with misinformation online highlight suggestions made by participants concerning strategies to promote a digital literacy program.

Critical Thinking vs Common Sense

Metacognition was perceived by some participants as a means for awareness of own expectancies and as a guide to direct an intentional, more active and critical behavior in evaluating information online. Metacognition strategies have been gained popularity especially in learning and pedagogic environments, as a mean to cultivate consciousness and cognitive process towards a goal (i.e., planning) (Milla, 2019).

Indeed, our results show that young migrants use strategies that represent the 'common sense' logic supported their effective navigation through Internet. Although **common sense** comprehends a necessary decision-making tool due to its low consuming cognitive resources, it lacks optimization, and the option for a **low-demanding strategy** in evaluating reliability of information may not, at the least, be the best option (Ross, 2012).

Metacognition can then be viewed as a "goal-directed", deliberate behavior in contrast with "common sense" strategies and processes that are more categorized within "habit-based" behavior. These exist because they have in the past provide positive outcomes, and although they win because they are efficient whilst free up cognitive resources to engage with other activities, they loose on flexibility (i.e., when there is a different goal, outcome or contingency) (Korponay, 2022).

In the scope of the project, studies have showed that a higher exposure to misinformation leads to more unreliable judgments of information and that metacognition exercises actually mediate this relationship (Salovich & Rapp, 2020).

Accessibility

Several young migrants of different countries' focus groups found accessibility a significant contributor for the achievement of the training's aim. The expectations mainly expressed by participants centered around making the capacitation accessible to young migrants – as often these initiatives fail to reach their target-groups – on its adaptation to different languages, and at a very minimum in English, and to online approaches.

> **"Digital Education can be more economic, doing daily chats, WhatsApp."**
>
> **-Sweden**

Indeed, studies showcasing that migrant's internet-related main challenges in engaging with information constitute the **scattering, language inaccessibility and outdatedness** of information (Beretta et al., 2018). Misinformation that is spread by internet and social media has been indicated as a challenge for migrants. For example, researchers have shown that one of the reasons that influenced various asylum seekers and refugees to came to Europe was related to an overly optimistic picture of the destination country social media networkers portrayed it (Ruokolain & Widén, 2020).

Conclusions

In summary, while the globalization of the Internet has vastly expanded access to information and learning opportunities, it has also unveiled the stark reality of the digital divide. Beyond mere access, factors like skills, motivation, and socio-economic status shape individuals' ability to fully participate in the digital world. The intersectional theory goes beyond in examining the experiences of exclusion and discrimination, by providing an approach that allows the contextualization of digital divide within more than an additive manner.

Therefore, efforts to bridge the digital divide must recognize the multifaceted nature of digital inequality and the importance of more comprehensive and systemic approaches. The focus groups led by partners in the consortium corroborates the findings of the multifaced challenges young migrants face in accessing to reliable information online, ranging from bureaucratic inefficiency to the proliferation of misinformation online. Despite these obstacles, the resilience demonstrated by young

migrants through their utilization of digital literacy, critical thinking, and common-sense logic underscores their adaptability in navigating the digital landscape. Moreover, the importance of external supportive systems, including community networks and educational institutions, cannot be overstated in providing the necessary resources and guidance.

The institutional and structural challenges and universal experiences of migrant backgrounds call for an emerging need of developing effective digital literacy programs directed to various stakeholders, including policymakers, settlement providers, and digital influencers, to further improve their support of young migrant's needs in accessing to reliable information online. By prioritizing a program focused on metacognition, accessibility, self-paced learning frameworks, and the use of the Two-Step-Flow communication strategy and involving anyone with impact in the inclusion of migrant communities, we can best empower young migrants to navigate through the digital landscape more effectively, promoting informed decision and full online participation.