



Mental health in digital environments

The role of European Youth Card in supporting a resilient generation

18 October 2021, online
Ljubljana, Slovenia

The seminar is organised under the Partial Agreement on Youth Mobility through the Youth Card and the European Youth Card Association (EYCA)

Concept Note and Provisional Programme



Introduction

One of the strongest side effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is a rise in anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues among young people. Youth Work services across Europe have to re-adapt and pay more attention to the well-being of youth, as they are navigating unprecedented challenges, uncertainty, and economic instability. The seminar will be dedicated to youth leaders, policy makers, mental health professionals and youth workers.

About the organisers

The Partial Agreement on Youth Mobility through the Youth Card exists since 1991 and is a programme of the Council of Europe aimed at developing the youth card scheme, particularly at European level, in the best interests of young people with a view to facilitating their mobility as well as access to the various goods and services necessary for their personal and cultural development.

The European Youth Card Association (EYCA) groups around 36 youth card organisations all over Europe and is the Partial Agreement's statutory partner. EYCA's vision is a Europe where all young people are mobile and active (socially, culturally, educationally and economically). EYCA's mission to reach this objective consists in delivering quality youth card services and in contributing to a better policy on youth mobility and active citizenship. Today, over seven million youth card-holders benefit from youth card opportunities.

The Slovenian Youth Agency (SLOAM) represents the juncture between young people, non-governmental organizations, public institutions, and responsible companies. Through the development and implementation of programs and regular communication, we encourage young people into active citizenship, social and environmental responsibility and enable their personal growth.

SLOAM is a non-profit organization in the public interest in the youth sector in Slovenia aimed at bringing together different stakeholders for the overall well-being of young people.



The Slovenian Youth Agency helps young people to develop competencies, as they are aware that during this period young people are most susceptible to personal growth and the development of skills that will be most useful to them later in life.

The International Youth Health Organization (YHO) is an international network of youth organizations that co-create environments and policies for all-inclusive youth health. YHO works towards health and wellbeing of young people through promotion of healthy lifestyles, prevention activities, capacity building and advocacy for effective, comprehensive and inclusive policies. The main priority areas include non-communicable diseases, mental health and environmental health, with a special focus on health inequities, health literacy, determinants of health and meaningful youth engagement. YHO's vision is to empower young people to take care of their own health, make informed decisions about their wellbeing, conduct high quality work in the field of youth health and actively engage in decision-making processes.

About the seminar

The Council of Europe is the leading Pan-European international organisation promoting inclusive, human-rights based youth policies. One of the priorities of the Partial Agreement on Youth Mobility for 2021 is to *“Support and encourage innovation in youth work and youth services, especially in the context of COVID-19 challenges”*. The pandemic has represented a major disruption to everyone's life. As our societies get back to normal, young people are left with invisible scars that we need to be pro-active in addressing, through youth policy development and tailored programmes for youth.

The pandemic has particularly impacted young people in complex ways, from taking a toll on their mental health to negatively impacting their education process as schools moved classes online, or to disproportional loss of their already vulnerable jobs. Addressing the effects of the pandemic requires creativity and cross-sectoral approach in youth policy development.

Since the start of the pandemic, the everyday life of young people has transitioned to the virtual setting. While younger generations have been characterized as the “digital natives” even before the pandemic, the COVID-19 measures together with lockdowns and social distancing contributed to major lifestyle changes which is why youth are spending more time online and in different digital environments than ever before.

Even before the pandemic, there was evidence of how the digital world negatively impacted mental health and COVID-19 only exacerbated the problem. Youth in the COVID-19 era are reporting rising levels of depression, anxiety and feelings of isolation and loneliness. Heightened levels of stress and substance use have been noted amongst the young people as well. We are seeing a rise of new and emerging mental health issues, such as Zoom fatigue or Snapchat and Instagram dysmorphias, as well as the worsening of mental health disorders like gaming addiction, self-harm and other psychiatric illnesses.

The worsening state of mental health and wellbeing of youth also reflects exponential levels of uncertainty that young people are facing in their everyday lives. Spending an increased amount of time engaging with digital technologies and social media is influencing the mental health of youth by disturbing their sleep patterns and making them more vulnerable towards cyber-bullying.

That is why mental health in digital environments is a crucial topic to be addressed throughout Europe. It is critical to intervene early and ensure a cohesive, holistic and rigorous policy action to transform the narrative. Prioritizing the topic on the national and European level requires a cross-generational and interdisciplinary policy approach with a non-siloed mentality, keeping in mind the potentials and limitations of digital environments and investing in solutions, such as but not limited to digital mental health, increasing health literacy of youth on appropriate digital use and risks, and establishing support systems for young people.

The seminar aims to:

- Ensure mental health is being promoted as a policy priority at national and European level, respectively that youth work adapts and includes services to identify, guide and support young people with mental health challenges;
- Offer the space for professionals and young people to have a coordinated approach on this topic and make recommendations for policy makers; DRAFT PROGRAMME

Monday 18th October 2021	
9.00 – 9.45	<p>Welcome and short presentations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Health, Slovenia • Ministry of Education, Slovenia • World Health Organisation • Council of Europe – about PA on Youth Mobility • EYCA Director – about EYCA • SLOAM
9.45 – 10.00	<p>Aim and objectives</p> <p>-mapping the audience -expectations</p> <p>Introduction of the facilitator, presentation and expectations of participants</p>
10.00 – 11.00	<p>New realities for young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Matej Vinko – Slovenian National Public Health Institute
11.00 – 11.15	Coffee break
11.15 – 12.00	<p>BREAKOUT ROOMS: Thematic working groups led by EYCA members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movijovem, Portugal – supporting youth wellbeing and mental health • SLOAM, Slovenia – sustainability and mental health at the core of youth participation • Young Scot – involving young in codesign of mental health services / presentation of iFeel programme • Instituto Aragones de la , Spain - EYC as a tool to offer integrated youth services <p>Participants will work in parallel groups:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Attend a short presentation on how EYC is used as a tool for supporting young people</i> • <i>Share good practices and challenges they face given the new realities of young people</i> • <i>Map and identify possible new policy priorities and topics to be tackled in youth agenda</i>
12.00 – 12.15	Back to plenary Q & A session
12.15 – 12.30	Coffee break
12.30 – 14.00	<p><i>Round table event: Mental Health in the Digital World: Future of Policy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mental Health Europe: Dominique de Marne, Senior Policy Advisor for Youth - YHO: Andrej Martin Vujkovic, President - EFPSA: Deianara Couwet, President (or their external representative) - IFMSA: Mohamed Mamdouh Eissa, Liaison Officer for Public Health Issues (or the Regional Director for Europe) <p>Closing remarks</p>