



QueeResilience

Digital Media &

LGBTQ+ Youth

**Benefits,
Risks,
Recommendations**



Co-funded by
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About the Project

QueeResilience is a European initiative aimed at **strengthening the digital wellbeing of LGBTQ+ youth**. The project responds to the growing impact of online environments, both positive and negative, on queer young people. It provides practical resources, training, and support for youth workers and communities.

QueeResilience focuses on raising awareness, building resilience, and promoting allyship. Key activities include the development of this guidebook, interactive workshop modules and a co-created social media campaign. **A special focus of the project and its materials lies on youth work** with the goal of providing background knowledge, skills and resources for supporting and guiding queer youth in their digital media use.

The project is implemented by a partnership of organizations across Europe: Stiftung Digitale Chancen (Germany), Tolerantiško Jaunimo Asociacija (Lithuania), SaplinQ (Slovakia), and Prague Pride (Czechia). It is co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission.



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About the Guidebook

This guidebook offers a **comprehensive overview of how digital media impacts the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ youth**, along with practical guidance for those who work with them. Designed primarily for youth workers, but also relevant to educators, parents, and LGBTQ+ young people themselves, the guidebook serves as both an informative and action-oriented resource.

Divided into two main parts, the first section explores the dual impact of digital media on queer youth. It highlights both the risks – such as hate speech, cyberbullying, and disinformation – and the benefits, including community-building, access to information, and emotional regulation through online spaces. It also gives an overview of the general situation of LGBTQ+ acceptance and digital media use in the four partner countries Germany, Lithuania, Slovakia and Czechia.

The second part offers concrete tools, methods, and recommendations for youth workers. It includes adaptable strategies for group settings, one-on-one interactions, as well as strategies and actions for the individual digital media use.

Part 1: Insights draws from an **extensive literature review** of academic papers, reports and statistics. Additionally, the project consortium conducted **four focus groups**, one in each partner country, with four to seven queer participants between 16 and 25. The focus groups examined the relationship between digital media use and the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ youth. Guided by the question “How does digital media use affect young LGBTQ+ people?”, the session aimed to explore both the positive and negative impacts.

Part 2: Support mainly draws from **eight expert interviews** conducted in all four project partner countries. The expert group includes professionals from education, psychology, social work, and community advocacy across Czechia, Germany, Slovakia, and Lithuania, all with significant experience in LGBTQ+ issues, youth support, mental health, and digital media education. The expert interviews explored how digital media impacts the mental health and identity development of LGBTQ+ youth, with the aim of identifying effective support strategies and methods for youth workers and educators.

Glossary

LGBTQ+ Identity & Concepts

LGBTQ+: An acronym that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, with the “+” representing other identities such as intersex, asexual, pansexual, and non-binary.

Transgender / Trans: A person whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. For instance, a person assigned male at birth who identifies as a woman is a transgender woman. “Trans” is a common abbreviation.

Queer: An umbrella term for identities that are not exclusively heterosexual or cisgender. Once used as a slur, it has been reclaimed by many LGBTQ+ people as a symbol of pride and inclusivity.

Non-binary: A gender identity that doesn’t fit within the traditional categories of “man” or “woman.” Non-binary people may feel like both, neither, or something else entirely.

Intersex: A term for people born with physical sex characteristics that don’t fit typical definitions of male or female. Being intersex is about biology and is separate from gender identity or sexual orientation.

Pansexual: A sexual orientation describing someone who is attracted to people regardless of their gender. Pansexual people may be attracted to men, women, non-binary people, and others across the gender spectrum.

Omnisexual: Similar to pansexual, but often with an emphasis on attraction to all genders.

Asexual: A sexual orientation for people who experience little or no sexual attraction to others. Asexuality exists on a spectrum—some asexual people may still want romantic relationships or experience other forms of attraction.

Cisgender / Cis: A person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. “Cis” is a commonly used shorthand.

Gender Expression: The way a person outwardly shows their gender, such as through clothing, hairstyle, voice, or behavior. Gender expression may or may not align with someone’s gender identity or the expectations of society.

Pride / CSD: Pride refers to demonstrations and celebrations that recognize and support LGBTQ+ identities, rights, and communities. CSD stands for Christopher Street Day, commonly used in German-speaking countries for Pride events. These gatherings often include parades, festivals, and protests to promote visibility, equality, and solidarity.

Digital Media and Online Risks

Doomscrolling: The habit of endlessly scrolling through negative news or upsetting content online, often without realizing how much time has passed. It can increase stress, anxiety, and feelings of hopelessness.

FOMO (Fear of Missing Out): The anxious feeling that others are having fun or experiencing important things without you, often triggered by seeing social media posts. FOMO can make it hard to take breaks from being online.

Parasocial Relationships: One-sided emotional connections people form with media figures, like influencers, celebrities, or fictional characters. These relationships can feel very real, especially when someone sees themselves reflected in that person.

Digital Wellbeing: A sense of balance, safety, and control when using digital technology. It includes healthy screen time, positive online experiences, and awareness of how digital habits affect mental and emotional health.

Cyberbullying: Bullying that takes place online or through digital devices. It includes mean messages, threats, spreading rumors, or sharing private information to hurt or embarrass someone.

Hate Speech: Comments that attack people based on who they are, such as their race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. Hate speech can be verbal, written, or visual.

Grooming: A form of manipulation where someone (often an adult) builds a relationship with a young person online to gain their trust and later exploit or abuse them, often sexually. It can happen slowly and seem harmless at first.

Fetishization: When someone reduces a person, especially from a marginalized group, to an object of sexual desire based on one trait, like their gender identity or race.

NSFW (Not Safe For Work): A label for online content that includes nudity or sexual content. It's meant to warn that the content may not be appropriate in public or professional settings.

Misinformation: False or misleading information that is shared by someone who believes it's true. It can spread quickly online and lead to confusion.

Disinformation: False information that is spread on purpose to mislead or cause harm—often used in political, ideological, or anti-LGBTQ+ campaigns. Unlike misinformation, disinformation is intentional.

Online Platforms

This section explains online platforms that are mentioned in this guidebook, which some audiences might not be familiar with. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube or TikTok are not listed here, assuming their basic function is widely understood.

Reddit: An online platform made up of user-created communities called subreddits, where people can post text, images, links, and comments. Topics range widely, including LGBTQ+ support, hobbies, news, and personal stories. Most users interact anonymously or with pseudonyms.

Discord: A communication platform that hosts servers where users can join text, voice, or video channels. Originally developed for gaming communities, it is now used for a wide variety of interest-based and identity-based groups, including LGBTQ+ communities.

Grindr: A location-based dating app designed primarily for men who are gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. Users create profiles, view nearby users, and exchange messages and images. It is intended for adults and widely used within the LGBTQ+ community for social and dating purposes.



Chapter 1: **Benefits** **of Digital** **Media for** **LGBTQ+ Youth**

PART 1:

INSIGHTS

Access to Information and Resources

For queer youth, access to accurate, affirming, and diverse information is not just empowering, it can be life-changing. In a world where heteronormativity still dominates many schools, communities, and even homes, digital platforms and media serve as vital resources. These spaces allow LGBTQ+ youth to explore identity, find community, and understand themselves on their own terms.

As outlined in multiple studies, digital media plays a transformative role for LGBTQ+ youth. Whether it's through social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube or Reddit, young people are turning to the internet to explore and affirm their identities. For example, Craig et al. found that platforms such as Reddit, which offer educational resources and peer support, serve as critical spaces for LGBTQ+ youth to learn about sexual and gender diversity, enhance self-acceptance and reduce isolation.¹

QueeResilience focus group participants from Czechia described these digital platforms as „information hubs“. Participants from Germany emphasized that discovering one's identity is a deeply personal process, shaped more by hearing others' stories than by formal learning. Participants from Lithuania shared that even casual content like memes helped spark identity exploration.²



“Information also found me. Step by step, one meme, another meme, and eventually you start questioning and figuring things out about yourself.”

Focus Group Participant, Lithuania (20 y.o., male (cis), bisexual)

Seeing oneself reflected in media can be a profound experience. For many queer youth, especially those without supportive environments, LGBTQ+ media figures become surrogate mentors. A survey from The Trevor Project found that access to adult LGBTQ+ role models, often through online communities, was associated with a stronger sense of life purpose and self-worth.

A 2020 study by Bradley Bond further emphasizes the importance of media narratives, noting that parasocial relationships with LGBTQ+ characters can

offer emotional support and guidance. For lesbian, gay and bi adolescents, these connections often serve as compensatory relationships when real-life support is lacking. Queer youth often form deep parasocial relationships with queer media figures, perceiving them as friends or community members, especially when real-life queer connections are unavailable.³ In general, queer adolescents form stronger parasocial relationships than their heterosexual peers. They are more likely to identify queer media personae as favorites, and view them as important sources of socialization, especially around topics like sex, relationships, and identity.⁴

“It gives you the feeling that there are other people and in this case also very, very big and well-known creators (...) who are actually somehow the same, (...) that just gives you the feeling that you’re not alone.”

Focus Group Participant, Germany (19 y.o., queer)

For many LGBTQ+ youth, discovering that they are not alone is the first step toward self-acceptance. QueeResilience focus group participants described how hearing authentic experiences from queer creators or peers allowed them to reflect on their own feelings and helped them living their own authentic lives. Especially in countries where LGBTQ+ education is lacking or stigmatized, the internet often fills a crucial gap. For some, online access was the only source of sexual health education, identity validation, and community support.

“If I hadn’t had those resources I would have kept thinking that something was wrong with me, I would have gone to some charlatan doctor.”

Focus Group Participant, Lithuania (20 y.o., male (cis), gay)

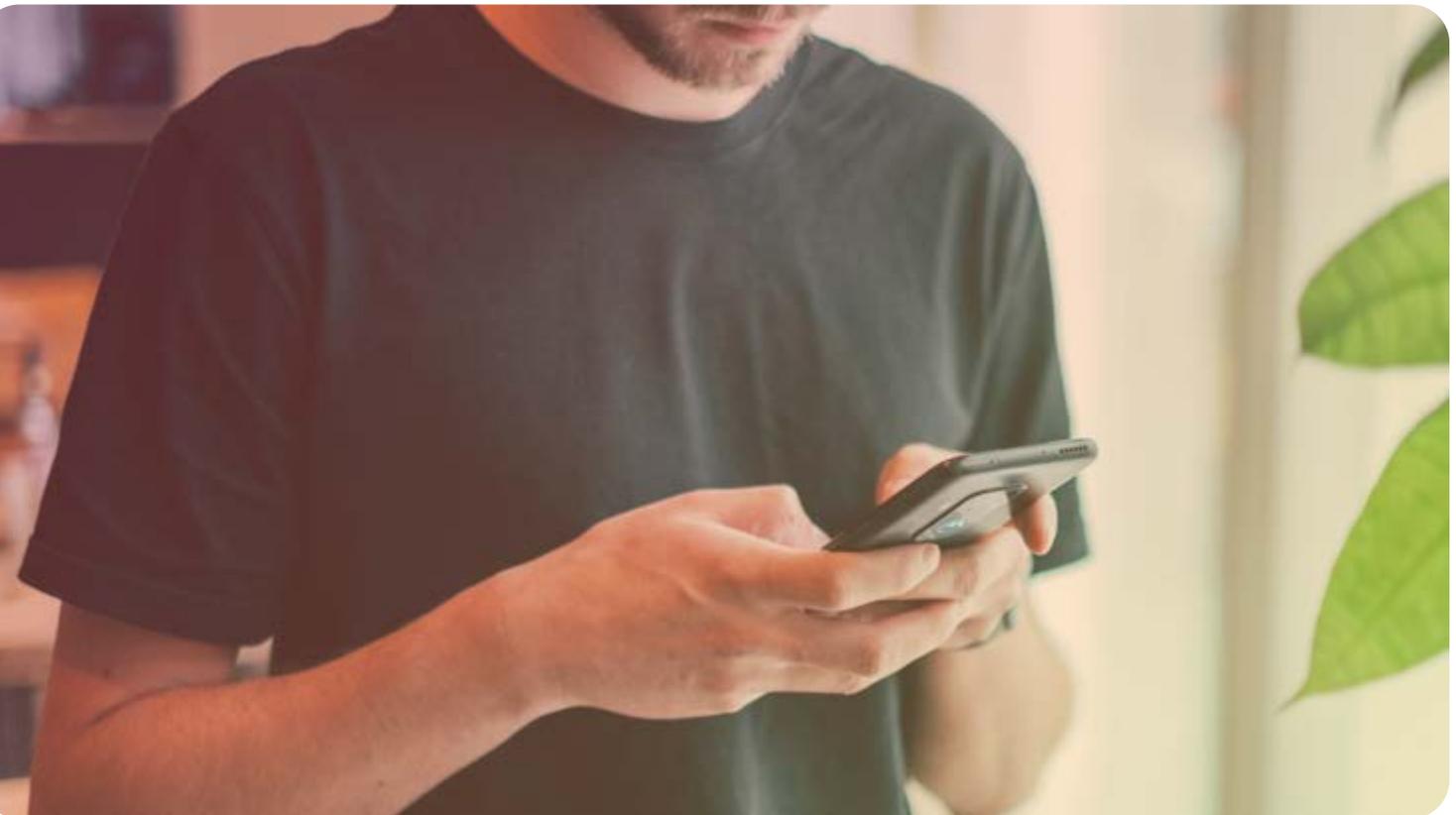
“The internet was the only place where I could learn how to use protection during sex that’s not just between a man and a woman.”

Focus Group Participant, Czechia

Access to accurate, affirming, and relatable information is a cornerstone of queer youth’s well-being and identity development. Whether through memes, YouTube stories or online communities, digital media enables young LGBTQ+ individuals to find clarity, connection, and confidence in who they are.

In short:

- » Online platforms help queer youth **explore their identity and find supportive information.**
- » **Personal stories and queer role models** online make youth feel less alone and more understood.
- » **Digital spaces often fill gaps** left by schools, families, or communities that lack LGBTQ+ inclusive education.



Activism and Advocacy

In the digital age, activism and advocacy for social change have transformed. They are no longer confined to marches, flyers, or town halls. For queer youth, the internet has become a powerful, low-barrier tool for visibility, organizing, and driving social change. LGBTQ+ youth are participating in shaping public discourse, challenging stigma, and building community in ways that are often safer and more accessible than offline activism.

Online platforms lower the threshold for participation, especially for those who may feel unsafe or unprepared to engage in activism publicly. Digital spaces offer a kind of protection, both physical and psychological, allowing queer youth to advocate for their rights without the risks often tied to public visibility.

“Sometimes you want to defend your ideas but it might not be safe. You can be anonymous and defend yourself against homophobic comments with anonymous comments with a John Doe account.”

Focus Group Participant, Lithuania (20 y.o., male (cis), gay)

This digital activism is especially crucial in countries where in-person advocacy is limited by censorship, social stigma, or safety risks. For example, in Turkey LGBTQ+ social media activists navigate a delicate balance between visibility and safety. These activists often tailor their messaging to avoid state surveillance or societal backlash while still asserting their identities and demands.⁵ Similar observations likely hold true for other European countries, where being open and loud about LGBTQ+ rights could potentially be dangerous.

Online platforms empower not only traditional activists, but also what Blackwell et al. call incidental advocates – individuals, for example LGBTQ+ parents, whose everyday posts inadvertently challenge heteronormative norms.⁶ These subtle forms of advocacy play a crucial role in normalizing queer lives and fostering social empathy. Such representation may seem small, but they can significantly influence public attitudes and self-perception among queer youth.



“Just knowing that [my] account was somehow run by a queer person... just made [other LGBTQ+ youth] so happy and gave them this small form of visibility.”

Focus Group Participant, Germany (19 y.o., queer)

However, activism takes its toll. As the RAY Network report from 2024 notes, digital tools are only effective when combined with attention to digital well-being and emotional sustainability.⁷ Young activists report burnout and internal conflicts.

“[Activism] is something that takes a lot more time and energy than I thought before.”

Focus Group Participant, Slovakia

“I think I went over all the phases in my life. From trying to change something to apathy then trying to do something without giving my entire self to it. I don’t want to burn myself completely out. I join where and what I can. Picking my battles, where I can make a difference, and where I can’t”

Focus Group Participant, Lithuania (23 y.o., female (cis), lesbian)

Another drawback of online activism: Because of the global nature of social media, many queer youth engage in activism within a broader, often more progressive international public sphere. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram expose them to Western content and values, which shapes their views and encourages more outspoken expressions of identity and advocacy. However, this often happens in digital spaces disconnected from their local realities. As one Lithuanian participant noted, these young people remain largely invisible in their own countries – where public support for LGBTQ+ rights may still be limited, and where their voices could make a significant impact. While they are active and vocal online, they rarely participate in national discourse or local activism, leaving a gap between global awareness and local change.

“Our most active people are hidden. They are talking but not in Lithuanian [public].”

Focus Group Participant, Lithuania (22 y.o., non-binary, bisexual)

Overall, digital activism has given queer youth the power to be visible, strategic, and safe – on their own terms. It enables intersectional advocacy, fosters community, and serves as both a platform and a lifeline. Whether through memes, livestreams,

or grassroots campaigns, LGBTQ+ youth are not just participants in online culture, they are reshaping it as a force for inclusion and justice.

In short:

- » Online activism offers a **safer and more accessible** way for queer youth to speak up and organize.
- » **Anonymity and low barriers** help those in unsafe or conservative environments take part.
- » Even small acts online, like everyday posts, can **challenge norms and increase queer visibility**.
- » Many queer youth are **active in global online spaces**, but their voices often remain unheard in their own countries, **limiting local visibility and impact**.



Supportive Community and Safe Spaces

For many LGBTQ+ youth, finding community and safe spaces offline can be difficult, especially in environments that are unwelcoming or geographically isolated. In this context, digital media plays an important role in offering spaces where queer individuals can connect, find support, and foster self-understanding. Studies as well as the QueerResilience focus groups show that online platforms are not just substitutes for in-person communities, they are often the first and sometimes only spaces where queer youth feel seen, understood, and supported.

Research shows that platforms like TikTok, Discord, Instagram, and Reddit provide critical support networks for LGBTQ+ youth. Craig et al. emphasized in a paper from 2015 that digital media use helps queer youth build resilience by enabling coping, strength, activism, and, notably, community building.⁸ Similarly, Hiebert and Kortess-Miller identified in their 2021 study that TikTok acts as a vital platform for offering support around identity formation, family relationships, and finding belonging, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹

Berger et al. (2022) conducted a meta-analysis revealing that LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to rely on online platforms for social support compared to their non-LGBTQ+ peers. These spaces allow for anonymous interaction, helping youth connect across geographical and cultural boundaries.¹⁰

“When you have a community on social media who can relate to your questions and issues, it gets easier ... you get suggestions, support, and someone makes a joke. It makes it easier to go through it.”

Focus Group Participant, Lithuania (20 y.o., male (cis), gay)

Online spaces create what our focus group participants sometimes called „queer bubbles“ – safe zones where identity exploration is not only allowed but encouraged. A participant from Czechia described the internet as “a safe haven where I could be myself”. Social media enables LGBTQ+ youth to express themselves without the constant fear of judgment, offering a form of freedom not always available offline. This “bubble” effect, while sometimes criticized for limiting exposure to differing views, is invaluable for youth in the early stages of identity exploration, providing essential validation and belonging.

“Bubbles are also positive in a way, because you have lots of like-minded people with whom you can talk about certain topics and let off steam a bit.”

Focus Group Participant, Germany (19 y.o., female (cis), lesbian)

Many focus group participants discussed how social media helped them form lasting friendships. Platforms like Discord were particularly noted for facilitating meaningful relationships that often transitioned from online to offline connections. For youth in rural areas or conservative environments, online friendships were often the only lifeline to queer youth during critical developmental stages.

Similarly, finding romantic relationships online was common, with some participants sharing stories of meeting partners through Instagram or specialized queer platforms.

While online communities provide essential support, many participants noted that as they grew older and moved to larger, more accepting environments, real-life interactions became increasingly important. Social media was described as a starting point – a place to understand oneself and build initial connections – but not a permanent substitute for offline community life.



“The internet was the first place to play around and figure it out... but now I live more actively away from social media.”

Focus Group Participant, Lithuania (20 y.o., male (trans), bisexual)

Many participants acknowledged that while online spaces helped them survive isolation during events like the pandemic, face-to-face experiences provided a deeper sense of fulfillment.

In short:

- » **Online platforms offer crucial support** when queer youth can't find safe spaces offline.
- » **“Queer bubbles” online can allow for safe identity exploration** and self-expression without fear of judgment.
- » **Online friendships and relationships often become key social lifelines**, especially in rural or unwelcoming areas.
- » While digital spaces are a strong starting point, many youth later seek **more fulfilling in-person connections**.

Escapism

For queer youth, escapism through digital media can serve as a coping mechanism. Digital spaces offer young LGBTQ+ people – or all young people for that matter – a way to retreat from whatever difficult situations they are dealing with in their daily lives.

According to a 2015 study by Craig et al., media acts as a catalyst for resilience in queer youth. One key way it does this is through escapism. “Media is a form of escapism from the harsh reality that is the heteronormative, the heterosexist world that we live in...” one youth shared in their study. Escaping into queer-affirming stories, games, or creative projects becomes a coping mechanism – a way to manage emotional strain and reclaim joy.⁸

Focus group participants in Czechia described how they use media creatively to escape and express themselves: “I wrote a full book in English... I can ask ChatGPT. It creates perfectly written chapters.”

Through creative writing and AI-generated storytelling, youth carve out personal, affirming spaces even when reality feels unsafe.

Consuming LGBTQ+ content also provides both affirmation and a sense of belonging. Streaming shows, fandom communities, and even memes become portals to queer culture and solidarity – connecting youth to stories and people who reflect their experiences.

“I felt this kind of insatiable hunger, a craving for anything queer-themed.”

Focus Group Participant, Czechia

Kuo et al. distinguish between passive distraction and active escapism, noting that immersive activities like role-play games or storytelling can affirm identity and restore a sense of agency.¹¹ For queer youth, this isn't about avoidance. It's about empowerment through imagined worlds where they are safe, visible, and powerful.

However, even passive distraction and avoidance can be beneficial sometimes, as one Slovak expert from the QueeResilience expert interviews explained. Sometimes, escape is necessary just to stay afloat.

“It's just that actually an escape into another reality is not necessarily bad – it's survival sometimes.”

Patricia Vesel Ganoczyová (Expert Interviewee, Slovakia)

In short:

- » Digital media offers queer youth a way to **cope with stress and difficult environments.**
- » **Creative use of media** helps youth express themselves and feel safe.
- » Queer-themed content provides **affirmation, connection, and a sense of belonging.**
- » Escapism is not just avoidance. It can be **empowering and sometimes necessary for emotional survival.**



Chapter 2: **Risks** **of Digital** **Media for** **LGBTQ+ Youth**

PART 1:

INSIGHTS

Cyberbullying and Hate Speech

LGBTQ+ youth across Europe face a lot of online harassment and discrimination. They are more likely to deal with hate speech, cyberbullying, and other forms of online abuse than their non-LGBTQ+ peers. A lot of this comes from deep-rooted prejudice and social exclusion, making many feel even more isolated and affecting their mental health. Social media platforms like Facebook and X often become hotspots for this kind of harassment. Research shows the serious emotional toll this takes on victims – a problem that the QueeResilience focus group participants underlined.

A systematic literature review found that the prevalence of cyberbullying among LGBTQ+ youth ranges between 10.5% and 71.3% across studies. Queer adolescents are disproportionately more often victims of cyberbullying than their heterosexual, cisgender peers.¹² While this holds true for all sub-groups within the LGBTQ+ community, there are still some notable differences. For example, transgender youth and individuals identifying as non-binary or other genders report experiencing higher levels of cyberbullying compared to cisgender gay and bisexual males.¹³

While LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately targeted by online hate speech in general, a German study suggests that individuals with multiple marginalized identities (e.g. migration background) and those who are politically active are especially at risk.¹⁴

Focus group participants in the QueeResilience partner countries reported being frequently targeted for their identities, simply for being visible, whether through profile pictures, advocacy work, or general participation in online discussions.

“When I ran a queer account, classmates sent me disgusting stuff.”

Focus Group Participant, Czechia

“But my account is public, so there are always people coming around the corner who not only say stupid things, but also insult you, which you definitely have to deal with first.”

Focus Group Participant, Germany (19 y.o. agender, omniseual)

These experiences take a psychological toll on many queer adolescents. Research on the psychological and emotional impact of cyberbullying on LGBTQ youth has identified three key areas of concern: suicidal ideation and attempts, depression, and lower self-esteem. Studies consistently show that cyberbullying alone or in

combination with face-to-face bullying significantly increases mental health risks for LGBTQ youth.¹²

“I must worry about whether I'll be around in 20 years due to global warming... or being stabbed on the street because someone realizes I'm different.”

Focus Group Participant, Czechia

“And then they said to me, if I find you, I'll beat you up [...] it took a bit of a toll on me.”

Focus Group Participant, Germany (18 y.o., male (cis), gay)

Across the EU, 38 % of respondents of the 2023 “EU LGBTIQ Survey III” reported they had “always” or “often” encountered/seen online calls for violence against LGBTIQ people in the last 12 months. This figure is significantly higher for Lithuania (56 %) and Slovakia (54 %) than for Germany (32 %) and Czechia (31 %).¹⁵

Exposure to hate speech is also linked to reduced participation in democratic discourses online. Those who are particularly affected by hate online will withdraw most often from online discussions, leading to minorities’ voices being less represented in democratic discourses, known as Silencing Effect.¹⁶



“Homophobes are more likely to yell homophobic rhetoric in the comments, those who support [LGBTQ+], who are LGBTQ+ or are neutral about it usually stay silent and keep it to themselves. Then it looks like everyone is homophobic.”

Focus Group Participant, Lithuania (23 y.o., female (cis), lesbian)

In short:

- » **LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to face online harassment** than their non-LGBTQ+ peers, especially on social media.
- » **Trans and non-binary youth are particularly affected**, along with those holding multiple marginalized identities.
- » **Cyberbullying and hate speech harm mental health**, increasing risks of depression, low self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts.
- » **Hate speech discourages participation** in online discussions, leading to fewer queer voices in public debates (known as the “Silencing Effect”).



Misinformation and Stereotyping

In the digital age, digital platforms and social media in particular, often act as amplifiers for misinformation and stereotypical depictions. The LGBTQ+ community is increasingly confronted with misleading narratives disseminated through social media and other online channels, which not only distort public perceptions but also affect individuals' self-image and emotional well-being.

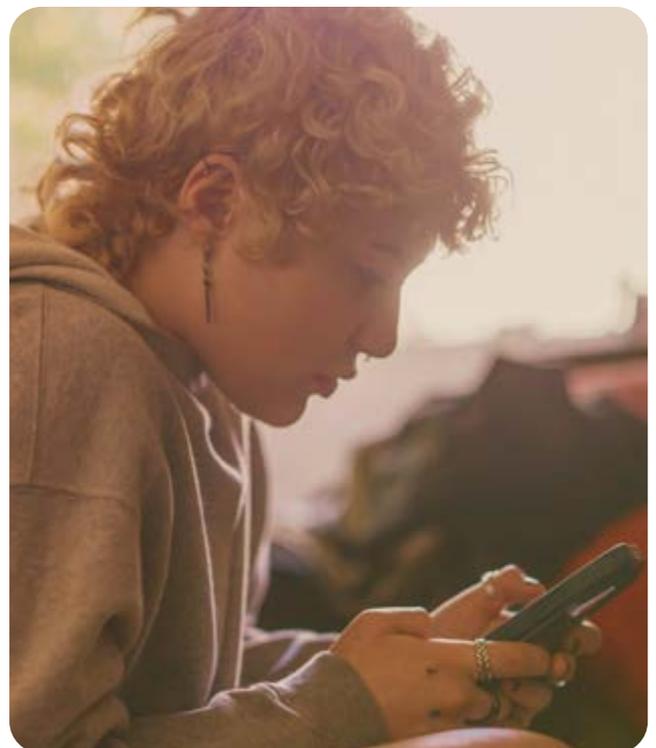
Participants of the QueeResilience Focus Groups voiced frustration over recurring stereotypes and factually wrong statements about queer people online, particularly around events like Pride (CSD), and offensive associations with topics like pedophilia or homosexuality being a disease.

“Especially because I’ve also dealt a lot with the topic of pedophilia (...) it’s also frustrating to a certain extent because it indirectly attacks you (...) I’m part of this community and they’re trying to portray it as if we simply accept offenders.”

Focus Group Participant, Germany (19 y.o., female (cis), bisexual)

An analysis by the European Digital Media Observatory confirms that these narratives that our participants mentioned, are the most pervasive. The main narratives of disinformation targeting LGBTQ+ are linking queer identities to mental illness, associating them with pedophilia, portraying them as violent or dangerous, or exaggerating claims of preferential treatment in sports.¹⁷

The spread of false narratives led many to feel misunderstood, misjudged, or even to question their own place within the LGBTQ+ community. Exposure to misinformation often caused confusion or self-doubt as well as frustration over a twisted public perception of queer topics.



“It’s frustrating because it affects how the public perceives us.”

Focus Group Participant, Slovakia

“When I’m having a bad day and I know it would harm me, I simply avoid places where I know [stereotypes and misinformation about LGBTQ+] will appear.”

Focus Group Participant, Czechia

Across Europe, 64 % of respondents of the “EU LGBTIQ Survey III” in 2023 reported they had always or often encountered content considering LGBTIQ people to be “unnatural” or mentally ill in the last 12 months. While Germany and Czechia are close to the EU average, these numbers are significantly higher in Slovakia (85 %) and Lithuania (83 %). Similarly, 76 % of respondents have “always or often” encountered online references to “LGBTIQ propaganda” or “gender ideology” in the last 12 months (Czechia: 67 %, Germany: 77 %, Lithuania: 80 %, Slovakia: 86 %).¹⁵

Beyond the personal impacts, the spread of false information carries broader political and societal consequences. Research has illustrated how the so-called “Misinformation-Legislation Pipeline” influences policy decisions and compromises evidence-based healthcare. For instance, a 2023 analysis demonstrates how false claims regarding transgender healthcare in the United States have contributed to restrictive measures.¹⁸ Similarly, reports from the European External Action Service reveal that disinformation campaigns are strategically used to undermine trust in Western institutions and to frame LGBTQIA+ rights as a threat to traditional values.¹⁹

In short:

- » LGBTQ+ people are often targeted with **false and harmful stereotypes online**, especially around Pride or queer rights topics.
- » **Common misinformation** includes linking queer identities to illness, danger, or criminal behavior.
- » This content affects how queer youth feel about themselves and how they are perceived by others, often **causing confusion or distress**.
- » **False narratives also influence politics**, leading to harmful laws and increased public mistrust toward LGBTQ+ rights.

Privacy and Oversharing

For queer youth, navigating social media comes with added layers of risk: From accidentally sharing too much to dealing with judgment or even people crossing personal boundaries, social media can be a tricky space. In the QueeResilience Focus Groups, participants opened up about how they're figuring out ways to stay safe, be themselves, and protect their privacy at the same time. Their stories show not just how online life can affect emotions and relationships, but also how they're finding smart ways to take back control over what they share and with whom.

For many participants, sharing anything online, whether images, messages, or stories, is a collective decision that hinges on mutual respect and clear boundaries.



“In the groups I’m in, people always ask if there’s anything they want to share or in what form they’re allowed to share things. It’s always the case that people ask and find a way that works for everyone and that nobody has a problem with.”

Focus Group Participant, Germany (19 y.o., agender, omnisexual)

Concerns about privacy were not merely theoretical. Some participants described unsettling experiences that blurred the boundaries between the digital and the physical.

“There was a case a few months ago where some random guy messaged me on Discord and said that he wanted to move to my place of residence. And then suddenly messaged me my address [...] I didn’t dare go out on the street anymore. And I was a bit scared for the next few weeks that someone would turn up on my doorstep at some point.”

Focus Group Participant, Germany (18 y.o., male (cis), gay)

As a result of such experiences, many participants described heightened awareness when posting online. For some, this means avoiding real names or geographic details entirely. Others control visibility through privacy settings or by limiting

interactions to smaller, trusted circles. This self-censorship is a coping mechanism – one that, while protective, also reflects broader systemic issues around safety and stigma.

“Once I leave my digital footprint on the internet, if someone really tries, they can find everything.”

- Focus Group Participant, Czechia

“Anyone could use something small against me.”

Focus Group Participant, Czechia

These personal stories reflect a bigger problem: the online world isn't always built with queer people's safety in mind. According to Privacy International, apps like Grindr and Hornet have shared sensitive user info like locations without strong protections in place.²⁰ That kind of data leak can be dangerous, especially in places where being LGBTQ+ is met with hate or even criminalization.

A big part of the problem is that many queer young people haven't been taught how to stay safe online. There's often a gap in digital education, especially when it comes to understanding things like data privacy, app permissions, or how certain platforms might use – or misuse – your information. According to Privacy International, this lack of awareness makes LGBTQ+ users more vulnerable, especially when platforms don't make privacy settings clear or easy to manage.²¹

In short:

- » Queer youth face special risks online, including **privacy breaches and unwanted attention**.
- » **Many take extra care with what they share**, using privacy settings and limiting visibility to trusted groups.
- » **Negative experiences make queer youth more cautious** and anxious about sharing personal details.
- » **A lack of digital education and poor app protections** leave LGBTQ+ users vulnerable to privacy violations.

Sexualization, Grooming and Fetishization

For many LGBTQ+ adolescents, digital spaces offer a vital sense of community and self-expression. But these same spaces can also expose them to unwanted sexualization and inappropriate content – often without proper safeguards in place. Across QueerResilience Focus Groups, participants from Germany and Czechia opened up about how they encounter, experience, and navigate online environments where boundaries are blurred and safety is not guaranteed.

Participants expressed deep concern about how easily sexual or explicit content can be accessed online, especially on platforms like Discord, where NSFW (Not Safe For Work) areas are only gated by a simple “Yes, I’m 18” button. This lack of real age verification means that young users – especially those exploring their identities – are routinely exposed to content they may not be ready for. It also increases the risk of grooming, a topic that also came up in the groups.

One participant described a personal grooming experience that began in an LGBTQ+ Discord server. What started as friendly conversation quickly escalated into boundary-pushing behavior:

“It was so easy to start testing boundaries... invasive questions were asked about sexuality... then it slowly became a cycle where you were more and more afraid to say anything.”

Focus Group Participant, Germany (19 y.o., female (cis), bisexual)

Some reflected on how, in hindsight, they may have overestimated their ability to handle what they encountered online when they were younger. Others noted how the online world often doesn’t reflect the safe and supportive environment that queer youth are hoping to find. Instead, spaces that claim to be about “community” sometimes turn into places where sexualized content becomes the norm – even when it’s not what young users are looking for.

“Back then, I thought [sexual content] was cool and mature. Looking back, it probably wasn't the best thing for me at the time.”

Focus Group Participant, Czechia

Expert Stefan Hinterstorff echoes these concerns and emphasizes the need for extensive education on the risks of online interaction, particularly because so much of queer sexual and romantic exploration happens digitally. Apps like Grindr may

play a key role in that journey, but they also open doors to digital sexual violence and fetishization, especially for trans youth.

“There are also many risks involved, particularly with digital sexual violence that can occur. This requires a lot of education and the need to empower the youth in their sense of self, helping them to set and assert their own boundaries.”

Stefan Hinterstorff (Expert interviewee, Germany)

Some Czech participants took a more nuanced view, especially when it came to sexualized content created by LGBTQ+ people. “If it has a purpose, it’s not necessarily bad in itself,” one participant said, pointing to the importance of context and intention.

Still, there was a clear need expressed for more non-sexualized spaces. The call was clear: create more places where queer youth can connect, explore, and express themselves without being immediately exposed to adult content or adult expectations.

Research backs up these lived experiences. A 2021 study found that over half of transgender and nonbinary individuals reported feeling fetishized – often on dating apps or social media, where interactions crossed boundaries and reduced their identities to objects of desire.²² Another study found that stereotypical portrayals of lesbians in media, often designed for the male gaze, can negatively affect body satisfaction, even when they don’t impact other aspects of self-esteem.²³



In short:

- » **Queer youth are often exposed to sexual content online**, sometimes without proper age protections.
- » Platforms like Discord and dating apps make it easy for young users to encounter **grooming or fetishization**.
- » **Many youth feel unprepared to handle these experiences** and later regret early exposure.
- » **There’s a need for safer, non-sexualized queer spaces**, where young people can explore identity without adult content or pressure.

General Challenges for Wellbeing

Young people today are growing up in a world that is always online. In the QueerResilience Focus Groups, participants opened up about the struggles they face in their everyday digital routines. These aren't just issues for LGBTQ+ youth, they're things many young people, regardless of identity, are wrestling with.

Doomscrolling is one of the most common challenges participants described. Doomscrolling is the habit of endlessly scrolling through bad news, especially first thing in the morning or late at night.

“When I get up in the morning, the first thing I do is go on my cell phone and see if there’s anything new. There’s rarely anything positive.”

Focus Group Participant, Germany (18 y.o., male (cis), gay)

Whether it's political news, climate change, or global conflict, the constant exposure can lead to anxiety, frustration, and a feeling that nothing is getting better. Some described feeling burned out by the news cycle but still caught in the loop of needing to stay informed.

The fear of missing out – FOMO – is another challenge participants described. Even when they want to take a break from social media, it's hard to disconnect. There's always the feeling that something important might happen while they're away.

“When I try to really take a break, I can't do it. I think it's this FOMO or something – this fear of missing out. I just have that.”

Focus Group Participant, Germany (18 y.o., male (cis), gay)

Participants also described the comparison trap: Social media is full of carefully curated content – perfect vacations, fit bodies, success stories – that don't always match up with real life. And even though many young people know it's curated, it doesn't stop the comparisons. This subtle but constant comparison can chip away at confidence and satisfaction. While some may find the content motivating, others walk away feeling like they're not doing enough, achieving enough, or being enough.

Another challenge that came up in the Czech focus group is the way social media can turn ordinary interactions into conflict. One participant described how even casual conversations in Instagram group chats sometimes spiraled into arguments, often without a clear reason. One participant described experiences to how others in

an Instagram group would respond to aggressive messages with angry or laughing emojis, almost treating the conflict as entertainment.

“It became a spectacle. I feel that this way of communication incites conflict and creates hostile relationships. With the constant likes and similar metrics, which people track and want to achieve high numbers.”

Focus Group Participant, Czechia

According to research from the Digital Resilience in Media Usage study these daily habits take a toll. Young people are experiencing digital news burnout, emotional exhaustion, and psychological stress linked directly to the way they use digital media. Many report feeling socially isolated despite being online all day, and some are beginning to limit their screen time as a form of self-protection.²⁴

The study also found that aggressive online interactions and polarized public discourse can make young users feel unsafe or overwhelmed. And when loud, extreme opinions dominate the conversation, it can feel like there’s no room for honest or thoughtful engagement anymore.



In short:

- » **Doomscrolling and constant bad news** can lead to anxiety, frustration, and emotional burnout.
- » **Fear of missing out (FOMO)** makes it hard for youth to take breaks from social media.
- » **Comparing themselves to idealized posts** can hurt self-esteem and increase pressure.
- » **Online conflict and toxic communication** often escalate quickly and make digital spaces feel hostile.
- » **Many young people feel overwhelmed, emotionally exhausted**, and are starting to limit screen time for their mental health.

Chapter 3:

Context

on LGBTQ+ Issues

in Partner Countries



PART 1:

INSIGHTS

Czechia

A recent survey in the Czech Republic highlights ongoing challenges regarding LGBTQ+ acceptance. Around 40 % of the population believes that LGBTQ+ individuals should not have the same rights as others. Many people said they felt uncomfortable with the idea of a transgender or intersex person holding an important political position or working with them as a coworker. Additionally, nearly half of the polled people would feel uneasy if their child were in a relationship with someone who is transgender or intersex. These findings highlight the larger social challenges related to LGBTQ+ rights and inclusion. The study, which surveyed 3,063 respondents, found that half of queer individuals experience mental health challenges. However, these issues are not linked to their sexual orientation but are primarily a result of discrimination and stigma.²⁵

Another nationwide survey of Czech adults has revealed worrying information about the mental health of sexual minorities in the country. The findings show a big gap in mental health between heterosexual and LGB individuals in the Czech Republic. Among the general population, 18 % of heterosexual individuals reported experiencing current mental disorders. In contrast, rates were much higher for sexual minorities, with 52 % of gay or lesbian individuals, 33 % of bisexual individuals, and 26 % of those identifying as more sexually diverse reporting mental health challenges. Suicidal thoughts and behaviors also appeared more frequently among sexual minorities. While 6 % of heterosexual individuals reported such experiences, the rates were notably higher for gay or lesbian individuals (25%), bisexual individuals (23 %), and more sexually diverse individuals (11 %). Queer people in the Czech Republic reported higher levels of both depression and anxiety compared to heterosexual individuals, with those identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or more sexually diverse experiencing significantly more severe symptoms.²⁶

The findings highlight a pressing need for societal change, particularly in how LGBTQ+ individuals are supported and treated. With an estimated 10 % of the population identifying as LGBTQ+, and most having close family members or loved ones, the mental and physical health of this group affects society as a whole. When healthcare and support systems fail to adequately serve LGBTQ+ people, the ripple effect is felt across the broader population.²⁷

Schools are another place where discrimination happens, and LGBTQ+ youth still face a lot of it, often because of their sexual orientation. This mistreatment can seriously affect their mental health, sometimes for years. The impact goes beyond school, with the risk of being excluded socially and alienated from family, which can



52 %

**of gay and lesbian Czechs show
symptoms of mental health
disorders**

make it harder for them to finish school and find a job later. To help, it's important for teachers to get proper training on how to support LGBTQ+ students, understand their challenges, and give them the help they need to succeed.²⁸

Surveys show that LGBTQ+ individuals in Czechia face discrimination and stereotypes, especially trans and non-binary people. While hate towards LGBTQ+ people has risen, there has been some progress in reducing prejudice over the past five years. Many LGBTQ+ people have experienced physical or sexual violence, with trans women being most affected. Online abuse is common, and this violence negatively impacts mental health, leading many to seek care. Satisfaction with mental health services varies, with men and trans women feeling the most satisfied.²⁹

Germany

Marriage equality ("Ehe für alle" = marriage for everyone) has been established in Germany since 2017. According to a 2024 statistical study, 81 % of Germans agree with marriage equality, 75 % of respondents stated they would have little to no problem if their child identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.³⁰ Another EU survey within the queer population found out that 57 % are now fairly or very open about being LGBTQ+ in Germany. For the EU-28, it is 47%.³¹

Although German society is relatively accepting of queer identities, hate crimes and discrimination are still serious problems for the queer people. The Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) has been recording anti-queer crimes in the category of "gender/sexual identity" since 2020. Until 2022, reported cases have risen significantly: 66 % increase in the "gender/sexual identity" category, 50% increase in the "sexual orientation" category.³² In 2024, the federal interior minister reported that police registered over 1,785 hate crimes against members of the LGBTQ+ communities in Germany.³³

According to a 2020 EU survey 23 % felt discriminated against at work in the year before the survey in Germany. The EU-28 average is 21%. In Germany 36 % say they were harassed the year before the survey. The EU-28 is 38%.³¹



1,785

**incidents of hate crimes against
LGBTQ+ people were registered
in Germany in 2024**

LGBTQ+ people in Germany face major health challenges compared to those who aren't queer. They are three times more likely to experience depression and burnout. Around 40 % of trans people have been diagnosed with anxiety disorders. LGBTQ+ individuals are also twice as likely to feel lonely, with 15 % stating that they experienced loneliness. Additionally, about 26 % of the LGBTQ+ community will struggle with depression at some point in their lives, compared to 10% of cisgender, heterosexual people.³⁴

A significant number of LGBTQ+ individuals experience suicidal thoughts, with more than one in three (36 %) reporting such feelings in the year prior to the survey. The rates are particularly high among transgender people, with 54 % of trans men and 57 % of trans women expressing suicidal thoughts. Other groups that are confronted with additional types of stigmatization and / or socio-economic challenges face higher rates of suicidal thoughts: LGBTQ+ people with disabilities (54 %), unemployed LGBTQ+ individuals (52 %) and LGBTQ+ people belonging to ethnic minorities (48 %).³⁵

Although the use of social media can have an emancipatory character, especially for minorities, it can also bring along certain risks. In a survey, run by World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe in 2021/2022, 10 % of adolescents in Germany reported problematic (i.e. showing symptoms of addiction) social media use in 2022.³⁶

Lithuania

In Lithuania, LGBTQ+ people have to deal with low social acceptance and limited legal protection. A survey from 2023 revealed that 54 % of Lithuanians would not want to live in a neighborhood with homosexual people, 40 % would not want to work in the same workplace.³⁷

A 2023 survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights revealed that 47 % of LGBTQ+ respondents in Lithuania reported experiencing discrimination in various areas of life over the past 12 months. This is the third highest figure in the EU after Bulgaria and Cyprus.¹⁵ The 2023 Eurobarometer on discrimination in the EU found that 59 % of Lithuanians would feel uncomfortable if their child had a same-gender partner, and 65 % would feel uneasy if their child were dating a transgender person.²⁵

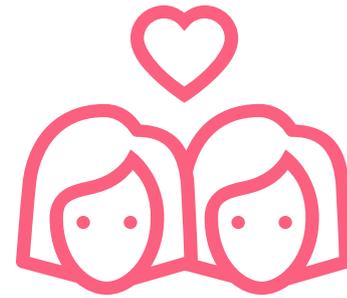
Members of the LGBTQ+ community in Lithuania face significant mental health challenges. A 2021 survey found that the main reasons for not seeking mental health care were fear of discrimination and the need to hide their sexual orientation. Many participants required assistance, with bisexual individuals expressing the greatest need.³⁸

According to an online survey conducted in 2022-2023, schools in Lithuania do not seem to be safe spaces for queer students. The aim of the study was to evaluate the situation of LGBTQ+ students in Lithuanian schools, focusing on their social acceptance, psychological well-being, bullying, discrimination, and the use of digital media. More than half of the polled students felt unsafe at school due to their sexual orientation, almost half of the respondents felt unsafe due to their gender expression. A significant number of respondents in Lithuania reported facing harassment and discrimination. Around 22 % experienced physical harassment, partly being linked to their gender identity or sexual orientation. More than a third of students dealt with cyberbullying. When it comes to teachers, only a small percentage (2.5 %) consistently intervene in homophobic situations, while over half (57.5 %) don't react at all. LGBTQ+ students also reported that 15.8 % of schools lack supportive teachers. Additionally, 81.3 % of respondents said their curriculum has not included any content about LGBTQ+ individuals in recent years.

Many LGBTQIA+ students in Lithuania struggle with their psychological well-being. A large portion, 67.9 %, feel uncomfortable discussing LGBTQ+ topics in class, and almost 50 % don't feel as "good as others".

Compared to a 2017 study, the sense of safety in 2023 among LGBTQ+ students has slightly decreased. The lack of support from teachers and school policies, as well as the absence of discussions on sexual orientation and gender identity, contribute to the negative school environment.³⁹

Social media plays a key role in LGBTQ+ activism in Lithuania and Eastern Europe in general. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram contribute to increase visibility for the community. These platforms allow activists to challenge the status quo, though they face issues like anti-LGBTQ+ disinformation and privacy concerns. Social media also helps LGBTQ+ individuals express their identities and build supportive communities in private or semi-private spaces. Groups like the Lithuanian Gay League and the Tolerant Youth Association use social media to promote campaigns on hate speech, marriage equality, adoption rights, and family diversity.⁴⁰



59 %

of Lithuanians would feel uncomfortable if their child had a same-sex partner

Slovakia

Social stigma against LGBTQ+ identities remains a major issue in Slovakia. The Queer Health Project reports that 77% of LGBTQ+ youth avoid public affection due to fear of harassment, and 40% have experienced abuse in the past year. This ongoing discrimination severely impacts their mental health, showing that society needs to change and be more accepting.

LGBTQ+ youth in Slovakia are facing a mental health crisis, with much higher rates of depression and anxiety than their heterosexual and cisgender peers. The Queer Health Project found that nearly 70% of LGBTQ+ youth reported depression, and over 60% experienced anxiety.

The mental health challenges go beyond common issues like anxiety and depression. Approximately 40% of LGBTQ+ youth have considered self-harm or suicide. These alarming numbers are often linked to experiences of isolation, discrimination, and rejection, which many LGBTQ+ youth face in both public and private spheres.⁴¹

Schools, which are meant to be safe spaces for learning and growth, often become places of exclusion and harassment for LGBTQ+ students. Research from the European Commission reveals that 57 % of LGBTQ+ students in Slovakia have encountered bullying or exclusionary practices at school. This persistent discrimination not only harms their emotional well-being but also has long-term consequences on their academic performance. Victims of bullying tend to experience reduced self-esteem, making it more difficult for them to thrive academically and socially.¹⁵

The role of family support in mental health is undeniable, yet many LGBTQ+ youth in Slovakia face rejection or lack of acceptance after coming out. Studies show that young people who face rejection from their families are more likely to develop depression and anxiety. Lacking support from those they care about can lead to long-term emotional pain, making their mental health struggles even harder.⁴²

Despite the growing recognition of LGBTQ+ mental health needs, Slovakia still faces a significant gap in affirmative mental health services. The Queer Health Project highlights that many therapists lack the training required to understand and address the specific challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals. As a result, LGBTQ+ youth are often hesitant to seek professional help, fearing misunderstanding or even bias from mental health providers. The lack of specialized care leaves many struggling without the support



77 %

of LGBTQ+ youth in Slovakia avoid public display of affection due to fear of harassment

they need to navigate the complex emotional and psychological challenges tied to their identity.⁴¹

Digital platforms offer LGBTQ+ youth a crucial space to connect, find community, and access support. However, these online spaces also come with significant risks. According to the Queer Health Project, nearly 50% of LGBTQ+ youth in Slovakia have experienced online harassment, exacerbating the mental health challenges they already face. Cyberbullying and the spread of misinformation can further isolate these young people, adding another layer of stress and vulnerability to their lives. These forms of online hate are intensified by the country's conservative political and cultural environment.⁴¹



Chapter 4: Empowering Queer Youth in Digital Spaces

PART 2:

SUPPORT

Introduction: Practical Approaches

After exploring the benefits and challenges of digital media use for the wellbeing of young queer people, this second part of this guidebook turns to practical applications within youth work. It addresses the question of **how youth workers can support queer youth and actively engage with the topic of digital media in their daily practice**. This section offers concrete recommendations, strategies, and methods to help professionals create safer, more empowering spaces for youth to open up about their challenges, but also their positive experiences with digital media.

The methods and recommendations collected here come from the expert interviews of the QueeResilience project, enhanced by additional research by the project team. These were the interviewees in the four partner countries Czechia, Germany, Lithuania and Slovakia:

- » **Stefan Hinterstorff** works at the Competence Center for Youth Media Culture North Rhine-Westphalia in Cologne, Germany, engaging in a wide range of media education projects with a focus on queer youth
- » **Agáta Hrdličková**, a professional deeply engaged in gender studies, with a particular concentration on LGBTQ+ issues and sexual education, responsible for educational and training projects at Prague Pride in Czechia
- » **Rasa Katinaité**, psychologist in Vilnius, Lithuania with expertise in the field of LGBTQ+ topics
- » **Zara Kromková**, community worker and advisor in the field of transgender people needs, working as an expert in the organization TransFúzia and the counseling center PRIZMA in Košice, Slovakia
- » **Luce Ostermann**, social worker at lambda::nord, responsible for the development of open youth work in Lübeck, Germany, focusing on the establishment of a central support hub for queer youth and young adults
- » **Jana Soukupová**, social pedagogue and crisis intervention specialist, working at high school in Prague, Czechia
- » **Dr. Jogaila Vaitekaitis**, professor and expert in educational sciences with a focus on educational policy, philosophy of STEM education in Vilnius, Lithuania
- » **Mgr. Patrícia Vesel Ganoczyová**, clinical psychologist and psychotherapist, working as a community worker at the PRIZMA community and counseling center in Košice, Slovakia

Tools and Methods for Youth Workers

The online world can be both a powerful space for self-expression and connection, but also a source of misinformation, exclusion, and harm. To help queer youth navigate these complexities, youth workers can use specific, creative methods that foster critical awareness and digital empowerment. The following tools and methods enable you to help queer young people build safer, more affirming online experiences while developing their confidence, media literacy, and sense of agency.

Creating Memes against Hate Speech

Hate speech directed at queer youth remains a pervasive issue, significantly impacting their mental health and sense of safety. A creative method to counter hate speech involves having young people **create memes and GIFs as a form of counter-speech**. Memes and GIFs play an important role in youth and online culture. They help foster a shared identity and a sense of belonging, as young people often share a similar sense of humor and common references. Memes can often be understood as inside jokes, since they refer to specific cultural references, events, and trends.

parole
ostili

The Manifesto of Non-Hostile Communication

1. Virtual is real

On the Internet, I only write or say what I would dare to say in person.

2. You are what you communicate

The words I choose define who I am. They represent me.

3. Words shape the way I think

I take all the time I need to express my views in the best possible way.

4. Listen before you speak

No one can always be right, and nor am I. I listen, with an honest and open-minded attitude.

5. Words are bridges

I choose words to understand, make myself understood and get close to others.

6. Words have consequences

I am aware that what I say or write can have consequences, small or serious.

7. Share with care

I share texts and image only after I have read, assessed and understood them.

8. Ideas can be discussed. People must be respected

Those whose views and opinions differ from mine are not enemies to be destroyed.

9. An insult is not an argument

I accept no offensive and aggressive words, even if they support my point of view.

10. Silence says something too

When it's better to keep quiet... I do.

This group activity can be offered if a person is personally affected by hate speech or if youth workers would like to raise awareness for the topic.

You can have a look together at [The Manifest of Non-hostile communication by the Italian NGO Parole Ostili](#), which is available in many different languages.

Start with a joint reflection about hate speech. The participants should try to answer these questions:

- » Have you ever experienced a case of hate speech or witnessed someone from your environment being affected?
- » Have you ever behaved in a wrong or disrespectful way towards others online?
- » How could we change the atmosphere online? How can we help others?

Afterwards participants can start creating their own memes against hate speech. There are various free online tools available that make it easy to create memes using popular templates, either to respond to hateful comments or to show support for those affected. Here are some suggestions by QueeResilience expert Stefan:

To create or reframe a meme with **IMGFlip**, start by selecting a template. You can use a popular option, search for others, or upload your own image. Next, customize the meme by adding text, images, or drawings. Once complete, click „Generate Meme“ and choose how to save or share the final product – whether downloading it, sharing a link, or posting it.

For a more interactive approach, the **Make It Meme** app can be used as a group game, encouraging engagement and peer feedback. Each round, players get a template and must come up with the best caption around topics such as standing up for LGBTQ+ issues, counteracting fake news, etc. Then everyone votes on their favorites, and the most entertaining memes score the most points. It´s also possible to download and share the memes.

Additionally, platforms like **Brush Ninja** allow users to draw their own animated GIFs frame by frame, which can be used to create positive or supportive messages. This method uses familiar digital formats to promote critical thinking and creative expression in a playful, empowering way. To make a simple GIF, open Brush Ninja and draw a shape. Duplicate the first frame using the overlapping boxes button. On the new frame, use the select tool to move, resize, or rotate the shape. Repeat this process on more frames to create movement. Press the play button to preview your animation. When you're happy with it, click export, name your GIF, and save it.



Voices of Resilience: Storytelling as a Tool for Queer Youth Empowerment

In the educational context, storytelling refers to a didactic method in which learning content is conveyed through stories. The goal is to enhance learning by promoting emotional engagement, identification with characters, and vivid connections. Stories activate prior knowledge, make information easier to remember, and encourage critical thinking and reflection. Storytelling can be used orally, in writing, or through multimedia, and is particularly effective for transporting complex topics, values, and cultural content.⁴³

According to QueerResilience expert Jana, **Storytelling is a useful and accessible method for working with queer young people**, particularly those experiencing personal or social challenges, including challenges connected to digital spaces and media use. Hearing real-life experiences, whether positive or difficult, can help young people feel less isolated and more understood. It shows them that others have faced similar struggles and that they are not alone.

Jana believes that **expert commentary from therapists, psychologists, social workers, or legal professionals can enhance these narratives**. Their insights help explain the structural or emotional factors at play and give guidance on how to approach similar situations. This combination of personal story and professional analysis is especially helpful for young people and those supporting them.

Reflection should be an intentional part of the process. After hearing a story, it is useful to ask: What influenced the person's decisions? What options were considered? What could have helped? These questions help young people, and their support networks understand the complexity of real-life situations and identify strategies for action.

Educators and youth workers can play a crucial role by **curating and recommending books, series, movies, podcasts, and other forms of media that feature queer narratives**. When young people encounter stories where they recognize parts of themselves – whether it's coming out, dealing with family rejection, finding love, or exploring gender – they often feel validated and seen. These curated resources can be used in both individual and group settings, offering flexible and inclusive ways to engage.

In group environments, **shared experiences can deepen the impact**. Watching a film, series, documentary, YouTube video, Reel or TikTok video together or reading parts of a book aloud invites conversation, empathy, and mutual support. It allows young queer people to explore complex themes together, to laugh, cry, and connect over common experiences.

Encouraging group members to recommend and share their favorite stories – fictional or real – empowers them to take ownership of their identities and their cultural influences. This process not only affirms individual taste and experience but also builds a collective library of queer voices.

Reshuffling Digital Pathways: A Method for Disrupting Habitual Engagement

In the context of supporting queer youth to develop mindful relationships with technology, QueeResilience expert Agáta suggests the method „Reshuffling Digital Pathways“ which offers a practical approach to disrupt automatic engagement with non-beneficial content. By **intentionally rearranging app icons on smartphones**, individuals can create a moment of pause before engaging with content, fostering greater awareness and control over their digital habits.

This exercise can be done within a workshop or individually. Within a group setting, you can ask everyone to reshuffle their apps randomly or move frequently used apps to different locations or place them in folders. Let the participants observe their usage behavior during a week and then reflect together on how automated usage is and if there have been any changes. Agáta wants the group members to ask themselves **„Why do I use certain apps?“**.

Digital devices are designed to be intuitive and engaging, often leading to habitual use without conscious intention. This automatic behavior is driven by a loop of motivation, ability and prompt. Notifications serve as prompts, and the ease of access to apps makes it difficult to resist the urge to engage, even when the content may not be beneficial.

Reshuffling app icons introduces a deliberate disruption to this habit loop. By moving apps to different places, individuals create a barrier that requires additional effort to access, thereby breaking the automatic response. This simple act can serve as a prompt for reflection, allowing users to assess whether engaging with the app aligns with their current intentions and well-being.

Community App-/Platform/Website Evaluation Activity

This activity, recommended by QueeResilience expert Agáta, encourages young people to **reflect on how their digital habits affect their well-being**. They begin by listing all the apps, games, and websites they regularly use, describing what they do on each platform and how often they engage with them. Afterward, they **assess how each platform affects their emotional, mental, and social health**. Then they categorize them into those that have a positive impact, such as platforms that help them feel connected, inspired, or relaxed, and those that have a negative impact, like those that cause stress, anxiety, or low self-esteem.

The goal of the activity is to raise awareness about how digital environments influence their lives, allowing them to make more informed decisions about which platforms to engage with and which to limit for better well-being.

Social Media Awareness Method: Behind the Screen

In this method, we aim to break the „fourth wall“ of social media – that invisible barrier between users and the systems they engage with daily. QueeResilience expert Agáta explains that instead of simply using platforms like Instagram or TikTok, young people are encouraged to take a step back and critically examine who designs these platforms, how they're built, and why they're structured the way they are.

As part of this method, **participants create their own social network concept from scratch. They decide how it works, how it's financed, how it's monitored, and how user data is handled.** This hands-on approach helps them understand that social media isn't just about chatting and sharing pictures – it's a carefully constructed system, often built around generating profit.

By designing their own platforms, young people learn to question the systems they interact with and recognize the commercial logic behind the user experience. The project fosters digital literacy, critical thinking, and a more transparent relationship with technology.



Pen and Paper Characters

QueeResilience expert Stefan introduces the method of creating “Pen and Paper characters”. This method involves **creating detailed character sheets inspired by pen-and-paper role-playing games**, adapted for queer youth work. Participants design a fictional character by filling out attributes such as name, nickname, age, gender, sexuality, zodiac sign, personality traits, appearance, abilities, goals and even fantasy elements like pets, fellows or class types. Group members can also provide information on character traits such as strength, skill, courage, charisma, creativity, intelligence, etc. The goal is not gameplay, but narrative and identity exploration.

The method can be used in several ways: **to imagine an ideal self, to reflect on personal identity development** (especially useful with younger youth), or as a starting point for creative writing and fanfiction. It also serves as a tool for discussion in mixed groups (queer and non-queer), helping to open conversations about identity, stereotypes, and norms – such as toxic masculinity – through reflection on the characters created. This makes it a versatile and engaging way to foster both self-expression and critical dialogue.

Recommendations for Youth Workers

For youth workers supporting LGBTQ+ youth, cultivating strong soft skills is essential to providing meaningful and affirming guidance. This includes fostering emotional safety and resilience through group emotional check-ins, creating and maintaining safe spaces, and empowering young people with tools for self-expression and confidence. Additionally, youth workers play a crucial role in supporting victims of cyberbullying, assisting in identity exploration, and promoting positive queer role models. These methods can contribute to equipping queer youth with the strength and skills to navigate digital media.

(Group) Emotional Check-Ins

QueerResilience expert Luce recommends regular emotional check-ins within group settings. These are moments when **participants are invited to openly express how they feel, either about their own experiences or about broader social issues**. This builds a collective space for emotional sharing that fosters community, empathy, and trust. It also normalizes discussing feelings in a public way – something that can be deeply empowering for queer youth.

These check-ins are especially relevant in group discussions on identity, belonging, or mental health. Youth workers can directly encourage participants to talk about experiences they've had in digital spaces in these check-ins. Here are some methods how to structure check-ins:⁴⁴

- » **Feelings 1-10:** Ask members, "Rank your mood today on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the worst mood and 10 being the best." Have them share with the group by showing their ranking on their hands. They can choose to explain and elaborate on their ranking, or not.
- » **Highs and Lows:** Ask members to think of their "high and low" of the day/week – this is the best thing that happened to them during the day/week, and the worst thing that happened to them. They can choose to explain and elaborate on their feelings, or not.
- » **Rose, Bud, Thorn:** Ask members to think of their "rose, bud, and thorn" of the day/week – this is the best thing that happened to them during the day/week (rose), the worst thing that happened to them today (thorn) and something they are looking forward to (bud). Then give everyone a chance to think, then go around the circle and have everyone share with the group. They can choose to explain and elaborate on their day and feelings, or not.

If queer young people report suffering from digital stressors, for example if they are victims of hate speech or are confronted with queer or trans hostility, Luce recommends to ask directly what they need: Do you want to talk about it right now or do we want to find another creative outlet? Do you want to find a solution? Or do you just want to rant about it and vent a little bit? Do you want to let your anger out? Do you want to go outside for a bit?

Safe Spaces and Guidance for Self-Empowerment

For young queer individuals, the journey toward self-empowerment is often fraught with challenges. Given that negative experiences are inevitable, QueerResilience expert Jana considers it crucial to provide guidance on navigating these obstacles and accessing support. **Safe spaces, such as those with peer mentors, offer environments where they can express themselves openly, free from judgment or humiliation.** In these settings, they can build self-confidence and self-awareness, ultimately learning to stand up for themselves and set healthy boundaries.

Safe spaces are environments intentionally designed to be free from bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions. Within safe spaces, peer mentorship plays a pivotal role. By connecting with individuals who have navigated similar experiences, young queer people gain insights and guidance tailored to their unique challenges. They can learn to set healthy boundaries, advocate for themselves, and navigate challenges with resilience. Peer mentoring and safe spaces are also crucial in working through challenges in the context of digital media use, such as cyberbullying, hate speech and grooming.



Supporting Victims of Cyberbullying

For many queer individuals, bullying remains a harsh part of everyday life. This kind of harassment isn't limited to physical space, it often extends into the digital realm. Cyberbullying refers to harassment or abuse carried out through digital communication tools such as social media, messaging apps, chats, emails, forums, or other online platforms. It includes a range of harmful behaviors like insults, threats, and hate comments. For queer teenagers, the impact of cyberbullying can be particularly damaging, reinforcing feelings of isolation and insecurity.

QueerResilience expert Stefan recommends a **multi-step approach to supporting victims of cyberbullying**, especially when threats escalate from hate to potential violence. First and foremost, it's important to create a safe, non-judgmental space where the affected person can speak freely and feel heard without being blamed for their situation. The emphasis is on listening, collecting information, and offering emotional support.

Next, the focus shifts to empowering the individual, helping them build confidence and a kind of emotional „protective wall“ to cope with the impact. If the situation involves serious threats – such as death threats – Stefan stresses the importance of informing youth about their rights, where and how to report incidents, and to document evidence such as saving screenshots of the threatening texts, posts and pictures. It can be helpful to keep a kind of “bullying diary”. Evidence is not only important in case the police is called, but also for confronting offenders or their parents with the allegations. In addition, most platforms offer the option to report and have bullying or hate messages removed.⁴⁵

According to Stefan, it is important to have a clear **cyberbullying emergency plan** in place within institutions to guide youth step-by-step through appropriate actions, including filing police reports when necessary. Overall, the goal is to provide both emotional and practical support to help affected individuals feel protected and informed.

Supporting Finding Identity and Positive Role Model Promotion

Queer adolescents face unique challenges in developing their identities. Unlike their heterosexual, cisgender peers, **they cannot simply adopt a socially accepted norm**. Instead, they must actively explore and define their own understandings of gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

QueerResilience expert Stefan emphasizes the importance of **staying engaged in conversations with youth to understand their interests and needs**. By doing so, educators and youth workers can offer relevant resources, such as recommending influencers or educational accounts on platforms like Instagram that provide answers to questions youth might feel uncomfortable asking in person.

He also highlights the value of information platforms. Additionally, in media education, providing tools and methods to support these conversations can be helpful. The key is to have **a range of media and resources available that align with youth interests**, such as video games or other digital media, to facilitate discussions on relevant topics.

QueeResilience expert Luce recommends actively encouraging young people to explore and engage with queer creators, authors, musicians, and public figures online who can serve as positive role models. By discussing who inspires them and where they find affirming representation, youth are supported in their identity exploration. This method is often informal, woven into daily conversations about music, shows, and online content. It addresses the specific need of queer youth to see themselves reflected in the world – and to imagine their futures with pride and confidence.



Strategies for Individual Use

Working with queer young people, youth workers play a crucial role in helping them navigate both the challenges and opportunities of the digital world. For many LGBTQ+ youth, online spaces offer vital communities, safe avenues for self-expression, and a sense of belonging that may be missing in their offline lives. At the same time, the digital environment can also expose them to overwhelming content, harmful interactions, and habits like doomscrolling that negatively impact mental health.

This resource provides you with practical strategies you can share with the young people you work with to support their digital wellbeing. They are meant as **suggestions you can give to young queer people how to improve their digital media habits** and ultimately their wellbeing. However, these methods and strategies are for adolescents to implement and follow themselves. They aim to encourage conscious media use, set healthy boundaries, and create more positive online experiences. They also highlight the potential of digital spaces for identity exploration and connection.

Strategies against Doomscrolling

- » **Encouraging Conscious Media Consumption:** Stefan suggests encouraging young people to track their media consumption through media diaries. This can help them reflect on why they engage with certain content, how it makes them feel, and when they tend to engage in doomscrolling, such as before bed. It can be helpful to set up a social media schedule as establishing a routine that limits social media use to specific times can reduce information overload. This process can be done collaboratively with educators to foster self-awareness.
- » **Emotional Checkpoints while Digital Consumption:** Agáta suggests incorporating checkpoints to assess emotional states during digital consumption. Ask yourself: “How do I feel after using this social network?” Encourage youth to pause periodically and assess their feelings during digital engagement.
- » **Setting Boundaries and Alternatives:** Another important aspect mentioned by Jana is highlighting the importance of balancing online and offline activities. This includes guiding youth to find alternative hobbies outside of social media and technology. Encouraging analogue activities can reduce dependency on digital platforms.
- » **Avoid Emotionally Draining Debates:** Patrícia pleads for young people being emboldened who to engage with online and cultivate a space that feels constructive and supportive.
- » **Digital Detox Challenges:** Another method that Stefan suggests is introducing a digital detox challenge, where young people reduce their screen time progressively, starting by disabling pop-up notifications, followed by a whole day without their phone, or even two days without smartphones.

- » **Seeking Positive Content:** According to Jogaila, finding positive news accounts or influencers who share uplifting stories can be helpful to balance the overwhelming negativity of the news cycle.

Identity exploration through online games and virtual environments

Several interviewed youth experts highlight the role of online games and virtual environments in supporting identity exploration, particularly for LGBTQ+ and trans individuals. According to Rasa, roleplay communities and customizable characters offer opportunities for self-expression in safe, imaginative ways. **These digital platforms can serve as testing grounds for exploring different aspects of identity and forming meaningful connections with others**, especially for those who may lack support in their offline environments.

The active construction of virtual identity allows individuals to experiment with gender expression, sexuality, and social roles without the fear of immediate real-world consequences. Unlike social media, where users often replicate their offline social environments and thus remain subject to peer scrutiny and real-life sanctions, online games can provide a degree of separation and anonymity that makes identity play safer and more liberating.⁴⁶

Video games offer a rich space for self-exploration, particularly through the creation and customization of avatars – digital representations of the player. One of the most empowering aspects of modern gaming is the ability to design avatars with diverse body types, appearances, and gender expressions. Players can experiment with different visual identities and explore facets of themselves that may not feel safe or accessible in the real world.

Together, these elements make video games a meaningful platform not just for entertainment, but for identity exploration, affirmation, and visibility – especially for queer youth seeking spaces where they can see themselves reflected and celebrated.⁴⁷

Recommended Platforms and Resources

In response to the overwhelming amount of often contradictory online information, especially around LGBTQ+ identities, organizations take on a guiding role. As young people seek to understand and explore their identities, the need for trustworthy, affirming online resources becomes essential.

It is recommended to direct young users toward reliable platforms which are known for offering factual, accessible, and non-judgmental content. This intentional curation not only helps youth navigate the complexities of online spaces safely but also empowers them to engage with their identities in meaningful, informed ways.

Parole Ostili

- » Social project to raise awareness against the violence of words
- » <https://www.paroleostili.it/manifesto-della-comunicazione-non-ostile>
- » In English, German, Czech, Lithuania

Bad News

- » Educational browser game where players spread misinformation to learn how disinformation works and how to resist it
- » <https://www.getbadnews.com/en/>
- » In English, German, Czech, Lithuanian

Klicksafe

- » The EU initiative aims to promote people's online skills and supports them in using the internet competently and critically with a wide range of offers.
- » <https://www.klicksafe.eu/en>
- » In English, German

Frag ZEBRA

- » The free and confidential platform provided by the State Media Authority of North Rhine-Westphalia offers personalized advice on questions related to digital media.
- » <https://www.fragzebra.de/>
- » In German

CORRECTIV

- » German nonprofit investigative journalism organization that aims to strengthen democracy through independent journalism, media education and technology.
- » <https://correctiv.org/en/>
- » In English, German

meinTestgelände

- » Platform for adolescents to express their perspectives on gender, equality, and social justice through various formats such as texts, videos, songs, and artwork.
- » <https://www.meintestgelaende.de/>
- » In German

jungsfragen.de

- » Online contact point for boys and young men on the topics of puberty, sexual education and STI prevention.
- » <https://www.jungsfragen.de/>
- » In German

321maxx

- » Content creator, doing educational work and informing about queer news and history
- » <https://www.instagram.com/321maxx>
- » In German

sbarvouven.cz

- » Czech online support platform dedicated to assisting individuals, particularly youth, with issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and the coming-out process.
- » <https://www.sbarvouven.cz/>
- » In Czech

Prague Pride

- » Prague Pride is the largest LGBTQ+ organization in the Czech Republic.
- » <https://www.praguepride.com>
- » In English, Czech

Učím o LGBTQ+

- » Učím o LGBTQ+ is an educational initiative aimed at supporting inclusion and safety for LGBTQ+ pupils and students in Czech schools.
- » <https://ucimolgbt.cz/>
- » In Czech

Queer Geography

- » Queer Geography is a professional think – tank, i.e. a group of experts, scientific, pedagogical and professional staff, as well as other people interested in interdisciplinary understanding and study of human sexualities, gender identities and issues related to them.
- » <https://queergeography.cz>
- » In English, Czech

TRANS*PARENT

- » Organization that strives for the empowerment, social justice, promotion of rights and positive social changes for the benefit of trans people.
- » <https://jsmetransparent.cz/>
- » In English, Czech

PRIZMA Košice

- » Community and counseling center dedicated to providing support for LGBTQ+ individuals in eastern Slovakia
- » <https://www.prizma-kosice.sk/>
- » In Slovak

TransFúzia

- » Non-governmental organization in Slovakia focused on supporting and advocating for the rights of transgender, gender non-conforming, genderqueer, and non-binary individuals
- » Website currently not available
- » In Slovak

RALYO playlist

- » Short video stories created by young LGBTQ+ people during the RALYO project – can be used for storytelling. The project was coordinated by Sapling and 10 countries took part.
- » <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9A-N-AMxEV5XAUIvWOUk86BVnUoSUCmE>
- » In English

Coming up: QueeResilience Workshop Modules

This chapter was meant to provide an overview of possible methods and strategies for youth workers to support young LGBTQ+ to navigate the challenges of digital media and make the most out of positive aspects of social media.

For a more detailed description of methods that youth workers and educators can use, please refer to the QueeResilience Workshop Modules (set to be released in early 2026). They come with detailed instructions for planning and conducting workshops on several topics related to risks and benefits of digital media for LGBTQ+ wellbeing.

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Project Coordinator

Stiftung Digitale Chancen
Chausseestr. 15
10115 Berlin, Germany
www.digitale-chancen.de

Project Partners

Prague Pride z. s., Czechia
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www.tja.lt

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www.florianjorzick.de

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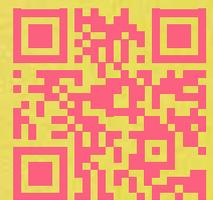
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