

IDENTITY DECODE

Youth Work Strategies for Navigating Online Manipulation

Guide for the Use of the Competence Matrix

WORKPACKAGE NO: 2

PROJECT NO: 2025-2-DE04-KA210-YOU-000382037

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This [Competence Matrix](#) has been developed within the project 2025-2-DE04-KA210-YOU-000382037 “Identity Decode – Youth Work Strategies for Navigating Online Manipulation” to support the professional development of youth workers working on identity-based narratives, critical engagement, dialogue facilitation, emotional safety, and conflict management.

The Matrix is aligned with the Council of Europe’s European Training Strategy (ETS) competence-based approach to youth work and supports the development of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviours required for effective youth work practice in these areas. You can find more information about the [ETS framework here](#).

The Matrix provides a structured framework for understanding, assessing, and developing the key competences needed to facilitate learning processes with young people on sensitive social issues, democratic participation, and resilience to online manipulation and polarisation.

The Matrix can be used by:

Youth workers – for self-reflection, self-assessment, and planning their professional development.

Youth organisations and trainers – for designing training activities, mentoring processes, and learning pathways for youth workers.

Project partners and stakeholders – for supporting a common understanding of the competences addressed by the Identity Decode project.

The Matrix can support users in:

- identifying existing strengths and areas for development;
- reflecting on current youth work practice;

- setting individual learning goals;
- planning professional development activities;
- monitoring competence development over time through self-assessment;
- strengthening the quality of youth work practice in the five competence areas.

The Matrix is intended as a developmental and reflective tool rather than an assessment instrument. Its purpose is to help youth workers identify their current level of competence, recognise strengths and areas for further development, and plan their professional learning journey.

The Matrix is organised around **five competence areas**:

- Critical Engagement
- Identity Narratives
- Dialogue Facilitation
- Emotional Safety
- Conflict Management

For each competence area, four **dimensions** are described:

- Attitudes
- Knowledge
- Skills
- Behaviours

Each dimension is presented across three **levels** of development:

- Basic
- Intermediate
- Advanced

These levels reflect a developmental progression from initial awareness and application to confident, reflective, and intentional practice, in line with ETS competence development principles.

It is important to note that competence development may vary across different competence areas and dimensions. A youth worker may demonstrate an Advanced level in one competence area, an Intermediate level in another, and a Basic level in a third. Therefore, the Matrix should not be used to assign an overall label to individuals, but rather to support reflection, self-assessment, and professional development.

Self-Assessment

The Matrix can also be used as a self-assessment tool. Users may assign a score of 1 (Basic), 2 (Intermediate), or 3 (Advanced) to each dimension and competence area in order to identify their current level of development and monitor progress over time.

Important Notes

The Matrix should not be used to rank, compare, or label youth workers. Competence development is a continuous process, and each level represents an important stage of learning and growth.

Low scores should not be interpreted as failure or lack of competence. They indicate areas for further development and provide a starting point for learning and professional growth.

Similarly, Advanced levels should not be viewed as a final destination. Competence development is an ongoing process, and higher levels should serve as a foundation for continuous reflection, learning, and improvement.

The Matrix is designed to encourage reflection, learning, and continuous professional development, supporting youth workers in building the competences needed to facilitate meaningful and inclusive learning experiences for young people.

Interpretation of Competence Levels and Self-Assessment Guidance

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Dimension	Basic (1)	Intermediate (2)	Advanced (3)
Attitudes	The youth worker is open to receiving information from different sources but often relies on familiar, trusted, or peer-shared information without questioning it in depth. The youth worker may accept information at face value and feel uncomfortable challenging viewpoints that are similar to their own or widely accepted by people around them.	The youth worker recognises the importance of questioning information and is willing to explore different perspectives before forming an opinion. The youth worker understands that information may be incomplete, biased, or misleading and is interested in looking beyond first impressions.	The youth worker sees critical reflection as an important part of learning, participation, and democratic engagement. The youth worker values curiosity, questioning, and openness to different perspectives, even when they challenge existing views and assumptions.
Knowledge	The youth worker has a basic awareness of misinformation and misleading online content. The youth worker knows that not all information online is	The youth worker understands how misinformation spreads and how algorithms, peer influence, and online communities affect the information people see and trust.	The youth worker has a strong understanding of how information ecosystems work and how narratives, emotions, social influence, and online platforms

reliable, but their understanding of how information spreads and influences people is still limited.

The youth worker recognises that different people may be exposed to different information and perspectives.

shape attitudes and behaviour. The youth worker understands how identity-based narratives can contribute to stereotypes, exclusion, or polarisation.

Skills

The youth worker can identify some obvious examples of misleading information or manipulation but may find it difficult to explain why the content is problematic or how it influences people.

The youth worker can analyse information using basic critical thinking tools. They are able to consider the source, purpose, evidence, and context of information and support simple reflection on different viewpoints.

The youth worker can confidently analyse complex information, narratives, and online content. They are able to recognise manipulation techniques, bias, stereotypes, and emotional messaging; evaluate sources and evidence; ask critical questions; and explore different interpretations of the same information. The youth worker can also support young people in developing these skills.

They can identify some forms of bias or misleading information, but may find it more difficult to analyse complex narratives, subtle manipulation techniques, or multiple interpretations of the same issue.

Behaviours

Critical reflection is not yet a regular part of the youth worker's practice. Discussions often focus on sharing opinions or information without

The youth worker regularly creates opportunities for young people to ask questions, reflect, and explore different viewpoints. Critical thinking is included in

Critical thinking and reflection are a natural and consistent part of the youth worker's practice. Young people are regularly encouraged to question information, explore

exploring them in more depth. Young people are rarely encouraged to question information, check sources, or think about how messages may influence their views.

some activities and discussions, helping participants think more carefully about information and opinions they encounter online and offline.

different perspectives, recognise stereotypes and manipulation, and reflect on how narratives and online content influence attitudes, relationships, and participation in society.

IDENTITY NARRATIVES

Dimension	Basic (1)	Intermediate (2)	Advanced (3)
Attitudes	The youth worker recognises that identity and belonging are important for young people but may feel uncertain or uncomfortable addressing sensitive identity-related topics. The youth worker may avoid discussions that could create tension or disagreement.	The youth worker is open to discussing identity, belonging, and diversity in a respectful way. The youth worker recognises the importance of hearing different perspectives and experiences and is willing to explore identity-related topics even when they are sensitive or complex.	The youth worker sees identity, belonging, and inclusion as important parts of democratic participation and youth work practice. The youth worker actively values empathy, openness, and critical reflection on stereotypes, exclusion, and polarising 'us vs. them' narratives.

Knowledge

The youth worker has a basic understanding that narratives about identity and belonging can influence attitudes and behaviour. The youth worker recognises some obvious examples of stereotypes or exclusion but may have limited understanding of how these narratives develop and spread.

The youth worker understands how identity-based narratives can shape perceptions of different groups and contribute to inclusion, exclusion, stereotypes, or polarisation. The youth worker recognises that online and offline environments influence how young people understand identity and belonging.

The youth worker has a strong understanding of how identity narratives are created and spread through social interaction, media, online platforms, and public discourse. The youth worker understands how 'us vs. them' narratives influence perceptions, group dynamics, attitudes, and behaviours across different social and cultural contexts.

Skills

The youth worker can recognise some obvious stereotypes, exclusionary messages, or identity-based narratives but may find it difficult to explore them in more depth or support reflection on identity-related issues.

The youth worker can facilitate basic reflection on identity, belonging, diversity, and different perspectives. The youth worker is able to support respectful discussions about stereotypes, experiences, and how narratives may influence attitudes towards different groups.

The youth worker can confidently identify identity-based narratives, stereotypes, assumptions, and polarising 'us vs. them' dynamics. The youth worker is able to support young people in reflecting on personal perspectives and experiences, exploring multiple viewpoints, and analysing how belonging and group identity can influence attitudes, relationships, and behaviour.

Behaviours

Discussions about identity, belonging, or stereotypes are addressed only occasionally or avoided when they become sensitive or uncomfortable. Reflection on identity-based narratives is limited.

The youth worker regularly creates opportunities for participants to reflect on identity, belonging, stereotypes, and different experiences. Discussions about diversity, assumptions, and different perspectives are supported in a respectful and structured way.

Reflection on identity, belonging, stereotypes, and polarising narratives is consistently integrated into youth work practice. The youth worker actively supports inclusive dialogue, empathy, perspective-taking, and critical reflection on identity-based narratives and 'us vs. them' dynamics. The youth worker creates group environments that promote inclusion, understanding, and constructive engagement between different perspectives.

DIALOGUE FACILITATION

Dimension	Basic (1)	Intermediate (2)	Advanced (3)
Attitudes	The youth worker prefers calm and non-confrontational discussions and may feel uncomfortable when disagreement or tension appears in the group. The youth worker shows openness to listening to others and	The youth worker values inclusive participation and recognises the importance of hearing different perspectives and experiences. The youth worker is willing to facilitate respectful discussions on	The youth worker actively values inclusive dialogue, equal participation, empathy, and perspective-taking. The youth worker sees respectful dialogue as an important part of democratic participation and youth work practice

basic respect for different opinions but may avoid discussions that feel too sensitive or polarising.

identity-related topics and understands the importance of balanced participation and equal voice within the group.

and is committed to creating spaces where different voices and experiences can be heard constructively.

Knowledge

The youth worker has a basic understanding of group discussions and recognises that people may have different viewpoints and experiences. The youth worker is aware of basic discussion rules but has limited understanding of group dynamics, participation processes, and how polarisation can influence discussions.

The youth worker understands how discussions develop and how group dynamics, identity, emotions, and perspectives can influence participation and interaction. The youth worker recognises factors that may lead to exclusion, imbalance, misunderstanding, or polarisation during discussions.

The youth worker has a strong understanding of facilitation processes, inclusive participation, and the influence of identity, perspectives, emotions, and power dynamics within group discussions. The youth worker understands how polarisation, stereotypes, and 'us vs. them' narratives may affect participation, communication, and dialogue processes.

Skills

The youth worker is able to facilitate simple discussions with limited structure and support basic participation in familiar or low-complexity situations. The youth worker can encourage respectful interaction but may find it difficult to manage disagreement, sensitive topics, or unbalanced participation.

The youth worker can facilitate structured and respectful discussions and support participation from different voices within the group. The youth worker is able to encourage reflection, perspective-taking, and balanced participation and can support discussions on sensitive or polarising topics using basic facilitation approaches.

The youth worker can confidently facilitate inclusive and participatory dialogue on sensitive and polarising topics. The youth worker is able to encourage balanced participation and equal voice, support reflection and perspective-taking, manage disagreement constructively, and guide discussions in ways that reduce exclusion and polarisation.

Behaviours

The youth worker supports basic interaction during discussions but shows limited ability to manage participation, disagreement, or group dynamics. Discussions may remain superficial or become dominated by a few voices.

The youth worker regularly supports respectful interaction and creates opportunities for different participants to contribute to discussions. The youth worker encourages balanced participation, supports reflection on different perspectives, and maintains a generally safe and inclusive discussion environment.

The youth worker consistently creates inclusive and participatory discussion environments where different voices, perspectives, and experiences are valued. The youth worker actively facilitates constructive dialogue on sensitive and polarising topics, manages disagreement respectfully, and supports reflection, empathy, and perspective-taking within the group.

EMOTIONAL SAFETY

Dimension	Basic (1)	Intermediate (2)	Advanced (3)
Attitudes	The youth worker shows limited awareness of emotional dynamics within groups and may feel uncomfortable addressing emotional situations or emotional discomfort during activities and discussions.	The youth worker recognises that emotions play an important role in group processes and discussions. The youth worker values respectful interaction and understands the importance of acknowledging emotional reactions and creating supportive group environments.	The youth worker actively values emotional safety, empathy, trust, and psychological safety within youth work practice. The youth worker sees emotional support and respectful group environments as essential for meaningful participation, dialogue, and reflection on sensitive or polarising topics.
Knowledge	The youth worker has a basic understanding that emotions can influence discussions and group interaction. The youth worker recognises visible emotional reactions but has limited understanding of emotional triggers or group emotional dynamics.	The youth worker understands how emotional reactions, emotional triggers, and feelings of safety or discomfort can influence participation and group dynamics. The youth worker recognises that sensitive discussions about identity, belonging, or polarisation may affect participants differently.	The youth worker has a strong understanding of emotional dynamics, emotional safety, trust-building, and psychological safety within group processes. The youth worker understands how emotions, identity, belonging, exclusion, and polarisation can influence participation, communication, and relationships within groups.

Skills

The youth worker responds reactively to emotional situations and may feel uncertain about how to support participants experiencing emotional discomfort or tension.

The youth worker can apply basic techniques to support emotional expression, emotional reflection, and respectful interaction within the group. The youth worker is able to recognise emotional reactions and create generally safe spaces for sensitive discussions.

The youth worker can confidently recognise emotional reactions and triggers, create emotionally safe spaces for sensitive discussions, support emotional expression and reflection, build trust and psychological safety, and respond constructively to emotional discomfort and tension.

Behaviours

The youth worker reacts to emotional tension without a clear structure and may avoid emotionally charged situations or sensitive emotional discussions.

The youth worker regularly maintains a respectful and supportive group environment and responds to emotional needs within the group. The youth worker acknowledges emotional reactions and creates opportunities for participants to express themselves safely.

Emotional safety, trust, empathy, and psychological safety are consistently integrated into the youth worker's practice. The youth worker actively creates safe spaces for sensitive discussions, supports emotional reflection, and responds constructively to emotional discomfort, tension, or exclusion within the group.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Dimension	Basic (1)	Intermediate (2)	Advanced (3)
Attitudes	The youth worker tends to see conflict as something negative and uncomfortable and may avoid situations where disagreement or tension appears within the group.	The youth worker recognises that conflict and disagreement are a normal part of group interaction and can become opportunities for learning and reflection when managed respectfully and constructively.	The youth worker values constructive conflict management, respectful communication, and dialogue between different perspectives. The youth worker sees conflict transformation, trust-building, and constructive engagement as important parts of democratic participation and inclusive youth work practice.
Knowledge	The youth worker has a basic awareness of conflict situations and recognises visible disagreement or tension but has limited understanding of conflict dynamics, escalation, or group reactions.	The youth worker understands some of the causes and dynamics of conflict and recognises that emotions, identity, stereotypes, exclusion, or polarisation may influence disagreements and group tensions.	The youth worker has a strong understanding of conflict dynamics, escalation processes, group reactions, and the influence of identity, emotions, and polarisation on conflict situations. The youth worker understands how trust, communication, and dialogue can support conflict transformation and constructive group interaction.

Skills

The youth worker is able to recognise conflict situations or disagreement but may avoid intervention or feel uncertain about how to respond constructively.

The youth worker can apply basic mediation and conflict management approaches and support respectful communication during disagreements. The youth worker is able to recognise some conflict dynamics, encourage dialogue, and reduce emotional tension within the group.

The youth worker can confidently recognise conflict dynamics and escalation processes, analyse different perspectives in conflict situations, apply de-escalation strategies, facilitate constructive communication and dialogue during conflicts, and support trust-building and conflict transformation within the group.

Behaviours

The youth worker tends to withdraw from conflict situations or avoid addressing tension within the group. Conflicts may remain unresolved or discussions may end without reflection or constructive communication.

The youth worker regularly supports respectful communication and basic conflict resolution processes within the group. The youth worker encourages dialogue, helps reduce tension, and supports constructive interaction during disagreements.

The youth worker consistently supports constructive communication, dialogue, trust-building, and conflict transformation within the group. The youth worker actively addresses tensions, facilitates respectful dialogue during conflicts, and creates group environments where disagreement can be explored openly and constructively without increasing exclusion or polarisation.