# MISCONCEPTIONS & MISINFORMATION: ABOUT DIGITAL LITERACY

What is it?

Digital literacy is a **digital phenomenon** which denotes an individual's ability to find, evaluate, and communicate information by utilising typing or digital media platforms. According to the EU definition, it is measured by the digital skills indicator, which is a composite indicator based on selected activities performed by individuals on the internet in specific areas, including information, communication, problem solving, software and safety. Digital literacy combines both technical and cognitive abilities in using information and communication technologies to create, evaluate, and share information.
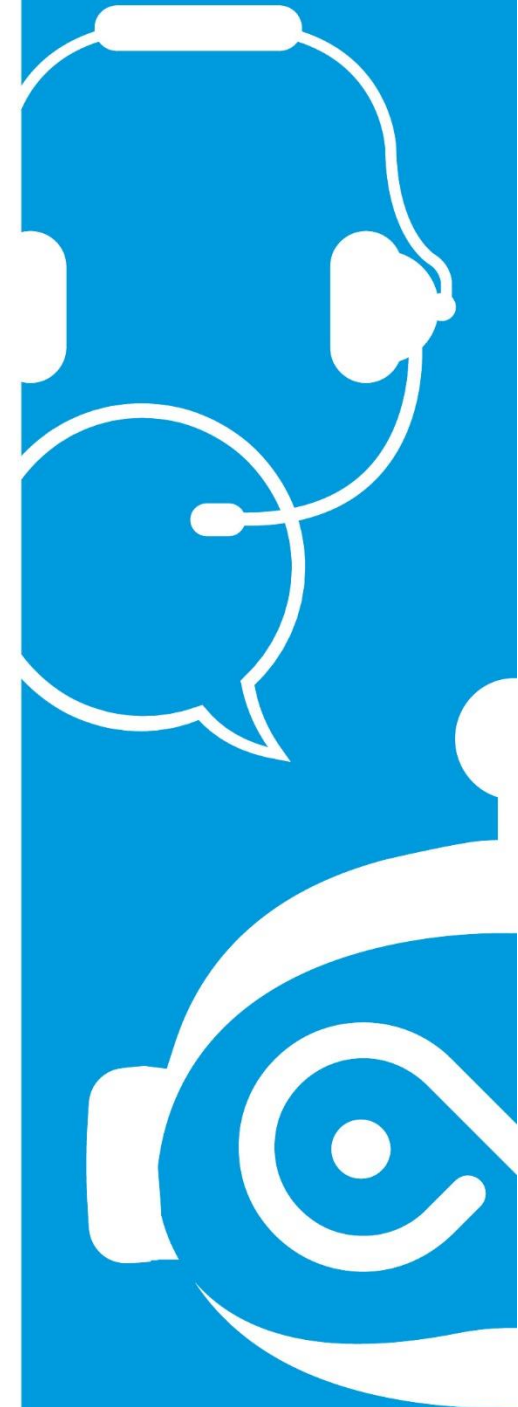
How can it impact the sexual and reproductive health of youth?

Young people use the Internet to a large extent as a source of information about SRH education. The uptake of relevant information varies due to lack of accessibility for people with disabilities and unequal digital literacy.

To become digitally literate, youth need to develop a range of skills. They need to be able to use technology to search for and create content, solve problems, to connect and communicate effectively online, safely collaborate with others and discover and share new information. Besides this, they need to be informed on how to protect their space, their physical and emotional wellbeing, stay safe and to effectively recognise risks. When it comes to the SRH-related contents, youth need to know how to apply and recognise positive online behaviours when interacting with others.

Digital literacy skills have proven to be challenging for youth, as they lack experience and have different comprehension levels. According to this target group, some say they trust websites that are well-known or have a good reputation, which is one of the factors that are included in the criteria to evaluate websites for 'authority and credibility'.[1]

[1] Whiteley et al. 2012.
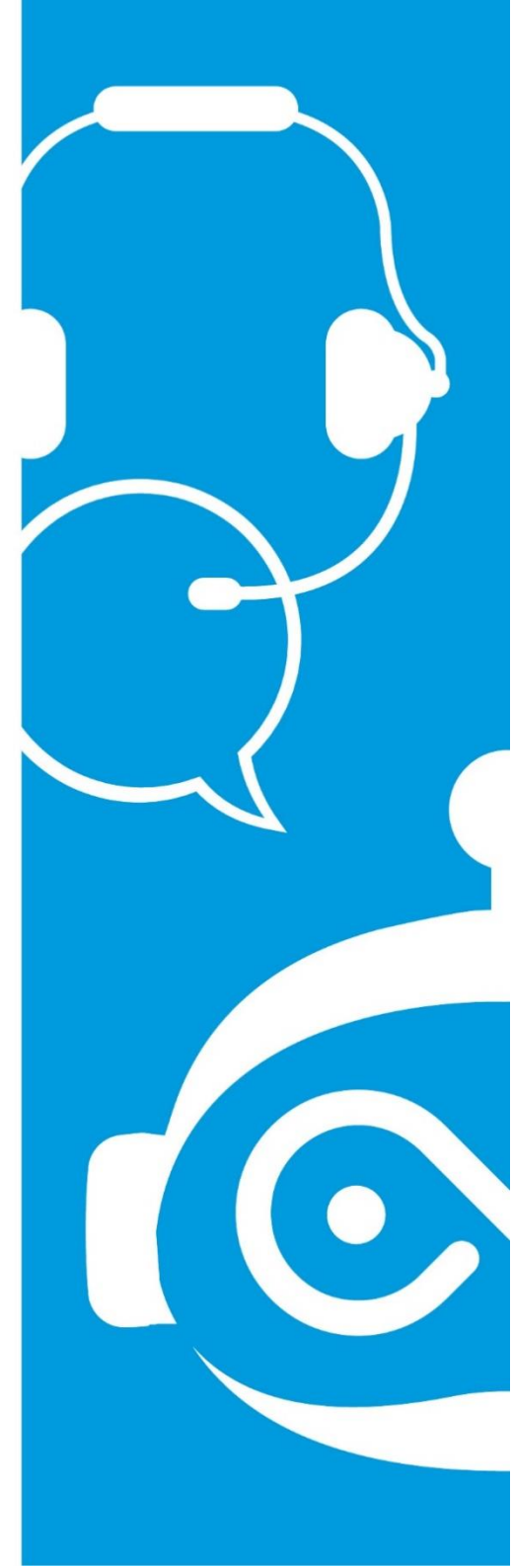
Digital literacy can also reduce the online vulnerability of young populations. The risks to children in digital spaces which can impact their SRH are categorised as either[2]:

- content risks: 'exposure to inappropriate content such as sexual, pornographic or violent images, some forms of advertising, discriminatory or hate speech and sites advocating dangerous behaviours, e.g., suicide';
- contact risks: 'inappropriate contact, for example, an adult contacting a child to solicit sex or individuals encouraging unhealthy or dangerous behaviours such as sexual risk-taking'; or
- conduct risks: 'scenarios where children contribute to risky content or contact', where young people might be aggressive or abusive towards other users.

[2] UNICEF, 2019.
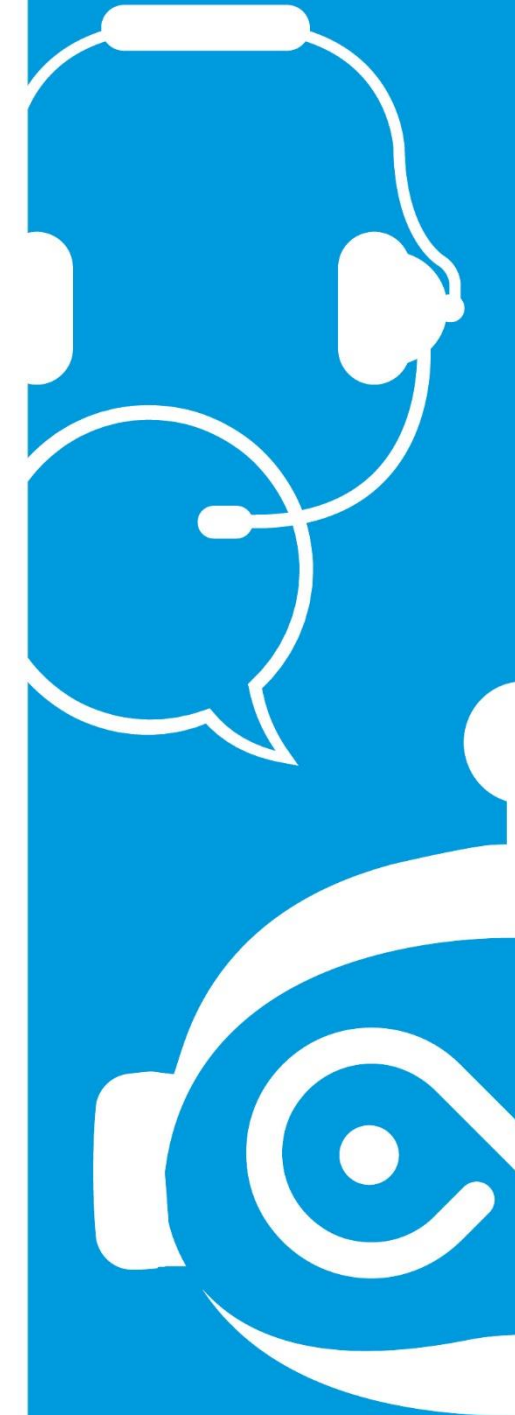
What are some ways in which youth can be supported?

- Improving young people's digital literacy skills. This is key in enabling them to access the relevant information they seek in relation to SRH, as well as protecting them from the negative impacts. Even correct information, not properly understood or taken outside of context, can do harm to a young person.
- Let youngsters browse and improve at their own pace. Youth should gain their own experiences browsing and critically-assessing information autonomously in order to gain digital literacy skills.
- Develop teacher-youth worker collaborations. It is necessary for teachers and youth workers to work together to improve the digital literacy skills of youth, as digital technologies are increasingly intertwined in our everyday life.

Related digital phenomena/tools:

See sheets:

- Privacy: Setting privacy settings
- Know your rights: The right to be forgotten
- Know your rights: Accessibility of platforms/media

Supporting youth's sexual & reproductive health in the digital age: BEST PRACTICES
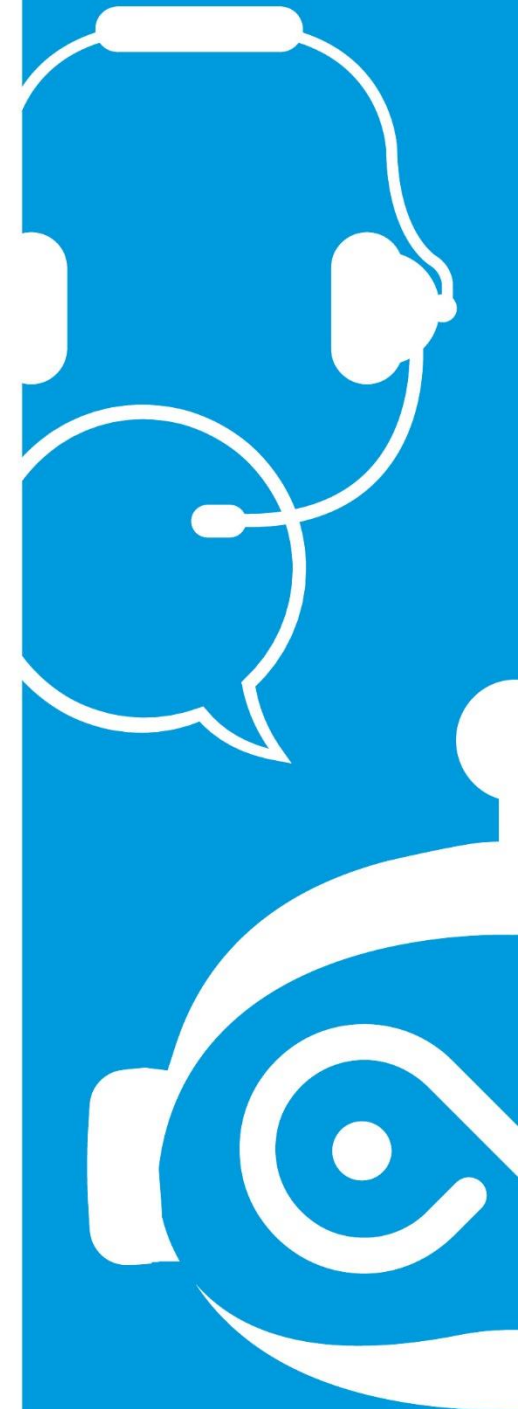
Further reading:

- Blue, Jade. "Understanding and Developing Digital Literacy : World of Better Learning." World of Better Learning | Cambridge University Press, April 7, 2022. https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2022/04/07/understanding-developing-digital-literacy/.
- Jolly, Susie, Pauline Oosterhoff, Becky Faith, Doortje Braeken, and Kelly Shephard. "A Review of the Evidence: Sexuality Education for Young People in Digital Spaces". https://www.ungei.org/sites/default/files/Sexuality-Education-for-Young-People-in-Digital-Spaces-eng-2020.pdf.
- "Welcome to ALA's Literacy Clearinghouse." Welcome to ALAs Literacy Clearinghouse. https://literacy.ala.org/digital-literacy/.
- "EuroStat Statistic explained." Glossary: Digital literacy. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Digital_literacy#:~:text=Digital%20literacy%20lays%20out%20five%20digital%20competence%20areas,and%20collaboration%2C%20digital%20content%20creation%2C%20safety%2C%20and%20problem-solving.