BALTIC SEA REGION YOUTH FORUM

SUBMISSION TO THE EU YOUTH STRATEGY POST-2027 PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Digital Literacy, Democratic Resilience, and Youth Agency in the Information Environment

Baltic Sea Region Youth Forum (BSRYF) | Working Group on Digital Literacy and Democracy

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About This Submission

The Baltic Sea Region Youth Forum (BSRYF) is the youth platform of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), bringing together youth organisations and young people (aged 16-29) from all ten member states across the Baltic Sea Region. Our Working Group on Digital Literacy and Democracy was established in 2025 to develop substantive policy positions on the challenge posed by disinformation and foreign information manipulation interference (FIMI) to democratic participation, civic life, and young people's ability to engage meaningfully in public discourse.

The following strategic recommendations reflect our collective experience engaging with disinformation across ten European countries with differing national contexts, educational traditions, and exposure to hostile information operations. We call on the EU Youth Strategy post-2027 to treat digital literacy and democratic resilience not as a niche technical concern but as a core dimension of youth empowerment, participation, inclusion and resilience embedded across all three of the Strategy's foundational pillars: Engage, Connect, and Empower.

> **Our four priorities:** *Youth agency and governance · Education and digital literacy · Regional civil society cooperation · Digital rights and platform accountability*

[Priority 1 · Youth Agency]

Young People as Active Defenders of the Information Space

The EU Youth Strategy's commitment to meaningful youth participation must extend to the governance of the digital information environment. Disinformation is not primarily a problem that affects young people, but one that young people are uniquely positioned to help solve. Yet current policy across Europe, including in the current Strategy's implementation, frames youth almost exclusively as a vulnerable group to be protected, rather than as skilled actors capable of defending democratic discourse and online spaces.

This framing is both empirically wrong and strategically costly. A generation that grew up online is best placed to model critical digital citizenship to peers, to navigate algorithmic environments, and to hold platforms to account in ways that institutional actors cannot. Excluding young people from the governance of these issues fails to capitalise on Europe's most relevant human resource and its first line of defence against the disinformation challenge.

What the Strategy post-2027 should do

- Embed substantive youth participation at the design stage and in ex ante decisions in all EU-level bodies addressing disinformation, platform governance, and the digital information environment. The EESC Youth Test has been a successful mechanism for enabling youth to formally shape the opinions that the EESC submits to the European Commission; it should be extended to other institutions and made more accessible to a diverse group of youth.
- Establish a dedicated EU funding line and practical support, accessible through Erasmus+, the Democracy Shield framework or successor funding programmes such as AgoraEU, for youth-led counter-disinformation initiatives: peer fact-checking networks, youth journalism projects, and community digital literacy programmes designed and run by young people.
- Require that youth impact assessments are conducted for all EU legislative and policy measures affecting the digital information environment, including the Digital Services Act, the AI Act, and successor instruments. These assessments should create accountability for whether youth concerns and recommendations have been genuinely incorporated, and should identify gaps to improve both efficiency and compliance with fundamental rights.
- Recognise peer-to-peer communication as a distinct and effective mode of building resilience among young audiences, and fund it accordingly. Evidence increasingly suggests that peer-messenger interventions outperform institutional top-down campaigns among young audiences.

> **Why this matters:** *Policies that young people have not helped shape lack the legitimate basis for young people to trust. In a threat environment designed to erode institutional trust, this is more than a procedural oversight; it is a strategic vulnerability.*

[Priority 2 · Education]

A Common European Standard for Digital and Media Literacy

Digital and media literacy is the most durable long-term investment in democratic resilience available to the EU. Finland's internationally recognised model demonstrates that high disinformation resilience can be achieved not through aggressive content removal but through deep civic literacy, institutional trust, and an education system that equips citizens to navigate contested information environments from an early age. The rest of Europe has not yet achieved this standard, and the divergence between member states is widening.

The EU's Digital Competence Framework (DigComp) provides a valuable technical baseline but is not sufficient on its own. DigComp is a competence reference, not a curriculum standard. It sets no minimum teaching requirements, defines no age-progressive learning sequences, and establishes no accountability mechanisms. The result is significant and growing disparity in what young Europeans actually learn about navigating the information environment.

Equally important: DigComp does not adequately address the deeper structural literacies most relevant to disinformation resilience. Platform literacy, understanding how algorithmic systems shape what we see and why, is not the same as general digital skills. Neither is data literacy, understanding of how personal information is collected and used, or the economic and political logics that govern digital information environments. These are the competences that research consistently shows to matter most.

What the Strategy post-2027 should do

- Adopt a formal EU-level compact committing member states to a minimum digital and media literacy curriculum standard spanning all levels of education, from early childhood through higher education and non-formal youth work settings.
- Go meaningfully beyond DigComp to include: platform literacy and algorithmic understanding; privacy, data literacy, and digital rights; critical thinking in digital environments; and civic participation through digital tools.
- Encourage biennial curriculum reviews informed by a standing expert group including young people, educators, researchers, and fact-checkers, ensuring standards keep pace with a rapidly evolving information landscape, including generative AI.
- Require implementation reporting every two years, with the first progress review within two years of the Strategy's adoption, and public transparency on the gap between commitment and delivery.
- Integrate digital and media literacy explicitly into the training of youth workers, non-formal educators, and Erasmus+ programme staff, not just formal school teachers.

> **The Finland standard:** *Finland achieves the highest disinformation resilience in Europe not through censorship or content moderation but through education. That is the model the next Strategy should adopt as its benchmark.*

[Priority 3 · Regional Civil Society Cooperation]

Building Resilient Youth Civil Society Networks Across Borders

Disinformation rarely stays within national borders. Information operations targeting democratic processes in one country often find their way across frontiers, borrowing narratives, sharing infrastructure and moving through the spaces between national monitoring systems. Young people's civil society organisations are already doing valuable cross-border work on disinformation resilience and there is a real opportunity to support and resource that work more fully than has so far been possible.

The EU Youth Strategy can play a distinct and complementary role here, alongside intergovernmental security cooperation. Its particular strength is the European youth civil society network itself, the organisations, youth councils, non-formal education bodies and activist groups that bring trust, local knowledge and peer relationships that institutions cannot easily replicate.

One area the Strategy is especially well placed to address is the need for shared resources and common tools for the Russian-speaking minority communities of the Baltic states and elsewhere in the EU. These communities are among the most heavily targeted by information operations, yet resources reach them less readily, as counter-measures are most often developed in majority languages. Digital inclusion and information resilience go hand in hand, and strengthening one supports the other.

What the Strategy post-2027 should do

- Create a dedicated EU support framework for cross-border youth civil society cooperation on digital literacy and disinformation resilience, building on Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, with a specific mandate for this area.
- Fund a Baltic Sea Region and broader EU youth digital literacy network that pools analytical capacity, shares best practice and enables cross-border coordination when information operations target youth communities.
- Build on the European Digital Media Observatory's (EDMO) existing public portal to develop youth-facing resources and pedagogical tools, accessible across EU languages, with Russian-language materials resourced as a priority for linguistically targeted minority communities without securitizing such communities.
- In line with Article 165 TFEU, encourage EU co-funded media literacy and disinformation resilience initiatives to meet a shared standard of linguistic accessibility, so that minority communities can reach the same resources as their majority-language neighbours.

> **The inclusion dimension:** *Strengthening information resilience in minority communities is both a democratic participation goal and a security asset. It helps close the openings that linguistic division can otherwise create.*

[Priority 4 · Digital Rights and Platform Accountability]

Young People's Digital Rights as a Youth Policy Priority

The platforms that algorithmically amplify disinformation are the same platforms that define young people's information environment. The Digital Services Act represents a significant step toward platform accountability, but it will only deliver on its promise if it is enforced, if civil society has the data access needed to monitor compliance and if the young people most affected by platform design choices are given a voice in shaping them.

The EU Youth Strategy is not a regulatory instrument, but it shapes the expectations and civic identity of the young Europeans who will be and already are the citizens, advocates and future policymakers who hold platforms accountable over the coming decades. Platform literacy, understanding how algorithmic systems work, what rights young people have as users and how to exercise those rights, is as fundamental a civic competence as knowing how to vote. The Strategy should say so.

Artificial intelligence is transforming this landscape further and faster than education systems or regulatory frameworks are currently adapting. AI-generated synthetic media, voice-cloning, and automated content generation have moved from experimental to operational in disinformation campaigns. Young people deserve both the technical literacy to recognise synthetic content and the civic frameworks to respond to it.

What the Strategy post-2027 should do

- Explicitly frame platform literacy, not just media literacy, as a civic education priority within the Strategy, including age-appropriate understanding of how algorithmic curation, data collection, and content moderation affect the information young people encounter.
- Support youth civil society organisations to engage formally in DSA transparency and accountability processes, including through technical assistance and funding for organisations to participate in oversight bodies and multi-stakeholder forums.
- Ensure that any EU Digital Education Action Plan, AI literacy initiative, or online safety programme developed in parallel with the Youth Strategy is co-designed with young people through the EU Youth Dialogue mechanism, not produced for young people without their input.
- Recognise researcher and civil society data access as a precondition for meaningful platform accountability and support youth organisations' calls for the enforcement of existing transparency obligations under the DSA.
- Include AI literacy, particularly synthetic media recognition and the implications of generative AI for the information environment, as an explicit component of any digital literacy standard adopted under the Strategy.

A Note on Rights, Safeguards, and Democratic Values

Every recommendation in this submission is grounded in a conviction that is also a caution: the aim of hostile information operations is not only to spread lies but to erode trust in democratic institutions. Countermeasures that themselves erode that trust, for instance by suppressing legitimate speech, surveilling citizens, or treating entire communities as suspects, are not a solution.

We call on the EU Youth Strategy post-2027 to build the following safeguards as structural features of all disinformation-related programmes it supports or funds:

- Independent oversight of any content action, monitoring activity, or early-warning mechanism — not self-regulation by platforms or governments without accountability.
- Strict data minimisation requirements on any monitoring body or analytical tool, so that resilience-building infrastructure cannot be repurposed for surveillance.
- Meaningful civil society participation in the governance of these systems — not as consultation that produces no binding outcome, but as genuine shared stewardship.
- Sunset clauses and regular democratic re-authorisation for any emergency or enhanced counter-disinformation powers, ensuring that temporary measures do not become permanent fixtures.

Security and openness reinforce each other. A generation that is educated to think critically and participate confidently in democratic life is a far more robust defence against disinformation than any takedown regime. That is the balance the EU Youth Strategy should embody.

Contact and Follow-up

This submission was prepared by the BSRYF Working Group on Digital Literacy and Democracy, drawing on our analytical report presented to the Council of Baltic Sea States and the Polish Foreign Ministry in April 2026. We welcome dialogue with the European Commission's co-creation process for the next Strategy and stand ready to contribute to consultations, expert hearings, and the EU Youth Dialogue process.

Please reach us at: **cyr@cbss.org**

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Representing youth from: Denmark · Estonia · Finland · Germany · Iceland · Latvia · Lithuania · Norway · Poland · Sweden