



Toolkit for the
**development
of materials
and activities**
for children aged 5-18

25 June 2021

Introduction

This toolkit for the development of materials and activities for children aged 5-18 (further called 'the Toolkit') was designed by Ecorys based on the findings and recommendations from the 'Follow-up review and sub-segmentation of Commission materials and activities targeting 5-18 year-olds' commissioned by Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM) at the European Commission (the Commission).

The Follow-up review was a part of the Commission's effort to follow up on the recommendations that emerged from the 'Review of European Commission materials and activities targeting youth', completed by Ecorys for DG COMM in 2018. This previous study recommended to:

- (i.) Consider tailoring youth materials and activities for demographic segments that are less engaged and more at risk of social exclusion and poverty, using social media and user-centred approaches to reach into these segments.
- (ii) Reinforcing the work with particular youth groups and youth organisations to establish longer-term relationships based on common interests in the development of Commission communication materials and activities for youth, to better understand the information needs of the different segments of this audience and together discover ways to engage them.

Hence, the aims of the Follow-up review were:

- (i.) Develop a typology of the 5-18 target audience, including a matrix of target audience segments for future use by Commission author services to inform how they tailor materials for the main segments of this target audience.
- (ii) Identify the EU information and learning needs of the segments as well as preferred material formats and communication channels to advise how to effectively reach and engage with this target group and its main segments.
- (iii) Produce recommendations and an outreach strategy on how to maximise the impact of the Commission's materials for 5-18 year olds, including how to streamline the current material's offer to this target group and its main segments to better address their needs and to cooperate on the distribution and promotion of Commission author services' materials more efficiently for 5-18 year olds.

The Follow-up review covered the Commission's print and online materials and activities for children aged 5-18 and their main segments published between 1 January 2018 and 31 December 2020.

The present document is composed of two parts:

- The main steps of an **outreach strategy** to guide author services through the recommended steps on the design, development and distribution of their materials for 5-18 year olds; and
- The **Toolkit for the development of materials and activities for children aged 5-18** with practical information on how to reach and engage with different segments of children.

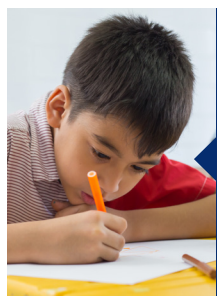
Background on audience sub-segments

Audience segments by demographic group were refined through the triangulation of existing demographic data (from sources including Eurostat and the World Bank) with the findings of factsheets, reports, and other documentation from a range of EU-level, international, non-governmental and advocacy organisations.

These audience segments were validated through comparisons across a wide range of indicators in order to identify digital, health, wealth, or educational inequalities between groups. These included:

- Digital skills, Internet use, and access to digital technologies;
- Educational attainment, early school leaving, and participation in formal education;
- Self-perceived health and long-standing illness, depressive symptoms;
- Rates of material deprivation, poverty and social exclusion; and,
- Percentage of youths in specific income quintiles.

Based on this triangulation and validation, the following demographic sub-groups were identified and researched to explore their characteristics, their EU information needs as well as their preferred communication channels and types of materials:



Children facing material and/or social deprivation

Child-specific material deprivation is estimated to be 23% among children aged 1-15, representing around 16 million children.



Children with a migration background

7% of children (or 4 million) have migration backgrounds or experiences that remain the most common ground for discrimination.



Early school leavers

Around 11% (or 6 million) of 18-24-year-olds in the EU27 were early school leavers, representing a significant segment for communication.

Children in rural areas

29% (18 million) of the total EU children resided in rural areas. Children in rural areas thus constitute a significant subgroup.



Children with special needs/disabilities

As many as 3 million European children aged 5-19 who live with moderate or severe activity limitations.



Children with ethnic minority backgrounds

Despite data availability limitations minority-ethnic children were found to be an important audience segment for communication.



LGBTIQ youths

Despite data availability limitations LGBTI youth were found to be an important audience sub-segment for communication.



Outreach Strategy

Step 1

Identify policies relevant for children aged 5-18

- Reflect whether, in order to achieve your policy objectives, it is necessary to communicate with children aged 5-18 and/or with professionals/multipliers that work with them.
- Using the Toolkit (presented below), consider what main age groups, main segments and multipliers you need to reach in order to achieve your policy objectives.

Step 2

Identify information needs of the selected target group

- Using the Toolkit, define as precisely as possible the intended end user(s) of your communication material or activities (it may help to think in categories of primary and secondary audiences¹).
- With the help of the Toolkit, identify what are the preferred communication materials and activities formats of your target group.
- With the help of the Toolkit, identify any specific needs that should be considered while designing/revising the material for your target group.

Step 4

Develop a dissemination strategy for the material or activities

- Using the Toolkit, identify the preferred channels and relevant multipliers that would help to reach out to your target group.
- Consider the role of other author services (Commission or other) in dissemination of your material or promotion of your activities.
- Consider the use of dedicated online portals e.g., the DG COMM Learning Corner for the dissemination of your material or activities.
- Consider the use of social media channels that are the most used by your target group for the dissemination of your communication material or promotion of your activities.
- Consider the need for printed materials if your target group has reduced access to the Internet, mobile devices or prefers using printed materials for their studies.
- Consider the role of public institutions e.g., schools, libraries, training centres, and community spaces in distribution of your printed materials or in access to our face-to-face activities.
- Consider the role of local (civil society and interest) organisations and local stakeholders in the dissemination of your material or promotion of your activities.

Step 3

Consider potential communication efficiencies and synergies

- Consider any previous materials from your author service covering the same communication objective that could be revised or updated.
- Check on whether any other author services have already produced materials that cover similar communication objectives or target groups that you could use.
- Consider pooling resources with other author services where your policy objectives aligned and allow providing a more integrated information offer for your intended target group.

Step 6

Collect and analyse feedback on your material or activities

- Collect feedback systematically on your communication material or activities, ideally covering quantitative and qualitative data on their use and usefulness.
- Make sure that analysis of the collected monitoring data on user feedback is used to inform any subsequent revisions of the material or improvement of activities as required.

Step 5

Implement your dissemination strategy for the material or activities

- Consider working with representatives of the target group, multipliers or experts who work with them in the development as well as distribution of your material or implementation of your activities for children aged 5-18.
- Consider testing a prototype of your material or running a pilot of activities with the target group, multipliers or experts during their development as this will help to ensure that your material or activities are ready to use and fully adapted to users' needs and abilities (your contacts established through testing will also facilitate dissemination).
- Ensure translation of your material and delivery of your activities in the EU official languages used by your targeted audience.

¹ Try to avoid defining your target groups in the widest terms possible. It is likely that your material will be relevant for different segments of youth. Please think for which segments it will be most relevant and appropriate. For example, materials on rights of children may be relevant for all children. However, the rights issue will be of particular importance for segments of children at greater risk of discrimination and exclusion as well as for children who are sufficiently old to tackle the issue of 'rights' (younger segments on this issue may need to be addressed from a different perspective of ground rules for their interaction with their peers and adults).

Toolkit for the development of materials and activities for children aged 5-18

The aim of this Toolkit is to support the Commission in reaching out to 5-18 year-olds by tailoring its materials for this target audience, depending on their EU information, presentation and learning needs. It provides guidance regarding the information needs, preferred communication channels and types of materials of different segments of children aged 5-18.

The Toolkit outlines key characteristics and needs of the main segments of 5-18 year-olds, including:

- **Demographic data** impacting the differences in learning about the EU in the Member States, particular the needs of children from migration backgrounds.
- **Socio-economic factors** e.g., rural versus urban environments, young people not in education, children at risk of social exclusion or poverty.
- **Interests and specific needs of children** with various physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments and/or difficulties.

If you are targeting more than one age group or segment of 5-18 year-olds, please consult the matrix below for the relevant pages of this guide.

As a general rule, materials and activities for children should be **inclusive** and **have an EU perspective on the topic**.

Toolkit overview							
	Children in rural areas	Children with migration backgrounds	Children with special needs/ disabilities	Children who left school early	Children facing material deprivation	Children with an Ethnic Minority background	LBGTIQ children
Ages 5 to 6: Emergent readers	7 & 12	7 & 13	7 & 14	7 & 15	7 & 16	7 & 17	7 & 18
Ages 7 to 9: Developing readers	8 & 12	8 & 13	8 & 14	8 & 15	8 & 16	8 & 17	8 & 18
Ages 10 to 12: Preadolescents	9 & 12	9 & 13	9 & 14	9 & 15	9 & 16	9 & 17	9 & 18
Ages 13 to 15: Early adolescents	10 & 12	10 & 13	10 & 14	10 & 15	10 & 16	10 & 17	10 & 18
Ages 16 to 18: Late adolescents	11 & 12	11 & 13	11 & 14	11 & 15	11 & 16	11 & 17	11 & 18

Ages 5 to 6: Emergent readers

Key characteristics of the segment



Around age 5

- Phonological awareness
- Alphabet knowledge

Around age 6

- Print awareness.
- Ability to 'sound out' unfamiliar words
- Ability to read short sentences and follow simple narratives

Types of content, main formats and communication channels to use

Content

- **Minimise** the use of **long sentences** and **complex narratives**
- Words should be **short** and **phonetically simple**
- **Text should be descriptive** as opposed to abstract
- Include **interactive elements**
- Focus on **introducing the EU in its simplest terms** (e.g symbols, flags, countries).

Format and type

- **Interactive, playful formats** of materials are the most engaging
- **Interactive online and offline games, puzzles, colouring maps, origami** are some examples of successful communication materials
- **Linking activities or materials to hobbies or areas of interest** to children can be successful.

Channels

- Most relevant communication channels are **parents and practitioners** including teachers and day-care managers, namely through **print distribution**
- At a local level, information could be shared through **city councils and youth/parent associations**
- **Social media will not reach them directly** but can reach relevant multipliers;

Ages 7 to 9: Developing readers

Key characteristics of the segment



Around age 7

- Reading more automatically and increasingly less phonetically
- Familiarity with the sounds of vowel diagraphs



Around age 8-9

- Ability to read silently, independently, and for extended periods of time
- Ability to confidently use written word to express personal ideas

Types of content, main formats and communication channels to use

Content

- Materials can include **longer sentences**, a larger vocabulary, and **more elaborate storylines**.
- Materials should provide **basic knowledge on the EU** (e.g EU history, geography, climate, environment and citizens' rights)
- Topics that can **be easily combined with national school curricula** for this age group are successful

Format and type

- Materials should be hands on or creative **facilitating a 'learning through doing' or play-focused approach**
- Examples of successful online content include **videos, games and quizzes**
- **Interactive offline materials remain successful** for this age (e.g., colouring books, boardgames, story books and activity books)

Channels

- **Parents and schools continue to play an important role** in influencing a child's interaction and use of materials and activities
- Consider sharing the material through **teacher networks or national governments networks**
- Due to age restrictions, **social media will not reach them directly** but can still reach relevant multipliers. Consider **print distribution**

Ages 10-12: Preadolescents

Key characteristics of the segment



- Rapid progress in children's social, cognitive and literacy skills
- Beginning of identity formation
- Increases in digital skills, use of technology and consumption of digital media

Types of content, main formats and communication channels to use

Content

- Focus on **more detailed concepts and ideas**, using longer sentences and a more varied vocabulary
- Opportunity to start introducing children to the **concept of a collective European identity and values**.
- **Avoid using complex terms** (e.g., digital transition) or EU terminology **without providing explanations**.

Format and type

- A **mix of interactive online/offline formats** should be considered for this age
- **Preference for online content** (e.g., videos, quizzes and games) particularly those that **include competitive elements**
- Printed materials **with content that can be used in classrooms and for home study** are also effective

Channels

- Communication materials should **consider the more influential role of friends** in children's digital choices compared to parents
- The education setting remains a key channel, although **children this age start to prefer online channels** to find new information
- Organisations that provide **extracurricular activities** should be considered

Ages 13-15: Early adolescents

Key characteristics of the segment



Reading ability

- Increased reading comprehension due to growing vocabulary
- Ability to understand more complex written styles and subject matter

Cognitive developments

- Increased critical thinking
- Burgeoning introspection and understanding of 'self'
- Development of increasingly complex individual and group identities

Digital skills

- Online activities shift to increased participation in social networks and watching videos

Types of content, main formats and communication channels to use

Content

- Materials should cover topics in more detail, using **more sophisticated language** with **explanations of key terms**
- Materials should focus on **EU policy areas in direct relation to interests of children** such as climate change
- Focus should be on **providing more practical information** on EU opportunities (e.g., EU programmes for youth)

Format and type

- A **mix of interactive online/offline formats** should be considered for this age
- Participatory formats such as **team games, quizzes, school competitions, events or workshops** are preferred for this age
- Offline materials **to learn during their free time** such as books, activity books, infographics and brochures can also be considered

Channels

- **Parents and educators** are still an important channel through which information is accessed at this age
- Social media is an increasing part of their daily lives **but it is not necessarily a principal channel** that children of this age would look to for information on the EU
- **Peer-led EU-related school activities or/and clubs** were shown to be effective method

Ages 16 to 18: Late adolescents

Key characteristics of the segment



- Improvements in reading comprehension are expected to continue indefinitely

Types of content, main formats and communication channels to use

Content

- **Minimal tailoring is necessary** to be readable and understandable for this age group
- Materials can **cover complex EU concepts and topics** (e.g., individual rights, legal rights, civic responsibility)
- Materials should **include a 'call for action' for a specific 'EU cause'** (e.g., climate action, standing up for EU values) with a **strong storytelling element from another young person**

Format and type

- A **combination of online and offline materials** would still be necessary to reach this group
- **Videos, posts, games, and materials shareable via social media** are particularly visible to this age group, and can be used at a greater rate than printed materials
- Leaflets and brochures with **clear and simple information about the EU** and its programmes also work with this group

Channels

- **Offline/online peer-groups and social media** play a big role in how this age access information but school and parents still play a role
- Social media content needs to be adapted to the **platforms that are currently used by this age group** which can change regularly
- **Use of influencers** could be considered
- **Cooperation with national, regional and local stakeholders** particularly youth organisations is recommended

Children in rural areas

Key characteristics of the segment



Digital divide

Fewer Europeans in rural areas use a smartphone to access the internet and they are more likely to report that they have never used a computer

Multilingualism

40.3% of rural Europeans are monolingual in contrast to only 26.3% of Europeans in cities

Types of content, main formats and communication channels to use

Content

- Rural children would benefit **from materials with information about EU programmes and mobility schemes or scholarships** that would help them become more aware of these opportunities
- **Strong storytelling elements from other rural children** could make the material more relatable for this group

Format and type

- Rural children may benefit more than their urban counterparts from **access to printed materials**
- Communication materials targeting this group **should be available in their national language(s)**
- Children from rural areas **may benefit from more visual aids in communication materials** targeting them

Channels

- Evidence also revealed that **professionals working with children in rural areas are less aware of the Commission's materials and where to find them** than their colleagues in cities
- **Europe Direct centres, school networks and local organisations** can play a crucial role in outreach to this target group

Children with migration backgrounds

Key characteristics of the segment



16-24 year olds with migration backgrounds are less likely to report living with a long-standing illness

The risk of poverty is dramatically higher for children whose parents are born in and/or are still citizens of a foreign country

15-17 year-olds with a migration background are more likely not to be in employment, education or training

Individuals with migrant backgrounds are less likely to report having used a computer in the last 3 months and they also report having low digital skills

Types of content, main formats and communication channels to use

Content

- Children with a migrant background and professionals working with them would benefit from having **materials explaining what the EU is doing to promote the rights of minority groups, promote equality within the EU and about specific EU priorities and programmes addressing their needs and concerns**

Format and type

- Due to lower access to computers, **offline materials are preferable** to reach out to this group
- Online materials have a better chance to reach to this group if **available on a smart phone or are adapted for mobile use**
- Leaflets and brochures in **some non-official EU languages** with **clear and simple information about the EU** and its programmes also work with this group

Channels

- Due to the greater generational divide in terms of digital skills, **materials that can be used and accessed without the technological support of parents might be more effective** in reaching this subgroup
- **Cooperation with national, regional and local stakeholders** working with this sub-segment is recommended

Children with special needs/disabilities

Key characteristics of the segment



Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

ASD prevalence estimates varied among European countries, from 4.4 to 19.7 per 1000 children aged 7-9 years.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

The estimated number of EU children with SEN is at 15 million. The prevalence of children with SEN enrolled in formal education amounted to 6.24%.

Moderate or severe disability

Among EU children aged 5-9, the rate of moderate and severe disability is estimated to be 3.1% and 0.6%, increasing to 3.6% and 1.3% among 10-15-year-olds.

Types of content, main formats and communication channels to use

Content

- **Sentences should be short, simple and pronounced in the positive**, instructions should be given as short lists of tasks
- Emphasis must be put on **words and expressions important and familiar to children**
- Content should include information on how people with special needs / disabilities **are contributing to the European project** and contain information on **how they can access EU programmes**

Format and type

- Children with learning disabilities would benefit from **interactive materials, including visual aids, audio formats (e.g podcasts) or videos, and online games**
- **Images, drawings or symbols may also be used** to facilitate the understanding of a text
- Develop content with **various difficulty settings and accessibility options**
- Materials should be available **in sign languages and Braille**

Channels

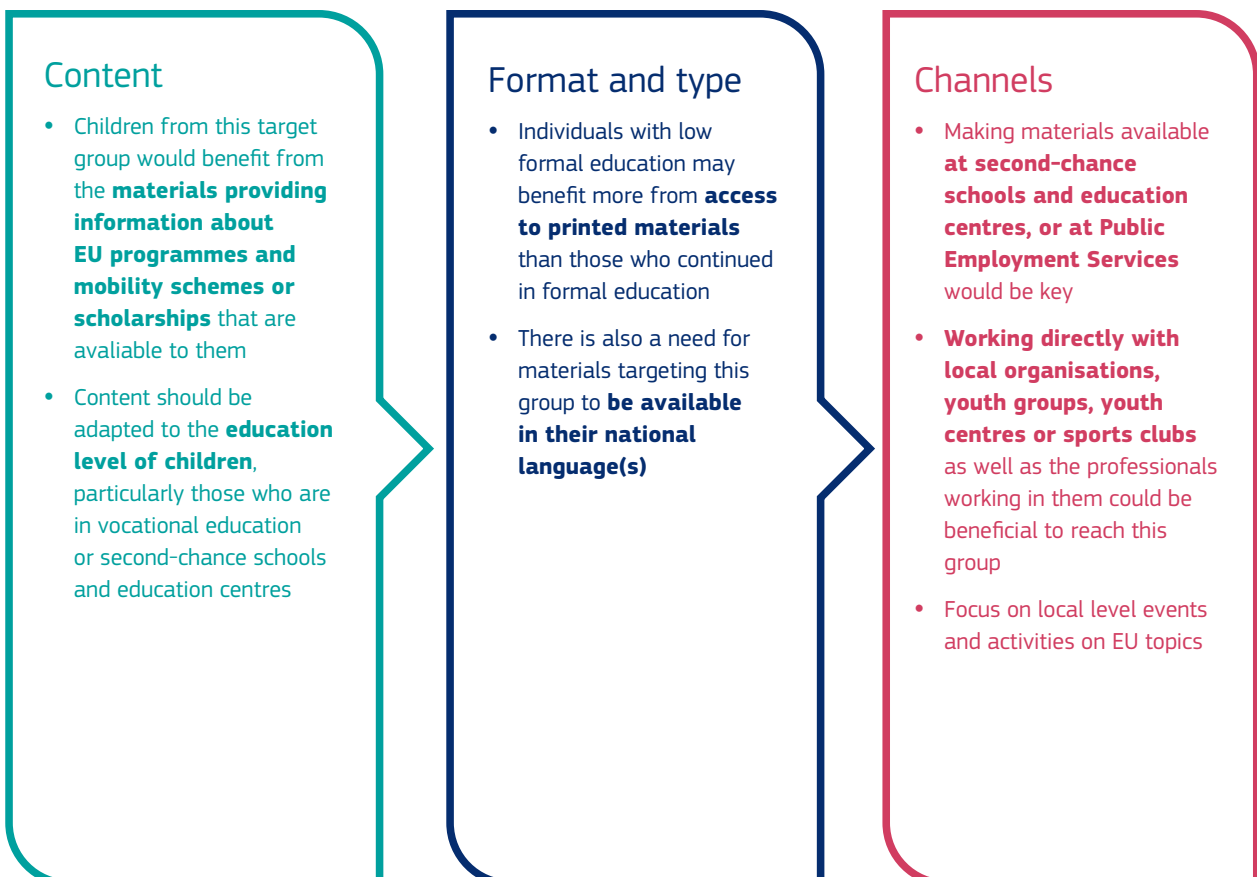
- **Co-production with experts and professionals working with this group is a key way to ensure that communication materials reach** and can be used by children with disabilities effectively

Children who left school early

Key characteristics of the segment



Types of content, main formats and communication channels to use



Children facing material deprivation

Key characteristics of the segment



Educational inequalities

Materially deprived 16-19 year olds are over-represented among those with lower educational attainment

Health inequalities

Children in the lowest income quintile are significantly less likely to report being in 'good' or 'very good' health

Digital divide

Individuals are significantly less likely to access mobile internet via smartphones and to report having used a computer in the last 3 or 12 months

Types of content, main formats and communication channels to use

Content

- Materials might be more effective if written in **easy-to-read language, with more visual aids and without EU jargon**
- Children from this target group would benefit from the materials providing **information about specific EU priorities and programmes addressing their needs and concerns.**

Format and type

- Due to the increased barriers in accessing digital media, **communication materials could be more effective in offline formats**
- There is also a need for materials targeting this group to **be available in their national language(s)**

Channels

- **Working directly with local organisations, youth groups, youth centres or sports clubs** as well as the professionals working in them could be beneficial to reach this group.
- Focus on local level events and activities on EU topics
- **School** still is an important channel for this group particularly to reach out to parents and educators.

Children with ethnic minority backgrounds

Key characteristics of the segment



Throughout adulthood ethnic minority individuals continue to face:

Discrimination when accessing employment

Experiences of hate-motivated harassment and violence

Lower educational attainment

Low social cohesion including reduced trust in public institutions

Types of content, main formats and communication channels to use

Content

- Materials could focus on providing content regarding:
- **What the EU is doing to promote the rights of ethnic groups,**
- **How it promotes equality within the EU**
- **Specific EU priorities and programmes** addressing their needs and concerns
- **Representation of ethnic minority children** in the material is also advised

Format and type

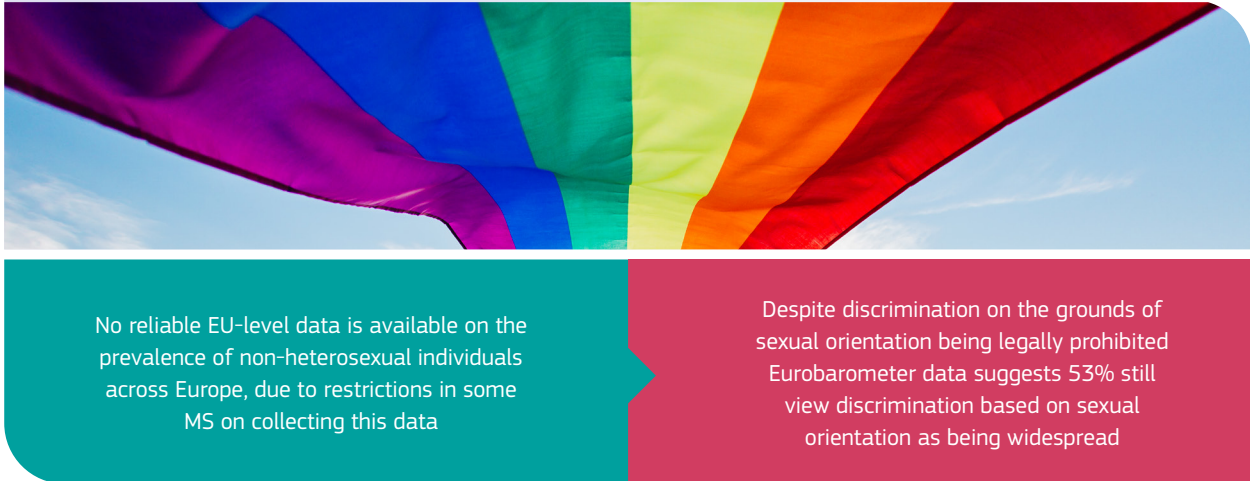
- Due to lower access to computers, **offline materials are preferable** to reach out to this group
- Leaflets and brochures translated in **national language(s)** with **clear and simple information about the EU** and its programmes also work with this group

Channels

- Local representative organisations, youth groups and professionals working with them could be beneficial to reach this group
- Efforts to accompany any communication materials with **dissemination and outreach campaigns at regional and local level** may be an important consideration
- **Schools** are an important channel for this group particularly to outreach to parents and educators

LBGTIQ children

Key characteristics of the segment



Types of content, main formats and communication channels to use

Content

- Materials for children should be **gender neutral and include an EU perspective on the topic** (e.g., their rights as EU citizens, policies promoting LGBTI rights and the EU position towards the community's rights)
- Teachers could benefit from **materials that could help navigate a complex world** with many kinds of identities they may not be familiar with

Format and type

- Due to the sensitive nature of the topic in some contexts and Member States, **online materials are preferable** since they can be consulted by the young person through their own personal phone or computer
- Offline materials **such as school or local events and actions on key dates** (e.g., Pride Day) can also be considered

Channels

- Local representative organisations, youth groups and professionals working with them could be beneficial to reach to this group
- Efforts to accompany any communication materials with dissemination and outreach campaigns at regional and local level may be an important consideration

