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Talking Across Generations  
on Education (TAGe)

*under the umbrella of*

**Youth-Driven Communities of Peace (YoD-COP)**

# Ensuring Well-Being through Social-Emotional Learning in the Digital World



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The production of this Pointers of Action was only possible thanks to the work accomplished by the 4 young people who participated in the TAGe event; Claire-Marie Beyet (France), Victoria Onuoha (Nigeria), Hameeda Syed (India) and Rafie Malik (India).

Their strong capacity for critical analysis, constructive discussions, and innovative ideas helped draw a complete and concrete portrait of how to Ensure Well-being through SEL in the Digital World with specific, realistic, and relevant recommendations.

The project was overseen by Fazolatkhon Nasretdinova, Project Officer, Youth Programmes, UNESCO MGIEP and Carina Racine, Consultant, UNESCO MGIEP.

**Talking Across Generations on education (TAG<sup>e</sup>)** is a unique advocacy tool developed by UNESCO MGIEP, for fostering an intergenerational dialogue across youth and senior decision-makers. The aim is to amplify youth voices through a face-to-face, unrestricted, non-hierarchical, and transparent dialogue with decision-makers. By bringing together youth and decision-makers, this tool aims to foster youth rights and put their aspirations and requests on a visible stage where their innovative ideas are heard, understood, and transformed into action by decision-makers.

Youth are often pushed to the periphery of the policymaking process in the areas of education, peace, sustainability, and global citizenship as they are not considered key stakeholders ([Bečević and Dahlstedt, 2021](#)).<sup>1</sup> UNESCO MGIEP strongly believes that any youth strategy cannot succeed without their active participation and interaction with policy-makers. Consequently, effective youth<sup>2</sup> engagement should include integrating youth perspectives into every component of policy-making, education opportunities, program planning, and other vital national and international decision-making pathways. This is at the heart of the Talking Across Generations on education (TAG<sup>e</sup>) program. TAG<sup>e</sup> is a five-month process whose most important components can be divided into three stages: (1) social media discussions;<sup>3</sup> (2) live intergenerational dialogue;<sup>4</sup> and (3) Pointers of Action<sup>5</sup>. These components will be detailed later.

- 1 Also see some youth voices such as Dević from Serbia and Sahar from Pakistan, as well as some case studies from the UK and Yemen.
- 2 UNESCO MGIEP defines youth as individuals between the ages of 18 and 35.
- 3 Social media discussions where youth are invited to share their thoughts, comments, and opinions.
- 4 A live intergenerational dialogue where six young people engage with three policy-makers in a live event.
- 5 Pointers of Action are the draft policy recommendations produced by the six youth who participated in the live event, summarizing and analysing all the discussions from the social media engagement and the live event and offering key recommendations for international communities and stakeholders involved in policy-making processes.

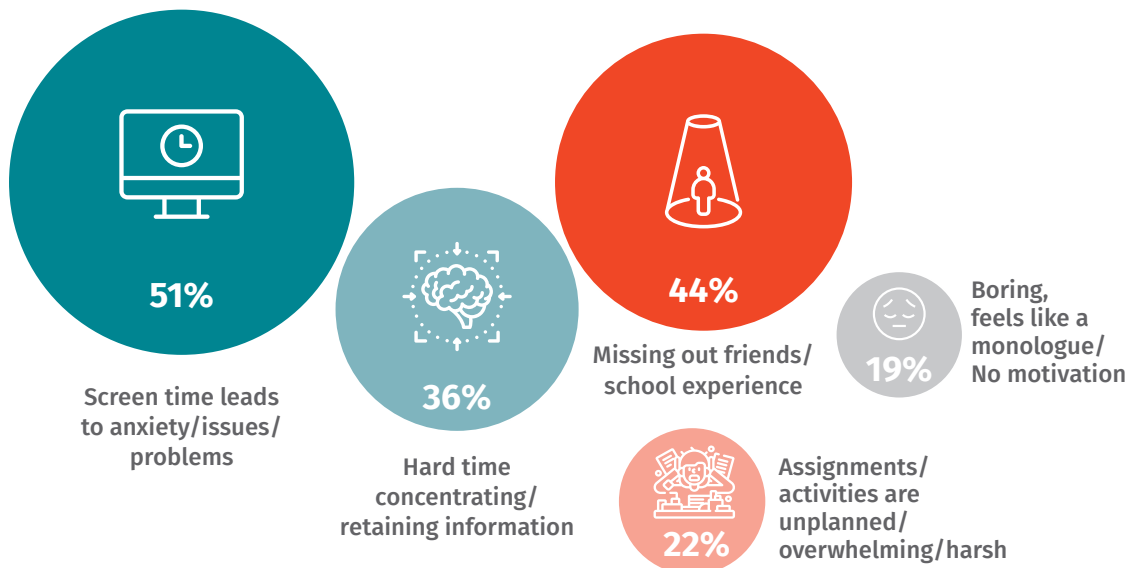
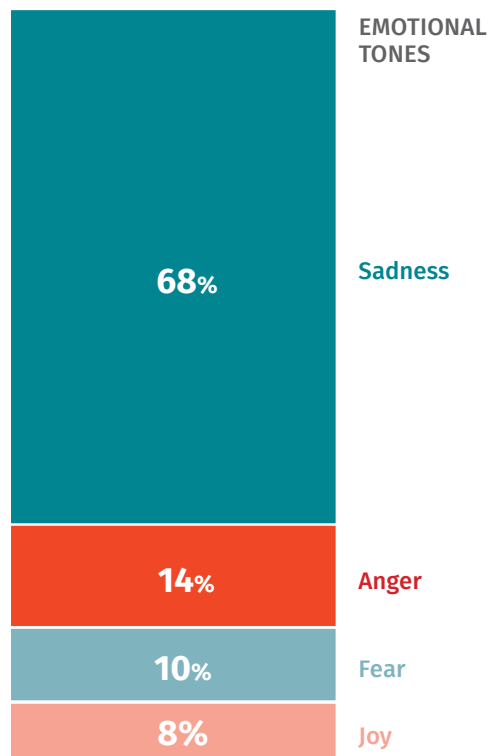
**UNESCO MGIEP STRONGLY BELIEVES THAT ANY YOUTH STRATEGY CANNOT SUCCEED WITHOUT THEIR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION AND INTERACTION WITH POLICY-MAKERS.**



In December 2022, the Institute celebrated its 10-year anniversary under the theme of *Education for Human Flourishing*. As part of this event, the Institute organized a TAG<sup>6</sup> on the theme *Ensuring learner well-being through Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in the digital world*, in which four youth<sup>6</sup> and three decision-maker<sup>7</sup> panelists participated. Addressing well-being in the digital world is crucial, as a tonal analysis from UNESCO MGIEP (NOPED) revealed that 92% of online comments<sup>8</sup> from youth on the issue of transition to online learning were negative in nature, expressing emotional tones of sadness and fear (UNESCO MGIEP, 2022). Keywords like stress, irritating, overwhelming, anxious, confused, harsh, and missing out were common occurrences in these comments. The most common phrases used were: hard time concentrating, no motivation, boring, missing friends. While further tonal and sentiment analysis is possible for other aspects of engagement in the digital world, the data online on learning and social media is symbolic enough to raise red flags on how we can make digital engagement more beneficial to the youth, its learning experience and well-being (UNESCO MGIEP, 2022).

Complaints about online learning were filtered and analysed by looking at common phrases in the comments using an AI-based summarizer tool.

**UNESCO MGIEP tonal analysis (NOPED):**



6 Youth from India (2), France, and Nigeria.

7 Decision-makers from Mexico, the United Kingdom, and North Korea.

8 Comments from popular social media forums like Twitter (X), Reddit and Quora. The data also crunched comments from student interviews published by NYTimes, Education Week and several other edtech blogs.

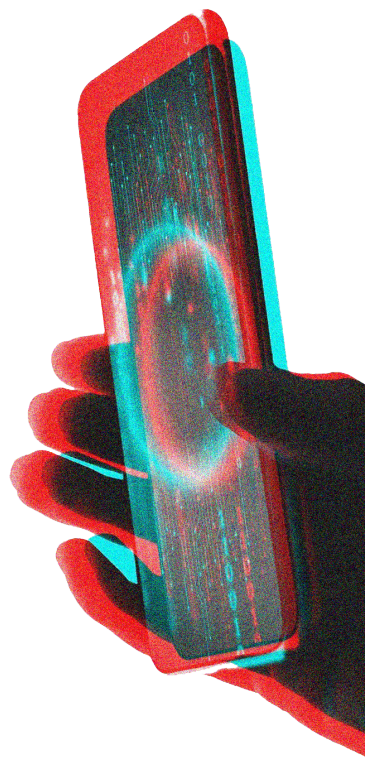
Thus, the TAG<sup>e</sup> organized in December 2022 first addressed this topic through the following questions in social media discussions on Facebook<sup>9</sup> and Instagram<sup>10</sup> and during a live dialogue with decision-makers: (A) How can SEL be integrated into digital engagement to improve well-being?, (B) What would be the pros and cons of integrating SEL in the digital world? and (C) How can decision-makers help to integrate SEL in the digital world? As a final outcome, youth panelists have compiled their ideas, and feedback received from the decision-maker panelists and the audience (online and offline), into the current Pointers of Action document. This document addresses the international communities and stakeholders involved in the relevant policy-making processes.

We aim in this document to identify the important elements addressed during the various discussions (social media discussion and live event) in addition to offering key recommendations for decision-makers. Concretely, this document has sought to highlight two social and emotional challenges faced today by youth, with a third issue present in each of them – *(1) educational and employment disparities (economic exclusion), (2) poor civic engagement, and (3) the impact of the digital divide and misuse of social media platforms* – in addition to showing how SEL competencies can be a tool to address the social and emotional challenges that may be encountered, supported by technological tools.

# What is Social Emotional Learning (SEL)?

SEL can be broadly defined as the process of acquiring the competencies, skills, abilities, and/or attitudes needed to recognize and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, build positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and manage difficult situations (Singh and Duraiappah, 2020).

These competencies are universal. Indeed, every human brain develops to enable social and emotional competencies such as Empathy, Mindfulness, Compassion, and Critical Inquiry (EMC<sup>2</sup>).



WE AIM IN THIS DOCUMENT TO **IDENTIFY THE IMPORTANT ELEMENTS ADDRESSED DURING THE VARIOUS DISCUSSIONS** (SOCIAL MEDIA DISCUSSION AND LIVE EVENT) IN ADDITION TO OFFERING KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION-MAKERS.

9 Debate on Facebook : Week 1, Week 2, Week 3

10 Debate on Instagram : Week 1, Week 2, Week 3

## UNESCO MGIEP's EMC<sup>2</sup> :

### CRITICAL INQUIRY

Ensure your inquiry is rooted in evidence

'Know that logic is the heart of rationality'

Build self-skepticism and intellectual resilience

### COMPASSION

Acknowledge acts of compassion

Practice compassion to self, others and environment

Be an agent for change

### MINDFULNESS

Increased attention and awareness

Practice mindfulness techniques

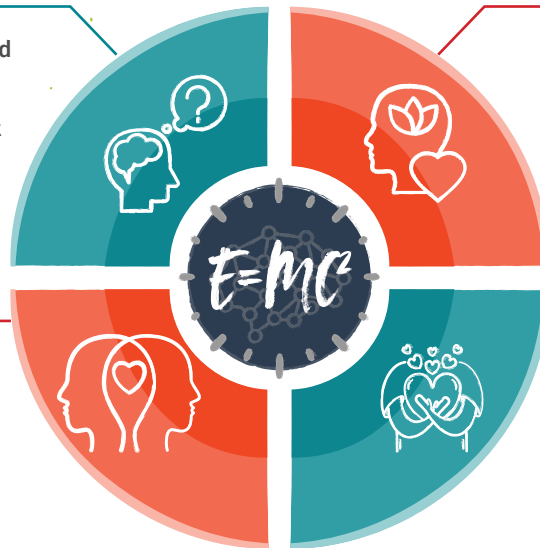
Regulate emotions

### EMPATHY

Name and recognise emotion

Understand perspective of others

Foster social connection



Source: Singh and Duraiappah, 2020; UNESCO MGIEP, 2022

## 1. Educational and employment disparities (economic exclusion)

In light of the EMC<sup>2</sup> framework and SEL competencies, the following section will show how SEL competencies and technological tools can help youth overcome the three challenges identified above.

As educational institutions increasingly leverage digital platforms for learning and coursework, lack of access to technology can place certain youth at a distinct disadvantage, leading to stress, low self-esteem, and a perceived sense of inadequacy (IEEE, 2023).

Added to this educational challenge is the lack of information (information gaps), which has a significant impact on employment opportunities. Indeed, the Internet is a primary source of information on a variety of topics. Lack of access to technology can lead to an information gap, causing feelings of being left out and impacting decision-making capabilities (IEEE, 2023). Moreover, the skills required for certain job roles change fast, creating an "information gap" where people don't know what skills they should learn. Closing this gap is crucial to reduce youth unemployment. In addition to unemployment,

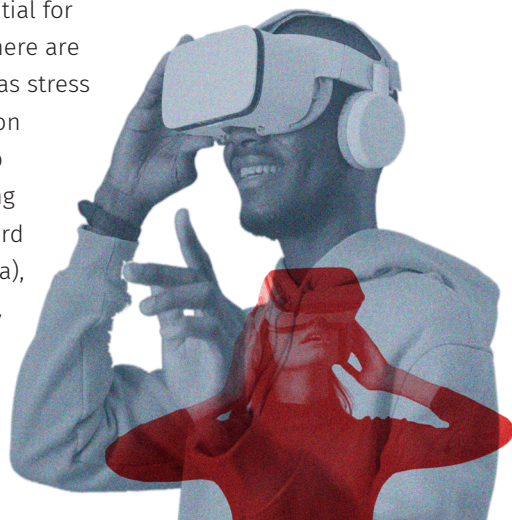
economic exclusion is experienced by many. Indeed, job hunting, skill development, and even some forms of employment now heavily rely on technology. Youth without access to technology can experience stress and anxiety about their economic future (IEEE, 2023).

Furthermore, despite the many benefits of social media, youth may face several negative experiences with this, such as cyberbullying, mental health issues, self-image anxiety, fear of missing out (FOMO), and so on (Kusuma, 2020). In addition, one of the major challenges facing youth today is the digital divide, i.e. unequal access to digital technology which includes smartphones, laptops and the Internet. The effect of this divide on youth has resulted in an inequality in educational and job opportunities (Bell, 2020). This digital divide can lead to isolation, stress, and a heightened sense of being an “outsider” (IEEE, 2023).

To meet these different challenges, the development and strengthening of several SEL skills are necessary. These competencies include **attention regulation** – the capacity to concentrate and focus on the present educational and employment situation; **self-regulation** – the ability to identify and recognize one’s emotions, thoughts (interests and skills), and the influences on their own behavior; **emotional regulation** – the capacity to regulate one’s emotions, thought processes, and behaviors effectively through the educational and employment challenges faced; and **critical inquiry** – the ability to collect and analyze information related to one’s employment prospects based on their educational knowledge while undertaking critical analysis of the educational tools and opportunities available (Singh and Duraipapp, 2020).

Several technological tools are available to support these skills, such as apps, online platforms, and other types of technology that allow youth to develop their strengths, skills, and interests. To this end, there are several tools that allow youth to track their progress and identify areas they need to focus on (e.g. Mural, Trello, Slack), which are essential for their educational and employment development. In addition, there are several apps to help manage their emotions and feelings such as stress and frustration, by offering “brain break” content with meditation and breathing exercises (e.g. Calm, Headspace). In order to help young people process information and find solutions, something essential to their success, there are tools allowing them to record their reflections or capture their ideas (e.g. Cloud Express, Canva), to create visual representations of their emotions (e.g. Buncee), or to design a timeline of their progress, to put together vision boards and to-do lists, to set deadlines and reminders, to

**THE SKILLS REQUIRED FOR CERTAIN JOB ROLES CHANGE FAST, CREATING AN “INFORMATION GAP” WHERE PEOPLE DON’T KNOW WHAT SKILLS THEY SHOULD LEARN.**





set goals, and so on (Dené Poth, 2023). These various strategies and digital tools allow young people to develop their SEL competencies and to take ownership of their development, while self-assessing their knowledge, skills, and emotions in order to meet the educational and employment challenges they may face.

A concrete example is a platform created in Bangladesh called NISE3 (Modeldoveanu et al., 2022). This project brings together various groups to exchange information on skill development. With such platforms, youth can get clear insights into the skills in demand, receive career guidance, and access training opportunities, making sure they are prepared for the job market. Another example is the use of a digital platform like WhatsApp. Through this app, an Indian trade union collective, SEWA (The Self-employed Women's Association) empowered women with information on COVID-19 and trained them in entrepreneurial skills, thus enabling them to earn an income online during the pandemic (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

## 2. Poor civic engagement

In an era where much of the civic discourse happens online, being excluded can prevent youth from participating in societal conversation and advocacy, fostering a sense of disenfranchisement (IEEE, 2023). Moreover, according to key findings from an OECD report, just under half of the population, no matter the country or age group, lives alone (OECD, 2022). Consequently, it is important to consider social inclusion/exclusion as it has a significant impact on the well-being of young people. Indeed, as per a report in the *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, young adults with serious mental illness are socially excluded compared to peers from the general community in terms of interpersonal connections, vocational engagement, autonomy/independence, and housing stability (Gardner et al., 2019).

Moreover, as for “Educational and employment disparities (economic exclusion)”, the misuse of social media networks has caused negative experiences that challenge today's youth. These issues include cyberbullying, mental health issues such as depression and self-harm in adolescents, anxiety around self-image, FOMO, and so on (Kusuma, 2020). Finally, the digital divide also impacts youth as it decreases their capacity for social interaction (Bell, 2020). In addition to the SEL competencies mentioned above, young people need the following skills to meet this challenge: **empathy** – the ability to sense, identify, and

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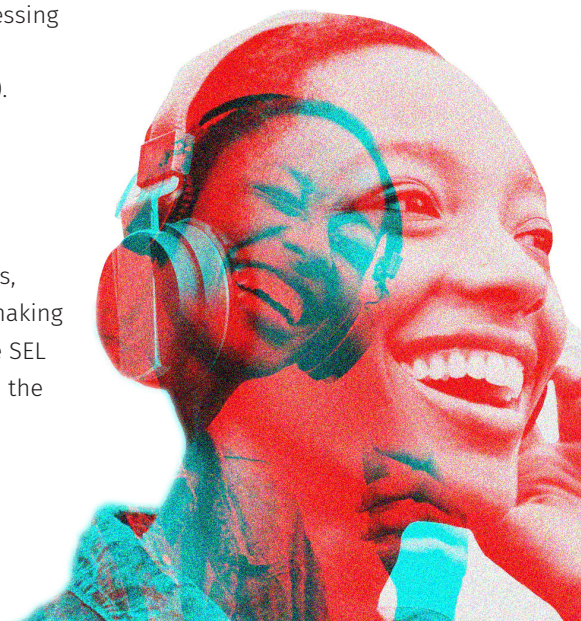


understand the “other” from their perspective; **social awareness** – the ability to appreciate and respect different situations and perspectives; **relationship skills** – the ability to communicate with, understand, collaborate with, listen to, and help others online and in their social network (family members, work colleagues, friends); **compassion** – a propensity to take action to help others (family, colleagues, friends); **cooperation** – working together with others without ulterior motives; and **responsible decision-making** – understanding the consequences of their behavior with respect to another’s well-being online and in their social network (family, colleagues, friends) (Singh and Duraiappah, 2020).

In addition to the tools mentioned above, there are different technological tools, strategies, and apps that allow young people to learn about others and develop their awareness of similarities and differences to develop better relationships and practice empathy and compassion. Indeed, cutting-edge technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) can be used to create immersive and interactive experiences for young people to understand different cultures, backgrounds, perspectives, and contexts (Daccord, 2020). Moreover, there are tools to promote relationship skills and teamwork by allowing young people to develop their ability to ask for help, offer support, and work in teams (e.g. Google Docs, Trello). Moreover, several digital **storytelling tools** allow young people to learn about different topics, allowing them to think critically about different issues and the role they want to play, but also allowing them to learn how to weigh the pros and cons of different choices (e.g. Gimlet, Quizziz), to reflect on their emotions and their reactions to different situations in order to understand the consequences of their actions (e.g. Common Sense Education) (Dené Poth, 2023). Finally, websites like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn can be used to improve youth’s interaction and communication skills through accessing information content, taking part in live discussions, and fostering online communities (Dhingra and Parashar, 2022).

In light of the above three challenges, it is possible to observe how SEL provides a framework for understanding and managing emotions, setting and achieving positive goals, managing emotions and showing empathy for others, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and making responsible decisions. Leveraging technology can enhance SEL competencies to ensure the holistic well-being of youth in the digital world.

THERE ARE DIFFERENT TECHNOLOGICAL **TOOLS, STRATEGIES, AND APPS** THAT ALLOW YOUNG PEOPLE TO LEARN ABOUT OTHERS AND DEVELOP THEIR AWARENESS OF SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES TO **DEVELOP BETTER RELATIONSHIPS AND PRACTICE EMPATHY AND COMPASSION.**



# Key Recommendations

Based on the discussions, here are the three key recommendations of the four youth who participated in the live TAG<sup>e</sup> addressed to *Youth, Civil Society, and Decision-makers*:

**1. Youth:** Empower and mobilize young people to engage with SEL through four key steps:

- a. Active participation:** Encourage active involvement in SEL-related activities, campaigns, and forums. This involvement can take various forms, such as social media campaigns, group discussions, volunteering activities, or co-creation of content that raises awareness about SEL. For instance, ACT for Youth has designed an activity toolkit for young professionals to impart socio-emotional learning by connecting research to practice. Most of these activities are self-taught and easy to follow (ACT for Youth, no date).
- b. Collaboration:** Facilitate collaborations with educators and civil society organizations to influence curriculum design and implementation. This collaboration can provide first-hand insights into the needs and perspectives of young people, contributing to a more tailored and effective SEL approach. A report by CASEL highlights the perspectives of youth towards making context-specific approaches to enhancing socio-emotional learning in their schools (DePaoli et al., 2018).
- c. Advocacy:** Equip youth with the knowledge and skills to advocate for the importance of SEL in both the educational and policy contexts. This can be achieved through workshops, policy dialogues, and fellowships that enable youth to articulate their insights and ideas effectively. Organizations like Global G.L.O.W in India train adolescent girls in socio-emotional learning approaches to advocate for their rights (Global Glow, 2023; glowglobal.org).
- d. Practice:** Promote the regular practice of SEL skills within their communities. This can involve role-modeling positive behaviors, leading peer-to-peer learning sessions,



and facilitating discussions on SEL-related topics within their social networks.

**2. Civil Society:** Enhance civil society's contribution to SEL promotion through three key actions:

- a. Collaboration:** Strengthen collaborations with tech companies, governments, and educational institutions to advocate for ethical and inclusive digital spaces, and to deliver digital literacy training to wider communities. In 2021, the Netherlands began a five-year policy called Strengthening Civil Society, partnering with 42 organizations to promote inclusive development. The policy emphasizes digital safety, ensuring online security and risk-free personal data collection. Digital inclusion is prioritized, involving local communities in designing accessible and user-friendly digital tools. Lastly, civil society plays an essential role in upholding human rights both online and offline (OECD, 2021).
- b. Netiquette promotion:** Develop comprehensive guidelines for respectful online behavior, or “netiquette”. These guidelines can be disseminated through various platforms, such as online courses, social media campaigns, and community events. For instance, a number of colleges that provide distance learning options also give suggestions on how to increase the effectiveness in online classrooms through practicing netiquette (Open University, no date).
- c. Awareness raising:** Organize activities and initiatives to increase public awareness of SEL. This can involve hosting educational events, creating engaging content for social media, and fostering discussions on SEL in community gatherings.

**3. Decision-makers:** Enhance the policy framework to support SEL through four key steps:

- a. Implementation team:** Set up a dedicated team within government bodies, such as the Ministry of Education, to oversee the implementation of SEL in the education sector. This team should include representatives from various stakeholder groups to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach. For instance, a national party in India's capital launched the “happiness curriculum” in



schools in July 2018. This involves nursery and kindergarten students participating in meditation, storytelling, and activities twice weekly, while students from classes 1 to 8 do so daily, followed by Q&A sessions (SCERT, 2023).

- b. Collaboration and support:** Enhance collaborations with civil society organizations and tech companies working on SEL. This could involve providing funding, technical support, and legitimacy to these efforts. The UNESCO MGIEP and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) have signed an MoU to collaborate on teacher training in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and digital pedagogies. This partnership prioritizes self-paced life skills learning, promotes cooperative academic research, and facilitates information exchange to strengthen the ties between the two entities (digitalLEARNING Network, 2023).
  
- c. Investments:** Allocate resources to support research and development of SEL applications. This could involve funding academic institutions, commissioning studies, or promoting findings from SEL research.
  
- d. Regulations:** Strengthen regulations against online hate speech and harassment, and promote ethical online behavior. This could involve drafting laws, developing a code of conduct for digital spaces, and setting up enforcement mechanisms.

## Conclusion

This document highlighted three social and emotional challenges faced by young people today; two distinct and one which is present in each. Indeed, youth may be confronted with challenges related to (1) education and employment, including an economic situation which can lead to stress, lower self-esteem, a perceived sense of inadequacy, and anxiety about their economic future, in addition to an “information gap” causing feelings of being left out and having an impact on their decision-making. The second challenge faced by young people is related to their (2) civic engagement, which can create a sense of disenfranchisement and/or a sense of being socially excluded. Finally, (3) the digital divide and the misuse of social media platforms, present in both challenges, have an impact on education and employment opportunities as well as on the civic engagement of young



people. Indeed, through negative experiences on social media platforms and a lack of access to technological resources, youth are faced with unequal opportunities in education and employment and poorer social interaction.

These different challenges can be met by developing SEL skills. Indeed, SEL competencies help overcome the challenges encountered in higher education and employment by increasing the capacity to focus better and pay attention to details, set goals, plan, and organize, as well as overcome challenges and solve problems that arise within the daily routine. In addition, SEL enables better navigation in all types of social situations, helps to resolve conflict, to cooperate, and to work with a team in a respective manner. Through these above-stated skills, SEL can secure youth's smooth social inclusion into society. Furthermore, the challenges encountered by youth due to mental health issues could be addressed through SEL by improved emotion recognition and emotional understanding of the self and others, being able to demonstrate empathy to self and others, and coping with frustration and stress (Singh and Duraipappah, 2020).

This document highlights technological tools that can be leveraged to reduce educational and employment disparities, help economic inclusion, increase civic engagement, and address the digital divide and misuse of social media platforms through the development and strengthening of several SEL skills, aided by several technological tools such as apps, online platforms, and others.

Finally, the four youths who participated in the TAG<sup>e</sup> as panelists at the 10-year anniversary suggested recommendations for youth, civil society, and decision-makers. Their suggestions for youth highlighted the need to encourage youth to actively participate in SEL activities, to collaborate with educators and civil society, to advocate for the importance of SEL, and to regularly practice SEL skills in their communities. As for civil society, they suggested that civil society needs to collaborate with tech companies and other stakeholders, to promote netiquette, and to raise awareness about SEL, with the Netherlands' policy emphasizing digital safety and inclusion as a prime example. Finally, for policy-makers, they suggested that they should establish dedicated teams for SEL implementation, support collaborations, allocate resources for SEL research, and tighten regulations for online behaviors, akin to Delhi's "happiness curriculum" initiative.



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