bye, Polarity
Thinking beyond Polarity
for Europe united in diversity

Report on polarising messages - occurrence and perception among young people

SAY: „BYE, POLARITY"

BORG MISTELBACH

SYNTHESIS CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

FUTURE BALLOONS we take you higher!

bit schulungscenter member of bit group

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1   Introduction

This overall report contains all the answers collected within the focus group interviews made in all the partner's countries. This will give a picture of where and how pupils perceive increasing polarity on social media and how they deal with it.

Focus groups with young people about polarity in social media channels is aimed at increasing the impact and visibility of the Erasmus+ project BYE, POLARITY at a local, regional, national and European level.

2   Target groups

PORTUGAL

The main target groups of the dissemination activities of BYE, POLARITY are pupils between the ages of 12 and 16 and secondary teachers. The age group was deliberately chosen from the age of 12, as young people are mature enough to deal with complex societal issues and it is ensured to also reach young people who leave school early. Both teachers and students need support and innovative material to take a stand online and offline against the ongoing polarisation and social division. We got 41 participants on this focus group activity.

CYPRUS

15 students from the 7th grade, aged between 12 and 13 years old took part in the focus groups activities. The students were divided to three equal groups, consisting of 5 students each. The focus groups started by giving a brief explanation of the term polarity and polarisation. We gave some examples to set the general idea and concept and we then explained how we wanted to view this concept in the context of social networks. Afterwards, the questions were given in the same order and students provided their answers in the form of discussions and debates. The students were highly engaged, and many fruitful conversations emerged.

ROMANIA

16 students from the 7th and 8th grades, aged between 12-14, took part in the focus group, the activities being led by the teachers at Secondary School no. 28. The students were divided into three groups, as follows: group 1 - 5 students, group 2 - 5 students, group 3 - 6 students. Given the fact that the topic of polarity is foreign to them, the term being unknown to the students, it was explained to them first what the concept of "polarity" is and how it appears, in general, in society. Thus, starting from a general concept, the teachers narrowed the discussion to the emergence of polarity at the educational level and, subsequently, to the polarity on social networks. The students participated in discussions with interest, giving examples from their previous personal experiences, recognizing that social networks have a major impact on their lives and that they often face situations in which they do not know how to react. Afterwards, the students received the materials and answered the questions addressed to their group, as they considered.

AUSTRIA

22 students from 10th and 11th grade between 15 and 17 years old took part. The students are accustomed to working on polarization issues therefore a quick introduction on the topic was sufficient. Then we engaged in a discussion on polarization via social media in private and professional use. The students shared their own analyses and experiences and talked about the great impact social media has on their lives. The worked extensively with the materials in group activities and answered the questions.

3   Polarisation in social media

The aim of this ***Focus groups with young people about polarity in social media channels*** is to collect information from the students about polarisation and how they approach social media and its polarity.

PORTUGAL

The focus group and questionnaire on polarity took place in the Secondary School Bernardino Machado and Secondary School Joaquim Carvalho, both located in the city of Figueira da Foz, in Portugal. The target group was students between the age of 12 to 16 years old. With the help of English, Portuguese and Philosophy teachers, different groups were divided, and some questions were given about polarity.

CYPRUS

The focus group and questionnaire on polarity were held by a group of 15 students. Second Regional High School of Nicosia – Malouda. The target group was students between 12 and 13 years old. With the help of their English language teacher, three different groups, consisting of 5 students each, were formed and given the same questions about polarity.

ROMANIA

The focus group and questionnaire on polarity took place at Scoala Gimnaziala Nr.28, Bucharest, Romania. The target group were 7th and 8th graders, who are 12- 14 years old. Two English teachers and one Romanian teacher organized the activities on polarity of the 3 groups of students, two of them consisting of 5 students and one 6 students.

AUSTRIA

Focus group research took place at BORG Mistelbach, Austria. The target group were 10-11th graders, who are 15-17 years old. One media teacher organized the activities within class and with two extra lessons.

What does "polarisation" mean? This is how the focus group started! We explained that our world is a diverse place. People have different ideas, needs and desires, they pursue different goals and see meaning in different things.

They have changing ideas of good and evil, they have not all had the same upbringing and education, they have not grown up in the same circumstances and have had very diverse experiences in their lives.

Unfortunately, most students did not clearly understand what the word *Polarity* means. Only when examples were given, it became more clear and more personal. Shockingly, many students have suffered some kind of polarity at some point in time, and some even rephrased that polarity was still a big issue in their personal daily lives, mostly through social media, but also amongst peers and family members.

3.1   Focus group about bye, Polarity!

PORTUGAL

This focus group was a joint group of students from the age of 13 to 15 years old, from the 9th grade level, at the Secondary School Bernardino Machado, Figueira da Foz, on the 23rd of May 2023. A survey after the focus group to get some quantitative data was added on Google Forms.

CYPRUS

This focus group was a joint group of students from the age of 12 and 13 years old, from the 7th grade level, at the Second Regional High School of Nicosia - Malouda, on the 8th of May 2023.

ROMANIA

This focus group was a joint group of students of 12-14 years old, from the 7th and 8th grades, organized at Scoala Gimnaziala Nr.28, Bucharest, Romania, on 14th July 2023.

AUSTRIA

Focus group research took place at BORG Mistelbach, Austria. The target group are 10-11th graders, who are 15-17 years old, June 7th, 2023.

Introduction: Our topic today is social media platforms. Do you know what social media platforms are? (If the answer is no, give examples: YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, …)

Four question topics we raised and discussed in small groups of 5 students each.

1. *which social media channels are used?*
2. *if and how increasing polarity is perceived there?*
3. *how do pupils react to questionable content?*
4. *if pupils create political content themselves?*

Most students chose Instagram, WhatsApp, Tik Tok and YouTube as the most used social media platforms. Some rarely use Facebook, Messenger, Snapchat or Twitter. The majority had not faced any kind of polarity through social media, but when they felt the polarity, the tendency was to do nothing. Only a very small percentage of them have reacted to questionable content and reported or told their family members.

In terms of political content, there was no interest in political matters for the students, even though they understand the importance of it.

3.2   Questions - Block 1

A. Then we asked a variety of questions, and again in different groups, they shared their answers after discussing them within the groups.

1. Do you use social media? Why?
2. If you do not use social media, why?
3. If yes, which social media platforms do you use?
4. Do you just "consume" content from there or do you post yourself?

Answers – Block 1A

1. Do you use social media? Why?

PT - The students use most social media channels, to talk with other people; as a way of socialising and connecting with the virtual world; it helps to take people's minds off things; to talk to friends; to communicate with people who interest them; to watch videos; to be informed and to chat with their classmates.

CY - Fourteen out of fifteen students replied yes to this question. One student replied that they do not use social media. There were various answers on the reasons why they use social media. 10 students replied that they use social media to see/check what others do, 13 students replied that they use social media as chat applications, 6 students replied that they use social media for family connections.

RO - All students answered that they use social media platforms. Using them is part of their life because they keep in touch with their friends. Moreover, they find out information about themselves or inform others about their activities.

AT - 90% use social media. Messengers to stay in contact with friends, family etc. Other platforms inform on various topics including lifestyle, celebrities, and politics.

2. If you do not use social media, why?

PT - All of them use social media.

CY - One student replied that he is not allowed to use social media until he turns 13.

RO - All students use social media platforms.

AT - Mostly out of data security and for psychological hygiene.

3. If yes, which social media platforms do you use?

PT - Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, TikTok and Facebook are their choices.

CY - The most popular answer was Instagram, with 12 students replying that they use it. TikTok was the second most mentioned, with 11 students replying that they use it. YouTube had 9 replies, Spotify 6 replies and Viber 5 replies.

RO - At the top of their preferences are Instagram and Tik Tok, on which they post funny videos or pictures. YouTube is again a frequently used platform because there the students find their favourite music. A few also use Snapchat.

AT - Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, Snapchat, Pinterest, YouTube.
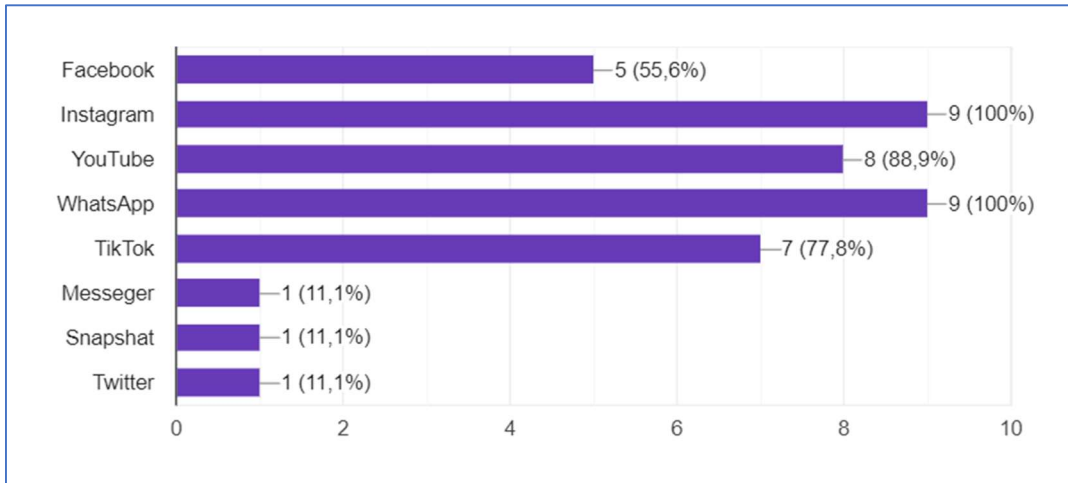
Graphic 1 – PORTUGAL answers to the question about which social media platforms are used by the pupils.
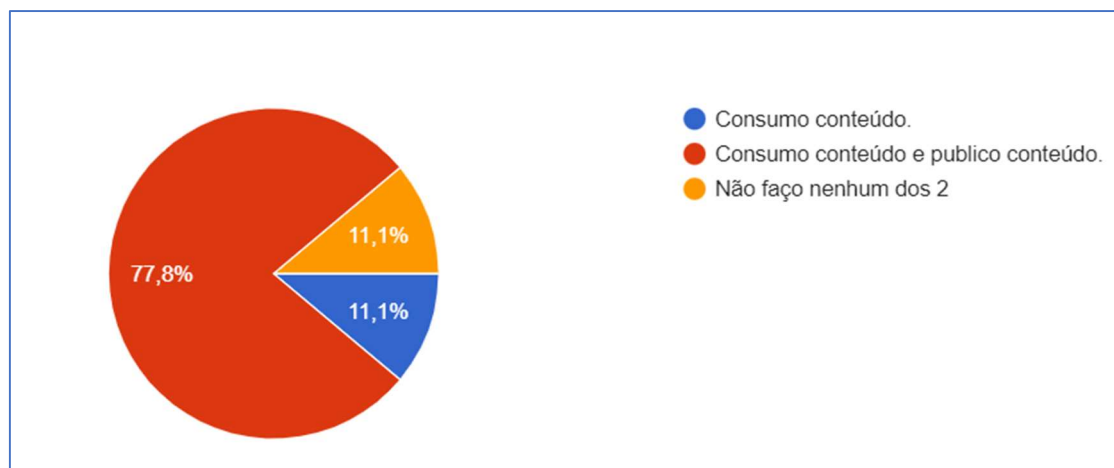
4. Do you just "consume" content from there or do you post yourself?

PT - This question raised privacy awareness because some students do not want to leak personal information. They may have social media, but they do not publish or share anything about their personal lives. Most students like to see and post on social media (77,8%), and (11,1%) just like to see things on social media and (11,1%) do not use nor share on social media.

CY - Only seven out of fifteen students replied that they also post. 7 students replied that they only consume content, and one does not post nor consume social media.

RO - Most of the students answered that they use the platform depending on its functionality. For example, on TikTok they post videos, on Instagram, they view their friends' pictures to see the news from their lives, on YouTube they watch videos etc.

AT - Mostly they consume, some post very often.

Graphic 2. PORTUGAL answers to the question: "Do you just "consume" content from there or do you post yourself?"

B. Before we concentrate on the content you find on these social media platforms; we would like to ask you: football – are you a fan or not? Youtuber channels – who is your favourite?

1. Do you have the same preferences? Or different?
2. Do you have very different opinions?
3. Think beyond your group here, do you have very different opinions than other people sometimes?
4. Do you have very different opinions than other people (parents, grandparents, teachers, friends, etc)?

Answers – Block 1B

1. Do you have the same preferences? Or different?

PT - Students may have different preferences, but there is no problem. Everyone respects each other's preferences and opinions.

CY - All students replied that they often have different preferences.

RO - Three students preferred not to answer this question, while one student answered he has different opinions compared to the other students because he moved to Romania two years ago. The fifth student answered that he shares the same preferences with his friends.

AT - Most students have different preferences.

2. Do you have very different opinions?

PT - Different interpretations, just missing a few words can lead to a totally different under-standing, so tolerance is important. (44,4%) agree that opinions are very different, yet all is a learning experience.

CY - 12 students replied that they sometimes have very different opinions.

RO - All the students answered "yes".

AT - All students said yes to different opinions.
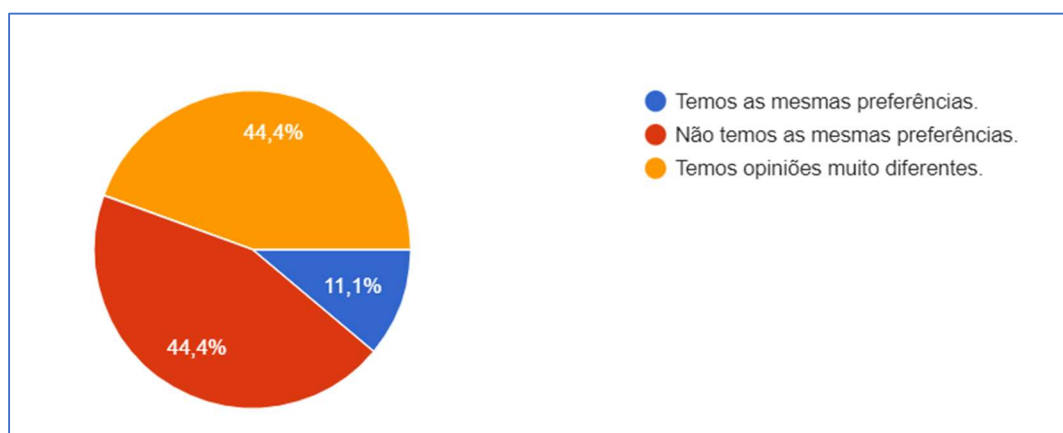
Graphic 3. PORTUGAL Answers to the questions: "Do you have the same preferences? Or different? and "Do you have very different opinions?"

3. Think beyond your group here, do you have very different opinions than other people sometimes?

PT - Despite the disparity in terms of opinions (44,4%), there is mutual respect towards differ-ent opinions.

CY - 10 students replied that they sometimes have very different opinions, especially when there is an age gap.

RO - Yes, all the students answered that very often they have different opinions compared to the people they know.

AT - Yes, but as long as we engage in dialogue and respect each other there is no problem.
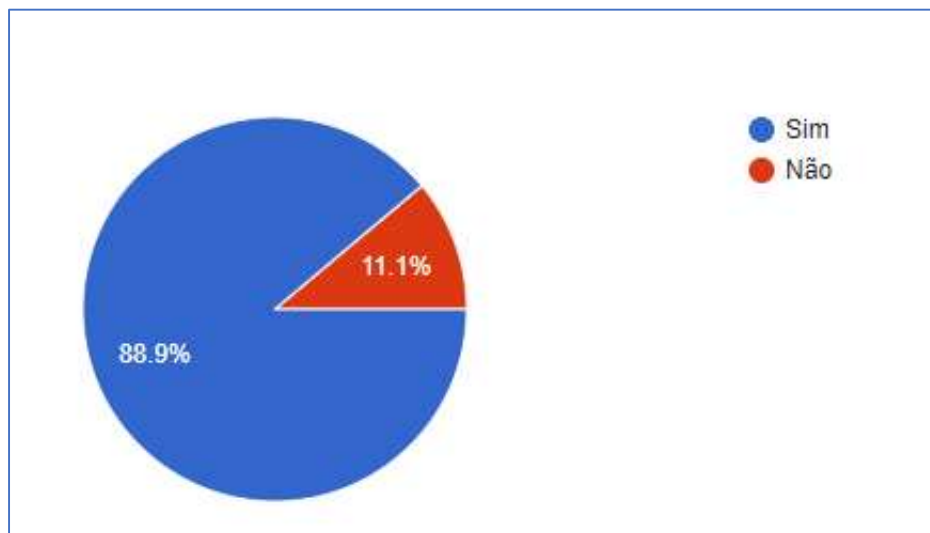
4. Do you have very different opinions than other people (parents, grandparents, teachers, friends, etc)?

PT - Even having sometimes different opinions, tolerance is necessary.

CY - The age gap does not help, but no need to be disrespectful.

RO - Most of the students answered that their opinions are different from those of past generations and that, often, the difference of opinion is also visible regarding the group of friends.

AT - Students agree that sometimes different opinions are expressed in a disrespectful manner to others or even harmful to groups of people.

Graphic 4. PORTUGAL answers to the question: "Do you have very different opinions than other people (parents, grandparents, teachers, friends, etc.)?"

3.3   Questions - Block 2

1. Did you find posts that some people might really like but other people might dislike?
2. Did you find posts which could lead to conflicts between those who like the post and other people who do not agree with the post?
3. Did you find posts which could lead fans and opponents of this post could get violent or even fight against each other?
4. Did you find posts where the comments and reactions to this post have been more "polarizing" than the post itself?

Answers – Block 2

1. Did you find posts that some people might really like but other people might dislike?

PT - All of them said Yes.

CY - All students replied yes to this question.

RO - Yes, all the students answered that they got into a conflict with their friends after posting a picture on a social network.

AT - All students replied "Yes" to this question.

2. Did you find posts which could lead to conflicts between those who like the post and other people who do not agree with the post?

PT - Bullying, Sexual Content, Violence.

CY - A few students shared some examples, mainly having to do with sports and specifically football. They mentioned slogans that had abusive content.

RO - Sometimes they encountered such posts that generated conflicts, mainly about history or movie reviews.

AT - Yes, often. Usually in comment-sections of social media or in particular profiles that try to influence you politically or to sell you stuff or to change your lifestyle to make money.

3. Did you find posts which could lead fans and opponents of this post could get violent or even fight against each other?

PT - Violent online videos, hate speech, negative feedback, talk to people whom we don't know can be very risky.

CY - Two students shared their experience on posts mentioning hate speech related to football teams and phrases such as: 'I hate everyone who supports this team', 'Death to people who support this team', etc.

RO - Two students answered that they did not see posts that led to acts of violence, while the other three said yes, giving as an example the fans of football teams, who often end up being violent.

AT - Yes, climate change, sexuality, migration, age, …

4. Did you find posts where the comments and reactions to this post have been more "polarizing" than the post itself?

PT - 77,8% of pupils say they do not find posts where the comments and reactions have been more polarizing than the post itself. However, 22,2% said yes.

CY - One student mentions the experience of a post about immigrants and how the reactions to the post were more polarizing than the post. The reactions mentioned racist content and phrases such as 'Death to foreigners', 'Only Greeks', etc.

RO - All students answered no, but two mentioned that they had heard about the existence of such posts.

AT - Yes, often. Usually in comment-sections of social media or in particular profiles that try to influence you politically or to sell you stuff or to change your lifestyle to make money.

3.4 Questions – Block 3

1. How do you react when you find such "polarizing" content?
2. Do you speak with others about such posts? With whom?
3. Do you think it is important to speak or report a polarizing post? Why it is important?
4. Did you ever alert other people (your parents, or a teacher, the police) about such posts? Whom?
5. Do you know any feature in your social media platforms with which you could "report" such posts?

Answers – Block 3

1. How do you react when you find such "polarizing" content?

PT - Most students find it easier to ignore if it is just anonymous, but if the case is near, it is important to find out who caused the trouble. Sometimes they just report such posts, or they do not follow the people anymore.

CY - Most students replied that when they see such content, they ignore it. Only two students said they would pay more attention to it.

RO - Half of the students answered that they did not find such content, while the others admitted that they did not react in any way and did not want to get involved in a contradictory discussion, waiting for the moment to end.

AT - Most of the time not at all, sometimes students engage in quarrels, and sometimes they try to bring peace.

2. Do you speak with others about such posts? With whom?

PT - Some talk to their family or friends. Going to the police seems extreme, but they are aware. If it is something serious, the police are the safest option.

CY - Most students replied that they would not speak with others about it. Only three students replied that they might mention it to someone or speak about it. Those who said they would report it mentioned that the people who would say something to include their parents, and their teachers, and one student mentioned that they could mention it to the police.

RO - Most answered that they did not discuss such posts with anyone, while one student said that he talked to his friends.

AT - Yes, showing them to friends and family, but most of the time for entertainment and not for resolving conflicts. Sometimes this starts a discussion within peer groups on a particular topic.

3. Do you think it is important to speak or report a polarizing post? Why it is important?

PT - They think it is important to report such posts to put an end to it.

CY - Even though most students replied that they do not report polarizing posts, all of them replied that it is, in fact, important to report them. There was a discussion about the distinction between more serious and less serious polarizing posts and they all agreed that it is very important to at least report the serious cases.

RO - All the students answered that it is important to report a polarizing post because they want to be safe.

AT - Yes, awareness is the first step to depolarizing things.

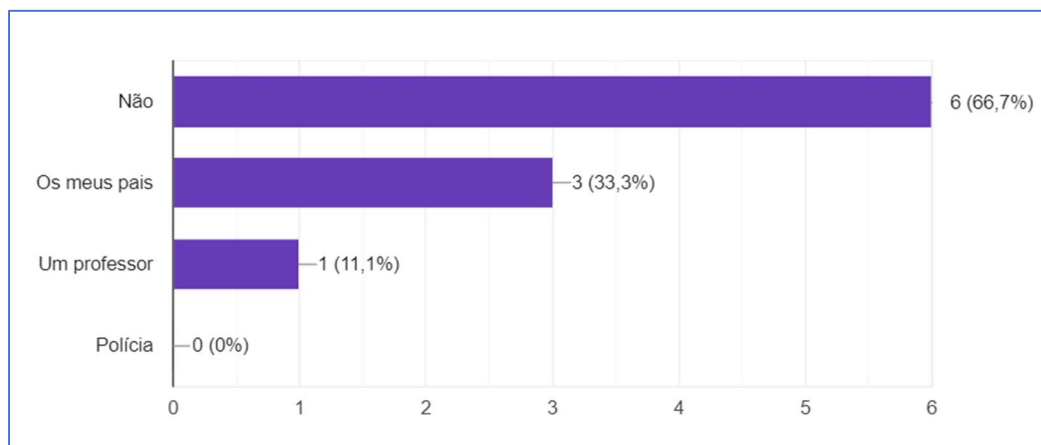**4. Did you ever alert other people (your parents, or a teacher, the police) about such posts? Whom?**

PT - Most students (66,7%) say they don't alert other people. The parents are mentioned by 33,3% of pupils. Only 11,1% refer a teacher.

CY - Only one student reported an incident to their parents.

RO - Most of the students answered that they alerted their parents when they were the victims of bullying on social platforms and that they became more aware of this during the pandemic when spent a lot of time online.

AT - All students answered "No".

Graphic 5. Portugal answers to the question: "Did you ever alert other people (your parents, or a teacher, the police) about such posts? Whom?"
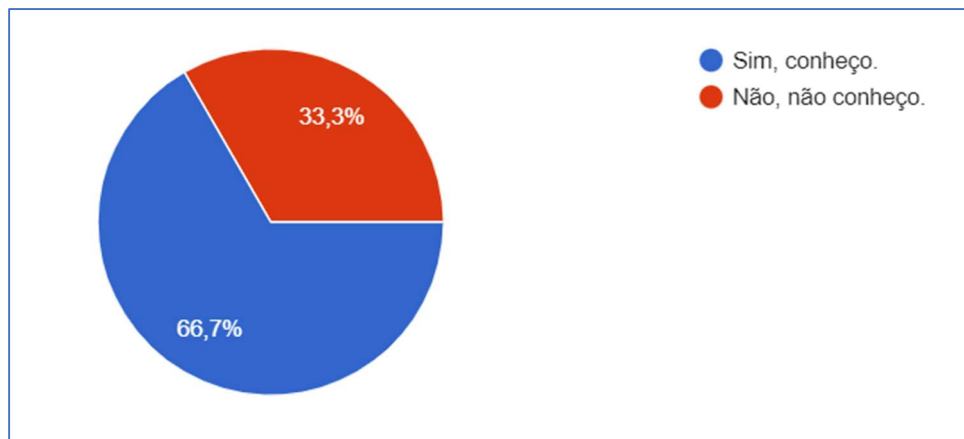
5. Do you know any feature in your social media platforms with which you could "report" such posts?

PT - Most of the pupils (66,7%) say they know features with which they could report such posts. However, 33,3% of pupils don't know such features.

CY - Ten students out of fifteen replied that they were aware of report functions in different applications and were informed on how to use them.

RO - Most of the students answered that they did not know where they could report such posts, but there were also students who thought that the "Assistance" and "Support" sections might help them.

AT – All students answered "No"

Graphic 6. Portugal answers to the question: "Do you know any feature in your social media platforms with which you could "report" such posts?"

3.5   Questions – Block 4

1. Did you or do you react to social media posts from others? Did you ever comment other posts?

2. Did you engage in a "conflict" in a discussion about a social media post? If so, tell a little about it.

3. Do you create public posts in any of your social media platforms? In which platform? About what?

4. Did you get reactions to your posts? (Likes, shares, comments, etc.)

5. Did you ever get "negative" reactions to your posts and if so, how did you handle them?

Answers – Block 4

1. Did you or do you react to social media posts from others? Did you ever comment on other posts?

PT - Most students find it a waste of time to react to social media posts, choosing to ignore them. Some comment on other posts but in a positive way. They connect with social media by "likes", and rarely comments.

CY - Fourteen students replied that they would often or occasionally react with a like or similar posts. One student does not use social media. Ten students replied that they have indeed commented on other posts, 4 said they never have. One student does not use social media.

RO - All the students answered that they react to social media posts and that they see this fact as a nice gesture, through which they show others that they appreciate them. Yes, sometimes with comments or likes.

AT - Yes, liking, forwarding, sharing, commenting. Yes, sometimes they comment.

2. Did you engage in a "conflict" in a discussion about a social media post? If so, tell a little about it.

PT - They do not engage in social media "conflicts".

RO - No, they did not, or at least this was declared.

CY - Three students replied that they engaged in a discussion. One student reported a case where someone else presented one of his videos as his own. Two students discussed a situation where someone posted a private picture of them without asking for their permission.

AT - Yes if they think people get the whole thing wrong or a conflict starts. But most of the time they keep it quiet.

3. Do you create public posts in any of your social media platforms? In which platform? About what?

PT - Most students like to search for lifestyle sites, food-related and sunsets. Some like sports and clothing websites and random TikTok or YouTube videos. They also publish about their interests and pictures of themselves on Instagram.

CY - Three students replied that they engaged in a discussion. One student reported a case where someone else presented one of his videos as his own. Two students discussed a situation where someone posted a private picture of them without asking for their permission.

RO - All the students answered that they post on Instagram and Tik Tok, especially pictures.

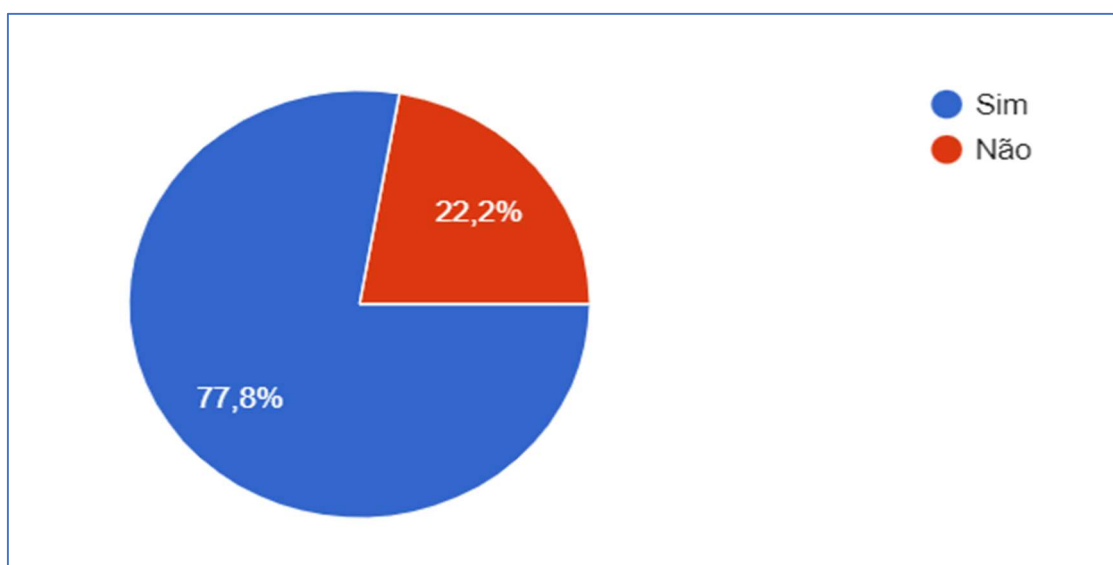AT - Sometimes, but mostly photos or short videos.

4. Did you get reactions to your posts? (Likes, shares, comments, etc.)

PT - Most students say that they get reactions to their posts (77,8%). However, 22,2% say that they do not get reactions to their posts.

CY - All students said that they receive different reactions to their posts, but most often likes and similar rather than comments.

RO - All the students answered that they had experienced reactions to some of their posts and some posts are discussed by others or appreciated.

AT - Sometimes

Graphic 7. Portugal answers to the question: "Did you get reactions to your posts? (Likes, shares, comments, etc.)"
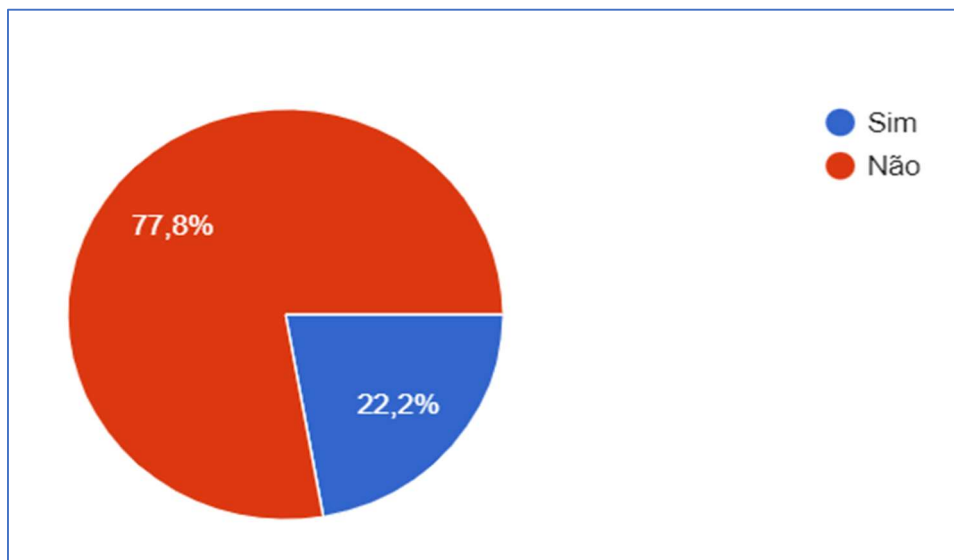
5. Did you ever get "negative" reactions to your posts and if so, how did you handle them?

PT - Most students do not get a negative reaction to their posts (77,8%). Nevertheless, 22,2% of the pupils have received negative reactions to their posts. They choose to ignore that negative reactions or react with intelligence.

CY - All students said that they receive different reactions to their posts, but most often likes and similar rather than comments.

RO - All the students answered that they had experienced negative reactions to some of their posts, but they preferred to ignore them, even though they were offended.

AT - Most students answered that "Sometimes" they have been attacked after uploading a video.
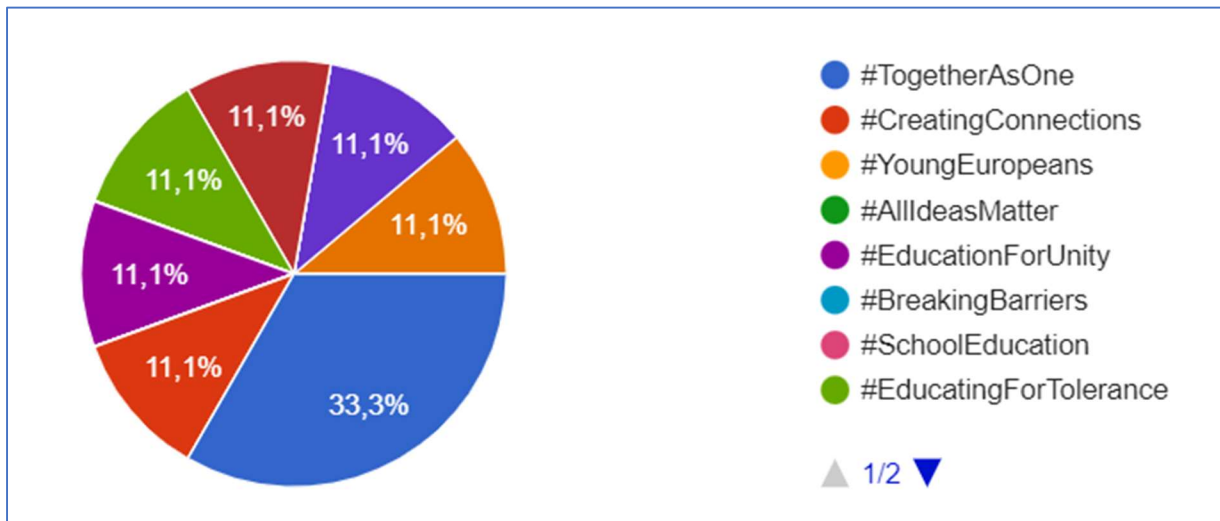

Graphic 8. Portugal answers to the question: "Did you ever get "negative" reactions to your posts?"

3.6 Social media challenge

Social Media Challenge – Students were challenged to choose between #hashtags given, or they could create their own and vote!

In PORTUGAL **#TogetherAsOne** was the winner!!

Graphic 9 – Hashtags chosen by the pupils in Portugal.

CY - Regarding the above challenge, the hashtags that had more votes in Cyprus were:

#OneEurope: 6 votes

#TogetherAsOne: 4 votes

#BreakingBarriers: 3 votes

#CreatingConnections: 2 votes

#BuildingBridges: 1 vote

RO **-** The hashtags which had more votes in Romania were:

#TogetherAsOne- 14 votes

#OneEurope- 10 votes

#YouthEmpowerment-10 votes

#AllIdeasMatter- 9 votes

#CreatingConnections- 7 votes

#SchoolEducation- 6 votes

#YouthEuropeans- 6 votes

#EducatingForTolerance- 5 votes

#UnitedEurope- 5 votes

#BreakingBarriers- 5 votes

AT - The hashtag that had more votes in Austria was:

#BuildingBridges

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https://www.instagram.com/bye_polarity/