

PART II

Hear the Voice of the Youth!

Safer spaces for everyone





Pamphlet about the final statements of the Digiraati discussions held by the Finnish Red Cross Youth Shelters.

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What is Digiraati?

DIGIRAATI.FI IS ONE of the democracy services maintained by the Finnish Ministry of Justice. The purpose of the service is to provide all people under the age of 29 with a channel to influence societal matters and an opportunity to make their voice heard in issues important to them.

The Digiraati discussions are anonymous and comply with the principles for a safer space. The key thoughts from the discussions are compiled on the Digiraati website as a public final statement.

Digiraati discussions can be hosted by ministries, municipalities, wellbeing services counties, other authorities and civic organisations, for example. Youth Academy from the Centre of Excellence for Participation, Koordinaatti, and the Youth Shelters and SOS Children's Villages have been involved in the development work and introduction of Digiraati, and they have also participated in organising the Digiraati discussions.

Digiraati discussions of the Red Cross Youth Shelters

THE FINNISH RED CROSS Youth Shelters offer young people and their loved ones help in five different wellbeing services counties and online across the country. Youth Shelters provide young people with help, such as temporary accommodation and support for becoming independent, as well as discussion support both for young people and their family and friends.

Digiraati is one of the volunteering and civic activity options offered by Youth Shelters. Digiraati discussions are guided discussions, typically between 10–15 young people. The starting point in Youth Shelters' Digiraati discussions is a topic of interest to young people, such as rainbow youth, loneliness or mental health.

Digiraati discussions of Youth Shelters are open to all young people under 29, but are particularly intended for those whose voice is not heard enough in society and who are unfamiliar with social influencing. The discussions are primarily facilitated by trained volunteers and interns of the Youth Shelter.

If you are interested in holding Digiraati discussions or hearing more about the Digiraati discussions of Youth Shelters, please contact Satu Rantakärkkä at satu.rantakarkka@redcross.fi.



Read more about Youth Shelters:

Nuortenturvatalo.fi

 [@nuortenturvis](https://www.instagram.com/nuortenturvis)

 [@nuortenturvis](https://www.tiktok.com/@nuortenturvis)

 [Youth Shelters, Red Cross](https://www.facebook.com/YouthShelters,RedCross)

Read more about Digiraati:

Digiraati.fi

 [@digiraadit](https://www.instagram.com/digiraadit)

Foreword

“In a safe space, everyone feels welcome, accepted and seen.”

– A YOUNG DIGIRAATI PARTICIPANT

IN DIGIRAATI DISCUSSIONS held by the Youth Shelters of the Red Cross, young people talk about how feeling unsafe is about the fear of mental and physical violence. It stems from being belittled and excluded. Young people speak about how concerned they are about the increase in racist behaviour. According to young people, increased racist behaviour adds to the feeling of unsafety for everyone, whether they belong to a minority or not. The key theme of this pamphlet, compiling the hopes of young people expressed in the Digiraati discussions, is safety.

Safer space is an important concept related to safety. In simple terms, safer spaces are spaces where everyone is welcome to join in as they are. Spaces where everyone can participate without the fear of being belittled or bullied and everyone follows the rules agreed on together. For people in the majority, most spaces and situations feel safe. It can therefore be difficult to understand how these same everyday spaces, either physical or digital, can be unsafe for those belonging to minorities. Sometimes, safer spaces are confused with the idea that they are used to deprive someone of their right to speak, or that disagreeing would not be allowed. This is not the case. The principles of safer spaces allow for respectful debate in which different perspectives can be discussed without any derision or harassment. And most importantly, they allow for discussion in which people belonging to minorities also dare to participate.

In Digiraati discussions, the message from young people has been clear: support and safety are vital. Safety can be built through the principles of safer spaces, for example, but a space does not become safe with written rules

alone. Young people want us adults to possess the courage and competence to intervene in discriminatory and racist behaviour. It is up to us to set an example of human behaviour that does not exclude others but actively involves everyone. We must also provide young people with support with finding their own community and place. This is especially important in educational institutions and hobby groups, but young adults outside these groups also need support.

The previous pamphlet of the Red Cross Youth Shelters that compiled the hopes expressed by young Digiraati participants was published in spring 2023. Since then, we have spoken with young people about communities and racism, and, as has started to become a tradition, the theme of rainbow youth was also discussed in spring.

In addition to the Digiraati discussions, we wanted to come up with an even easier way for young people to participate in the topic discussed in Digiraati. In late 2023, together with the Sekasin Collective, we released an advocacy bot, where young people can take a survey about the topics of Digiraati discussions. The collaboration has secured Digiraati a place within a service that young people have found and embraced. The bot can be found at sekasin.fi/vaikuta. The bot has now asked young people questions related to communality, racist behaviour and intervening in it. After answering the bot's questions, the young people have also had the chance to register in Digiraati discussions.

This pamphlet has messages from young people about four different topics: well-being that draws strength from community, dreams that build the future, the right to be who you are, and acting against racism. Direct quotes from the Digiraati discussions of young people have been presented of each topic. The topics also include commentaries from researchers, focusing on safety in society, as well as more information on Digiraati and the Youth Shelters of the Red Cross. The pamphlet has also been translated into Swedish and English.

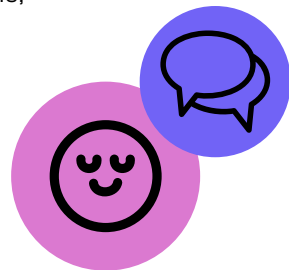
Youth Shelters and several other organisations organize Digiraati discussions. A final statement is written about each discussion, summarising the dialogue with the young people. The final statements for each discussion are available (in Finnish only) at digiraati.fi.

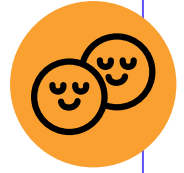
A warm thank you to the Centre of Excellence for Participation, the ALL-YOUTH research project and all other organisations and people that have worked with us to develop Digiraati and make the voice of youth heard. I would like to thank the Ministry of Education and Culture for funding Digiraati and the Ministry of Justice for developing the Digiraati service.

Above all, I would like to thank the young people, volunteers and interns who have participated in the Digiraati discussions. Thank you for daring to discuss even the most difficult topics time and time again and dreaming about a better tomorrow together.

Satu Rantakärkkä,

Developer of young people's volunteer operations,
Youth Shelters, Red Cross





Safer space rules in Digiraati

BE OPEN. Approach new topics and people with open mind, consider every new thing and situation as an opportunity to learn something new and develop yourself further.

RESPECT. Give others space, pay attention to your choice of words and take into account the diversity of participants. If you notice any harassment or other inappropriate behaviour, contact the Digiraati instructor or organiser or the service's administration.

DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS. Respect everyone's right to self-determination and do not make assumptions about other people's gender, background or family relationships, for example.

ENCOURAGE. Everyone is responsible for a successful discussion. Listen to and encourage others.

RELAX. You are allowed to make mistakes and ask questions.

BE CLEAR. Keep your comments brief and concise. Use expressions that others can understand.

PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY. Participation in Digiraati discussions is always voluntary. You can leave the discussion at any point.

Society must be a safer space for all young people

The message of young people participating in Digiraati discussions is strong and unambiguous: young people need safe spaces.

SAFER SPACES USUALLY mean physically existing spaces or digital environments where young people are on equal footing regardless of their own background, ethnicity, gender or other characteristics. The Digiraati participants emphasised that a safe space is an environment where people speak and are spoken to with respect, and everyone has the right to define their own identity. In these spaces, everyone is of equal value.

It is fairly simple to draw up principles for a physical or virtual space, which everyone will ideally follow. But what happens to safety when one steps out of these spaces? Is Finnish society a safer place for young people?

Young people's experiences with something being safe or unsafe are formed based on everyday encounters. Inequality, discrimination and bullying, being excluded from communities, experiences of lacking the opportunities to influence matters, and cultural perceptions of active and proper citizenship all shape young people's perceptions of their place in society.

Young people's experiences with feeling unsafe are fuelled by concerns related to Finnish society and the future of humankind. Crises such as wars and pandemics create new types of insecurity for young people and make it more difficult for them to prepare for the future (Honkatukia & Määttä, 2024). Young people are particularly concerned about climate change, the global political situation, the preservation of well-being services and the increase of inequality and racism (Myllyniemi & Kiilakoski, 2019).

Feeling unsafe is also related to their ability to navigate society's many demands. Coping with the complicated and demanding working life that can also sometimes be considered unfair, the pressures of studies, and the availability of support as and when needed are topics that many young people think about (Ågren & Kallio, 2023; Ågren, 2024). More and more young people also struggle with financial difficulties: insecurity related to poverty is about the feeling of uncertainty about being able to meet basic needs, but also about the lack of social relationships and falling outside everyday safety nets (Kallio & Toikka, 2022).

Experiences of discrimination and bullying are commonplace for many young people belonging to minorities. The fear of facing a mental or physical threat makes people feel unsafe. Young people belonging to racial and sexual or gender minorities experience bullying and exclusion more than others (Kiilakoski & Laine, 2022). Structural discrimination in the housing, education and job markets makes it more difficult to become independent and pursue one's own dreams, but discrimination also prevents young people from seeing themselves as valuable parts of society (Rättilä & Honkatukia, 2022). Girls and rainbow youth experience sexual harassment and violence particularly often (Jokela et al., 2020). Hate speech and experiences of discrimination and belittling lead some young people to withdraw from social debate and from public advocacy platforms. In Digiraati discussions, the young participants spoke about these experiences in a touching way.

The public debate climate plays a key role in experiencing safety. Even quite pointed examples are easy to find close by: [the reform of the Act on legal recognition of the gender of transsexuals was a topic of intense debate in the Parliament](#), racist writings by leading politicians were widely addressed just last summer, and right now street gangs are being discussed in a light that promotes a certain stereotypical image of young people. If young people belonging to minorities have to constantly hear, read or feel that they are somehow wrong and inferior, or are only seen through problems, how can they trust the promises of Finnish society on safety, equality and fairness?

Normalisation and silent acceptance of discriminatory and prejudiced speech make society less safe for everyone.

The principles of safer space thus seem to be absent in Finnish society. However, the young people participating in Digiraati discussions have a clear view on this issue, too: the adults have to take responsibility!

Young people believe that this adult responsibility must be implemented in three ways.

1. FIRSTLY, ADULTS AND PROFESSIONALS encountering young people need the sensitivity to see young people as unique individuals. Adult responsibility includes the courage to ask young people about their needs and concerns. They must take the time to listen to the experiences of young people and have the empathy to accept what they have told them. Young people often find it very hard to talk about the discrimination and exclusion they have faced with adults. They do not always trust that speaking about these things would solve anything, or that adults in general are able to even understand the struggles of young people or solve the problems they experience in any meaningful way. Standing strong by a young person's side is a message that their experience is not wrong. It is also a promise that the young person will not be left alone.

2. SECONDLY, OBTAINING INFORMATION is the responsibility of adults. Professionals who encounter young people, such as teachers, healthcare personnel and social workers, have the right to receive up-to-date information on the inequality experienced by young people belonging to minorities, as well as the tools for dismantling this inequality (see Laiti, 2024). Further training related to diversity and the prevention of discrimination should be part of day-to-day work. Educational institutions and healthcare and social services have a

significant impact on young people's experiences of themselves as members of society (Kallio, 2023; Ågren, 2024), and they also have the potential to strengthen the experiences of participation and advocacy of young people belonging to minorities as part of their well-being (Suurpää & Kallio, 2023). Information encourages adults to take action and support young people in issues that young people themselves consider important. Knowledge-based decisions help build a better society.

3. **THIRDLY, ADULTS TAKING** responsibility means allyship. Young people feel that they are not taken seriously as political actors and as citizens participating in society (Honkatukia et al., 2020). The voice of minorities is the weakest. Allyship means strengthening the position of young people in democratic decision-making and translating the inequalities and disadvantages into messages for politics and decision-making together with the young people. The eradication of racism and discrimination, the realisation of minority rights and the reinforcement of forms of support available at the welfare state are a sign for young people that their needs are taken seriously. Society's demands for efficiency need to be loosened so that all young people can become independent and grow up in more diverse ways than now (Honkatukia et al., 2020; Kallio, 2023; Ågren, 2024). Young people have detailed information and expertise on what kind of changes are needed.

The aim must be to enable young people to be heard and accepted as themselves. This is the only way Finnish society can be a safer place for young people.

Jenni Kallio,
postdoctoral researcher,
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Susanna Ågren,
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Adult support contributes to the sense of community among young people

“I personally see the sense of community as so important that it reduces loneliness, which has been alarmingly common, especially here in Finland.”

NEARLY HALF OF the 15–24-year-olds in Finland experience loneliness regularly, and the feelings of loneliness are the most common among this age group (Finnish Red Cross, 2024). That is why it is so important to listen to the young Digiraati participants who explain how a sense of community can prevent loneliness and its effect to the well-being of young people.

Young people emphasise that they need adult support to strengthen the sense of community in schools, educational institutes, hobbies and regional planning, for example. Finding a like-minded group is important to young people, but it is not easy for everyone.

In Digiraati discussions, it is repeatedly highlighted that young adults are too often left to cope alone. Young people emphasise that group-building should be invested in more also in studies after comprehensive school.

On the other hand, it is important to remember that not all young people are able to study or work. Free or affordable hobbies and public meeting places are needed for all young people and young adults, as well.

“When becoming independent, many things change so swiftly that you can’t keep up. And then when you also need to remember to create new contacts and know how to do that, everything starts to seem impossible.”

THE WISH TO have a variety of activities available at these meeting places for young people is also often expressed in Digiraati discussions. These kinds of activities are a way to make it easier for young people to get to know each other. Physical meeting places are needed, but opportunities for encounters online are also important for young people.

Young people want adults to understand that the Internet is not filled with only threats, but also with a genuine sense of community. For example, online communities offer opportunities for finding peers for young members of different minorities living in remote areas, for example. Young people wish for more online communities where the principles of safer space are upheld.

“It would be good on a societal scale to develop gaming communities so that they would take misogyny more seriously and would welcome different kinds of gamers open-mindedly.”

FOR THE YOUNG Digiraati participants, sense of community means belonging to a group and being heard and accepted as themselves. However, young people are aware that not all communities are safe. This is another reason for why it is important for adults to provide young people with support in forming communities.

Communities are important to young people in all life situations, but they become even more important during difficulties. One young person commented that a community gives you belief that things will work out. Community support may carry the young person and prevent problems from escalating.

“Communities can also inspire and motivate people to do good. When you have been helped in some way, you are often also prepared to help others.”

47 %

of 15–24-year-old people experience loneliness regularly.

(Finnish Red Cross, 2024.)

23 %

of the young people who responded to the advocacy bot feel that an online community can help them when they are struggling.

(Advocacy bot, 2023.)

Young people's wishes

- 1.** **MORE GROUP-BUILDING** activities are needed in schools and educational institutes. Young people's sense of community must be actively supported at all educational levels.
- 2.** **FREE OR AFFORDABLE** hobbies and public meeting places must be provided for all young people, and young adults, as well. These kinds of activities allow young people to get to know each other.
- 3.** **ADULTS HAVE TO** understand that loneliness damages young people's mental health. That is why adults must make sure that no young person is left alone.

The future is made with young people's dreams

“Public discussion is very stressful for young people. When politicians are arguing about the human rights of young people as if they were matters of opinion.”

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE forced to live in a world that is more uncertain than before in many ways, due to the escalating geopolitical security situation, the progressing climate crisis and the loss of biodiversity. Young people are also concerned about the increase in inequality and the unstable state of human rights. (Honkatukia & Määttä, 2024; Myllyniemi & Kiilakoski, 2019.)

However, it is important to remember that young people need hopes and dreams to build their future, so that they can find courage and their own paths. The dreams of young people are needed to build a better future for all. That's why Digiraati wants to dream together with young people.

Digiraati discussions emphasise that young people's dreams can be made stronger, together. Communities are also important to young people because they can offer them inspiration and courage to dream.

“Being part of different communities has opened my eyes to how wide and full of opportunities our world really is.”

IT'S IMPORTANT TO young people that someone believes in them and their dreams. They are telling us that support from their friends, family or wider community has helped them maintain hope even in difficult life situations.

Stories in media and entertainment can also create hope for young people. In particular, young people belonging to minorities highlight that showing

and normalising the diversity of humans in media gives them the belief that a more equal society is possible.

“I would like to see the diversity of people becoming so normalised so that a film could have any theme and the people could belong to minorities without the whole point of the film being their minority status.”

IN DIGIRAATI, YOUNG people dream of a world that is safe and good for everyone. This is a dream that comes up in many of the discussions. However, it is important to remember that young people also have personal dreams, and that personal and social realities are often intertwined.

For example, a society with equal opportunities for all is needed to realise the personal dreams of young people belonging to different minorities. Work for equality is therefore also work that is needed to strengthen young people's faith in the future.

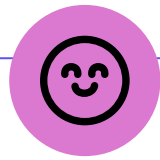
Young people are able to see alternative futures, and they want to be involved in influencing and building the future. It is the young people who will live the longest in the future we are building now, and their voice in discussions about the future must be strengthened (Sitra, 2023).

“In 2050, no one will need to mention, report, apologise or otherwise make themselves stand out from the norm; everyone can be just as they are among all the others. There is no need to fight over one's place or rights. There's no fighting, we just dance together in all the colours! <3”

87 %

of 15–24-year-olds believe that they can influence the future.

(Sitra 2023.)



Young people's wishes

- 4.** **ADULTS MUST COMMIT** themselves to ensuring that all young people and their human rights are spoken about in a respectful manner in public.
- 5.** **YOUNG PEOPLE NEED** active adult support to strengthen their hope and faith in the future, especially in difficult times.
- 6.** **YOUNG PEOPLE MUST** be involved in advocating for and building the future.

Young people have the right to be who they are

“When everyone is taken into account and when everybody’s voice is heard and they do not have to be afraid of being themselves, this creates positive feelings. Equality has also improved my mood, as we do not exclude anyone from the group, but rather everyone is equal and just as important.”

WHEN WE WANT to support the well-being of young people, it is good to start by promoting every young person’s right to be themselves without fear. The young Digiraati participants repeatedly share how important it is to the construction of their well-being to be heard and seen as themselves.

Unfortunately, young people’s experience that even professionals working with them do not meet them as themselves comes up repeatedly in Digiraati discussions. Encounters in educational institutes and in social welfare and healthcare services are important, as they help build young people’s sense of self and their value as persons (Kallio, 2023; Ågren, 2024).

Young Digiraati discussion participants belonging to minorities, in particular, say that they feel that others are unwilling or unable to face them as themselves in schools, educational institutions, hobbies or welfare services. Young people also feel it can be stressful if they are only seen as representatives of their minorities instead of whole persons.

“An identity should not be a statement. Nowadays, it seems that if you belong to a gender minority, this is automatically considered a statement of some kind.”

IN DIGIRAATI DISCUSSIONS, the young participants repeatedly highlight the need for more education on equality and anti-racism. They propose this edu-

cation to be targeted at children and young people, but also at adults working with young people.

Young people take into account the visibility of diversity and the importance of social learning in how people see themselves and each other. They are hoping for more diversity in toys, for example, so that children will learn to be open-minded and respectful to all people from a young age.

“More diversity in textbooks and toys, for example regarding appearance, disabilities or illnesses. This would make them the norm instead of something abnormal.”

IT IS IMPORTANT to understand that supporting the right of young people to be themselves supports not only those belonging to minorities, but all young people. Far too many young people experience feelings of inadequacy and exclusion (Finnish Red Cross, 2024).

The right to be yourself is linked to young people's opportunities to belong to a community that feels meaningful to them. The young people participating in Digiraati discussions recognise that safe communities are built on the acceptance and respect granted to each member.

Even small actions and some kindness can significantly influence whether young people feel that they are seen as they are. No assumptions are made in respectful interactions; instead, the young person is given the room to talk about themselves and their thoughts. Young people also emphasise in Digiraati discussions that claiming to be equal is not enough; instead, commitment to promoting equality must be made through practical actions.

“Hanging a rainbow flag on the door or displaying it otherwise creates a sense of belonging, for example. But the symbol is useless if the space is not actually safe for rainbow people.”

22 %

of the young people who responded to the advocacy bot say that they have made friends at school.

(Advocacy bot, 2023.)

55 %

of young people aged 15–29 reported being discriminated against at least occasionally.

(Kiilakoski & Laine 2022: Nuorisobarometri 2021.)

Young people's wishes

- 7. MORE TRAINING IS** needed for teachers and other professionals working with young people on how to treat all young people at an equal level and with respect. In particular, there is a great demand for training related to rainbow competence and anti-racism.
- 8. CHILDREN AND YOUNG** people have a right to learn to appreciate themselves and each other. More emphasis should be placed on equality in school and daycare centre education.
- 9. THE PRINCIPLES OF** a safer space must be actively implemented in public spaces, services, hobbies, schools and educational institutes.

Adults must take responsibility for acting against racism

“I notice racism more in public spaces and from adults than among my peers. Racism used by adults is usually directed at those who have a darker skin colour. I’ve noticed that young people are afraid to act against racism expressed by adults, myself included.”

YOUNG DIGIRAATI PARTICIPANTS repeatedly speak about adults' inability to act against racism and discrimination, and this is very eye-opening. Young people also have far too many experiences of adults behaving in racist ways. Many young people are afraid act against racist behaviour by adults because of the adult's position of authority.

Young people would also like to see more stringent actions from adults in addressing the racist behaviour of other young people. In particular, schools' commitment to promotion of equality would be important for young people. Young people highlight that they should not have to teach their teachers how to recognise and intervene in racism.

The young people of Digiraati want more education on anti-racism to schools and even to daycare centres. They have the will act against racist behaviour,

Anti-racism means active and conscious activities against all forms of racism. Anti-racist behaviour means work that reduces ethnic discrimination, the effects of discriminatory practices and negative prejudices.

(Non-Discrimination Ombudsman)

but they want adults to support them so that they do not have to fear the consequences of acting against racism.

“A small action I can take is to set an example and hope that it will have an impact through social learning :) So, I will make sure that I do not behave or speak in a racist manner, but with respect for everyone.”

YOUNG PEOPLE BELIEVE that racist behaviour can be changed. Some young people say they try to talk to people who are racist, either face to face or in social media. They believe that guilting others does not work; instead, listening and discussion are needed.

At the same time, young people are very concerned about the increasing racism in Finland. They have noticed an increase in speech normalising racism in politics and public dialogue, and they are concerned about how this will impact the lives of young people.

“It is incomprehensible that Finnish politics allow people in who openly share their opinion that people are not equal, that some Finns are better than others, and that some Finns do not deserve the same rights as others.”

YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATING in Digiraati discussions recognise that racism does not only affect the people targeted but is reflected in the whole community and society (Kareinen & Henttonen, 2023). Racism and discrimination increase the atmosphere of fear, thus reducing the general sense of safety among young people.

Young people acknowledge that racist attitudes can be deeply ingrained in society and people's minds. Structural racism is real, and it is part of the everyday lives of too many young people. That is why young people hope learning anti-racism would not be the sole responsibility of individuals –

especially only young ones. Adults must bear the main responsibility for creating an anti-racist society.

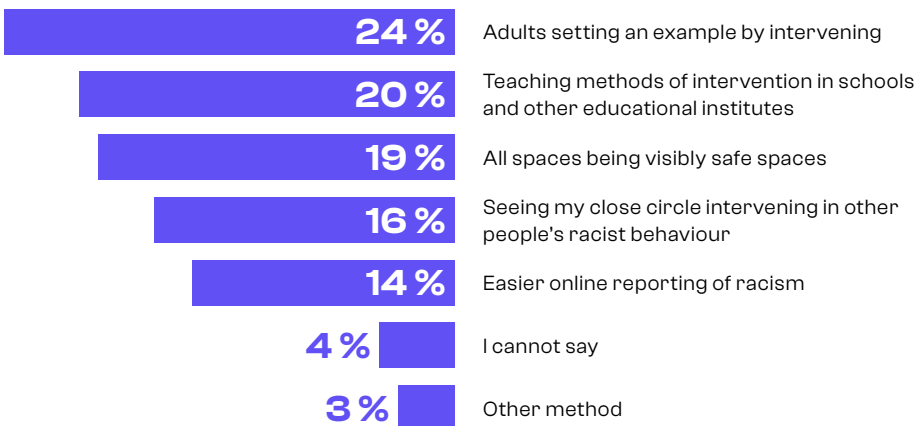
The building of a safe and accepting atmosphere should be started with the everyday environments of young people, such as schools and hobbies. However, it is important to remember that all events, discussions and general attitudes in society also affect young people. Promotion of anti-racism is a prerequisite for the realisation of Digiraati young people's dreams for safer spaces.

"In an anti-racist Finland, everyone can be themselves. And no one would be treated differently because of any external or internal factor."

Advocacy bot (2024) asked young people:

What do you think will help you or other young people to act against racism?

The young people were given different options for answers, and here is how they responded:



73 %

of the young people responding to the Advocacy Bot's questions stated that they have seen or heard racist behaviour. According to young people, racist behaviour occurs most often online, at schools or in educational institutes and in public places.

(Advocacy bot, 2024.)

Young people's wishes

- 10.** **NORMALISING RACIST SPEECH** in public forums and in politics must be stopped.
- 11.** **ACTING AGAINST RACISM** is a civic skill that all children, young people and adults should learn.
- 12.** **ADULTS MUST TAKE** responsibility for acting against racism and discrimination. Adults have the duty to build an anti-racist society in which every child and young person can be themselves.

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