

# YOUTH INFORMATION CHAT

## Impact Report 2021



Youth Work Ireland

**spunout**



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# Overview of 2021

Since Youth Information Chat (YIChat) began in 2019, we have learned so much about providing Youth Information online. When we look back on 2019 and 2020, we can see the growing demand for online Youth Information. In our pilot phase in 2019, we had 169 conversations with young people which increased to 2,026 conversations in 2020. Now that we are reflecting on 2021, there are many milestones reached by the service.

At the start of 2021, we set the ambitious goal of having 3,000 conversations with young people about the issues that mattered to them. We also wanted to reach young people in ways we hadn't before so we set plans to diversify how we advertised on social media and in print, with a specific focus on trying to connect with harder-to-reach groups of young people.

The service continued to navigate the national and international issues which impacted the lives of young people; most notably, the COVID-19 pandemic. During the lockdown, many of the spaces that young people could engage with Youth Information Officers were closed.

While there was less face-to-face availability of youth information, there was a growing demand for information, advice and guidance. This meant that digital channels were one of the primary ways to still meet the information needs of young people while maintaining public health interests. The impact of lockdown was seen many aspects of young people's lives such as their school, recreation and social activities.

Given the lockdown and restrictions, a space was needed where young people could get answers, advice and guidance about the issues that mattered to them. The Youth Information Chat was an essential service for young people, friends, family, carers, and those working with young people. It was a space to get the information they needed even during lockdowns and restrictions.

Our fantastic Youth Information Officers were there, five days a week, to make sure that young people could get the information they needed. Without the dedication, time and energy of all the Youth Information Officers, our success in reaching young people online during Covid-19 would not have been possible. Even during the difficult times of the pandemic, the team worked tirelessly to help young people when they needed support.



# About Youth Information Chat

## What is Youth Information Chat?

Youth Information Chat (YIChat) offers information, advice and guidance about the issues that matter to young people. Youth Information Chat is a free, non-judgemental, one-to-one, online chat and email service for young people. YIChat is a partnership between Youth Work Ireland, Crosscare, YMCA Ireland, and spunout.

## Who can use the service?

The majority of people who contact Youth Information Chat are young people aged 16 - 25 years old. Youth Information Chat is available to all young people aged 16 - 25 years old, parents, guardians, friends, family and those working with young people.

## Why access the service?

We offer information, advice or guidance on issues that matter to young people. Some of the common queries for Youth Information Chat include employment, education, social protection, travelling and volunteering opportunities.

## Youth Information Campaigns

Youth Information Chat also runs campaigns during the year about specific issues that matter to young people including: the Leaving Cert, the CAO, SUSI and Education Grants, and European Opportunities to work, volunteer and study.

## Where can I access the service?

YIChat is available at the end of articles on

spunout.ie, through the websites of a number of Youth Services, and through social media campaigns targeted specifically at young people. You can access YIChat on spunout.ie at spunout.ie/question

## When can I access the service?

YIChat is open Monday to Friday from 4:00 - 8:00 PM (excluding Bank Holidays). Outside of those hours, young people can leave a message at any time, day or night, and we will reply to them by email during our opening hours.

## Who will I be chatting with?

YIChat is staffed by Youth Information Officers. Youth information Officers provide information that in a way that is accessible, non-judgemental, and welcoming for young people. Youth Information Officers aim to enable young people to make their own informed choices and become independent and active citizens.

“

*Me and my girlfriend are currently homeless. We were scared to present to homeless services in case we get split up. We have been couch surfing with friends and family but need something stable. Since we have no fixed address, we can't apply for welfare or for jobs. What can we do?*

**Charlie - Age 21 - Galway**



## Highlights of 2021



We had 3,546 conversations with people about the issues that mattered to them 

On average, people waited just 15 seconds to speak to a Youth Information Officer 

We dealt with complex queries with the average chat taking 13 minutes 29 seconds 

We provided national coverage and were online and available for over 978 hours 

More than 568,000 people reached through our social media advertising 

# Stakeholders

This service is led by organisations all working in the youth sector: Crosscare, spunout, Youth Work Ireland, and YMCA Ireland.

Officers, the Youth Information Centres and Services, Youth Advisory Panels, Youth Information Chat Users, and Funders.

The Youth Information Chat service takes guidance, direction and feedback from core stakeholders such as the Youth Information

Together, we ensure that we are there to offer the information, advice and support that young people need.

## Youth Information Chat Partners



Crosscare Youth Information Service is part of Crosscare Youth Services, which is a branch of Crosscare, the Social Support Agency of the Dublin Archdiocese.



Youth Work Ireland is the largest youth organisation in Ireland. We are made up of 20 Local Member Youth Services and a national office.



YMCA Youth Information Services are part of YMCA Ireland's youth services, which provide advocacy, vocation and health support, family support and youth services for all ranges of young people aged 13 - 25.



spunout is Ireland's youth information website created by young people, for young people. spunout provide information to more than 180,000 readers each month.

## Participating Youth Information Centres

- *CYS Youth Information Service - Clare*
- *Clondalkin Youth Information Service - North Dublin*
- *Crosscare Dun Laoghaire - South Dublin*
- *Galway Youth Information Centre - Galway*
- *Kerry Youth Information Centre (KDYS) - Kerry*
- *In Sync Youth Information Service - Kildare*
- *Letterkenny Youth Information Centre - Donegal*
- *Limerick Youth Service - Limerick*
- *Youth Work Ireland Cavan Monaghan: Youth Information Project*
- *Ossory Youth Centre - Kilkenny and Carlow*
- *Sligo Youth Information Centre (NCYCS) - Sligo, Leitrim and Mayo*
- *Tipperary Youth Information Centre - Tipperary*
- *Waterford & South Tipperary Community Youth Service*
- *Wexford Youth Information Centre (FDYS) - Wexford*
- *YMCA Cork - Cork*
- *YouthSpin Bray - Wicklow*
- *Youth Work Ireland Midlands - Westmeath, Roscommon, Longford and Offaly*

# Groups and committees

## CEO Group

The CEO Group is comprised of the four CEOs from Crosscare, spunout, YMCA Ireland and Youth Work Ireland. In this group, the CEOs meet to progress the provision of information to young people in Ireland through our combined services. The CEO group provides strategic guidance, including on the role and positioning of the YIChat service.

## Steering Group

There is a YIChat Steering Group which has a representative from Crosscare, spunout, YMCA and Youth Work Ireland. The Steering Group meets regularly to review the progress of the YIChat service and identify ways to enhance the work we do. Additionally, the Steering Group coordinates the strategic and operational functions for the YIChat service such as rostering of YIChat Officers, project planning, best practice, knowledge exchanges, and securing funding for the continued development of YIChat.

## YIChat Officers

The YIChat Officers are the providers of our service and the people you speak directly with when you engage with our service. All of our YIChat Officers are trained experts in Youth Information who work in either Crosscare, YMCA or Youth Work Ireland. In 2021, we had a group of 21 fantastic YIChat Officers who had one-to-one, non-judgemental conversations with YIChat service users via instant chat and email.

## Youth Advisory Panels

Each of the partners in YIChat has Youth Advisory Panels who contribute to the work we do. The Action Panels are made up of fantastic young people who volunteer their time to Crosscare, spunout, YMCA and Youth Work Ireland to ensure that their services speak to the needs of young people. Many of the campaigns that YIChat ran in 2021 were guided by recommendations made by Action Panels members which enables the service to keep the voice of young people at the centre of our work.

## Working Groups

The Working Groups provide the vital information, advice and guidance on specific subjects and themes within the YIChat service. The Working Groups are comprised of YIChat Officers who contribute their expertise and knowledge on themes such as Education Grants, Housing and Accommodation, Social Protection, and Higher Education. All of this expertise is collected and shared with the wider group YIChat Officers. This enables us to harvest the knowledge of our YIChat Officers and share it across the group so that people who contact are service always get best-in-class information, advice and guidance on a range of diverse topics.

“

*Will I lose my SUSI grant if I get a temporary Christmas job? 🎄*

**Alex - Age 18 - Wexford**

# Who used our service

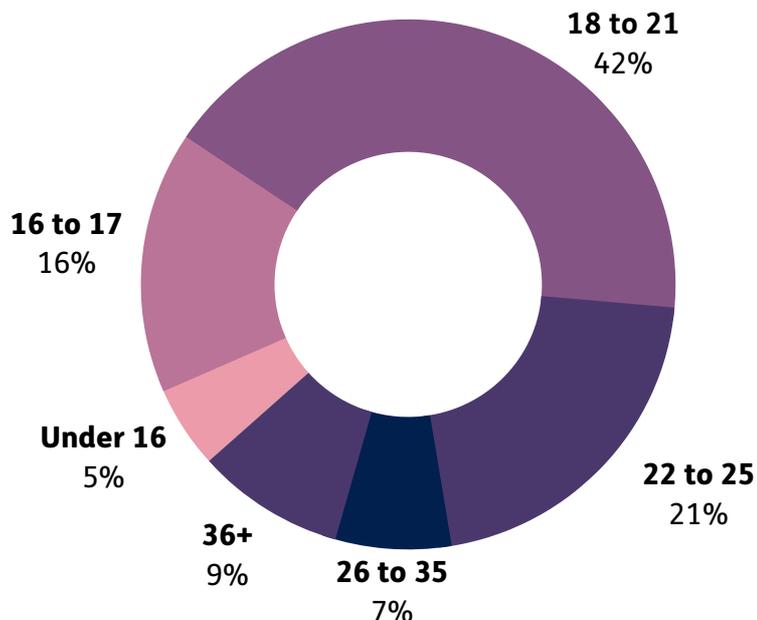
## Age

As a youth focused programme, Youth Information Chat's target audience are people aged 16 to 25 years old. This is reflected in our YIChat User demographics, with 84% of people who engaged with us last year being 25 years old or younger. This shows that we are reaching people in the right way and are able to get the information, advice and guidance they need.

However, our service is not limited to just 16 to 25 year olds. As national specialists in youth information, we understand that youth issues are not just for young people. Many people who contact us are family, friends, carers, guardians, teachers, and support workers who are in need of information.

The age range of people who engage with our service highlights how, at every stage of life, people need information about the issues young people face across the country.

**Ages of YIChat users in 2021**



“

*I was wondering if I can go to a GP or anything like a doctor without my parents knowing? My family doesn't really talk about sensitive topics like this but I would like to see a doctor.*

**Jay - Age 16 - Leitrim**

“

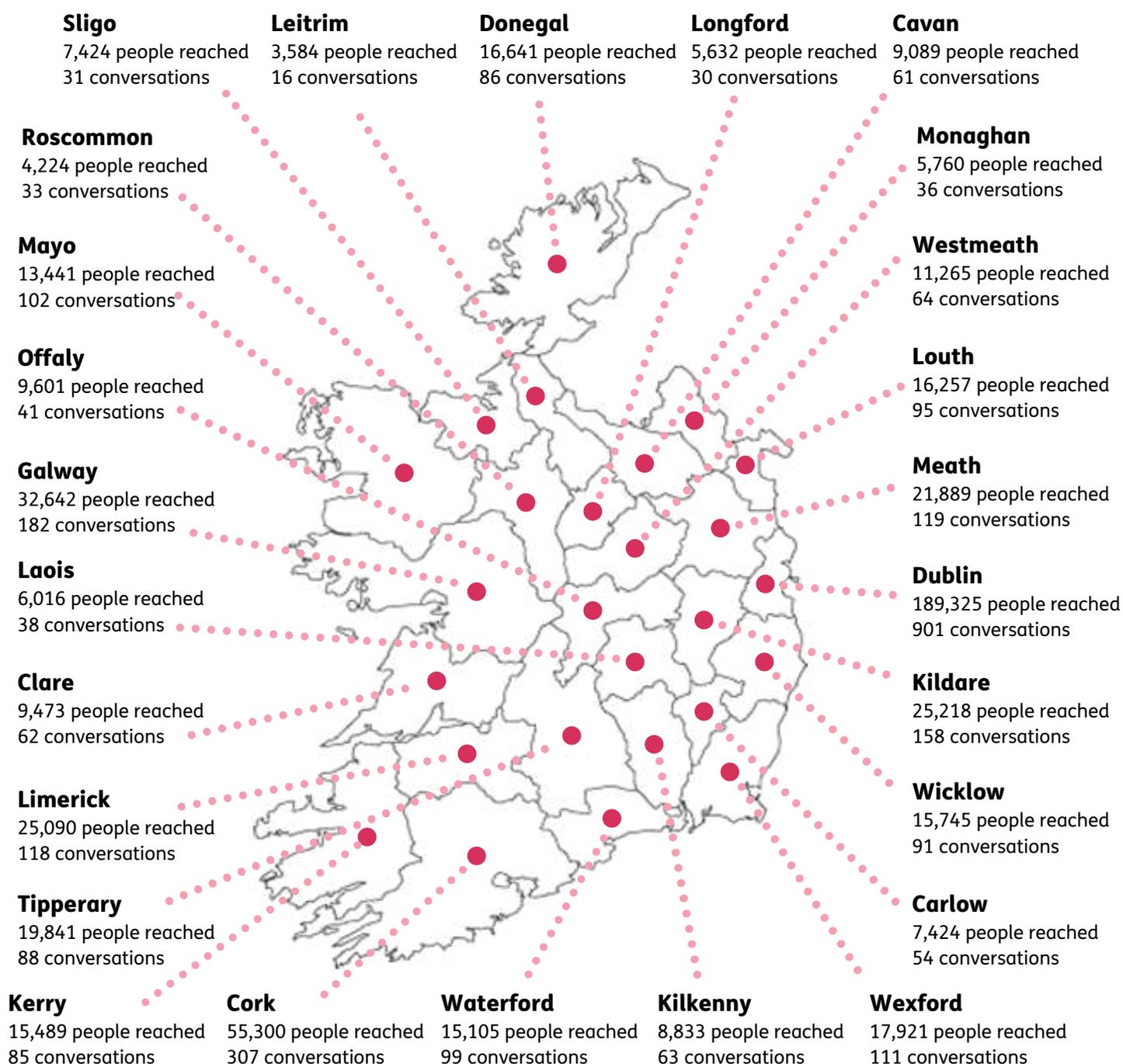
*I got my first job! My employer said I need to register with Revenue, do you know how I do this? And what information or documents I need? 💰*

**Kai - Age 20 - Clare**

# Who used our service

## Locations

The map below shows a breakdown by county of the number of young people we reached online with adverts for youth information and the number of conversations we had. Being an online service allows us to reach young people through times of physical isolation, such as COVID-19 and reach geographically and socially isolated young people online. Moreover, not every county has a Youth Information Centre or Officer so our service enables us to provide youth information to young people in every county.

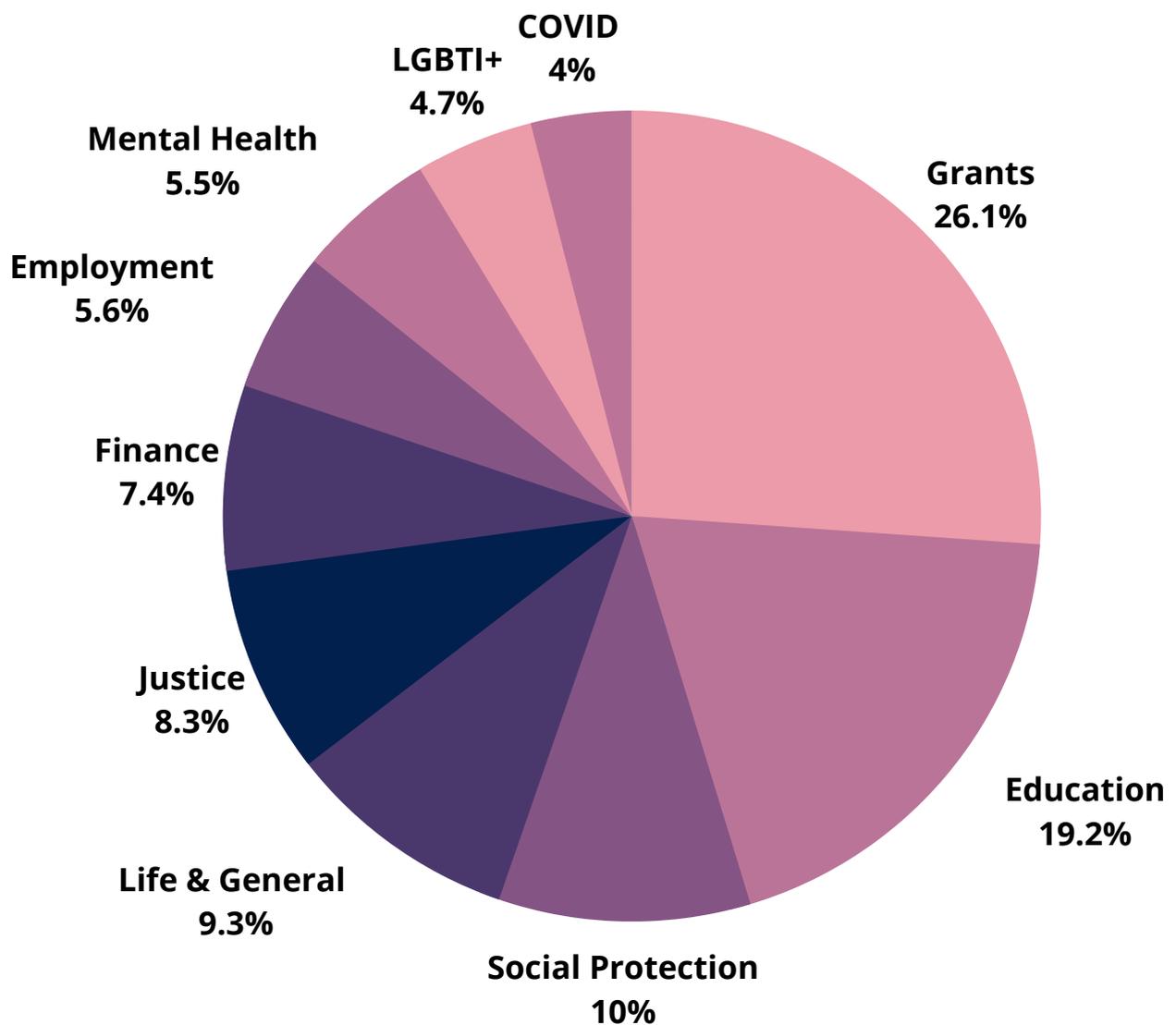


# Conversation themes

People come to us to get the answers they need regarding the issues that matter to them. During 2021, we were privileged to be there to offer information, advice and guidance to young people and people in their lives. The topics of conversations spoke to some of the most important aspects of young people’s lives including their education, welfare, health, identity and livelihood. Not only were young people contacting us about the issues they have experienced and are going through, but also their plans, prospects and directions.

The conversation themes speak to some of the pertinent issues that young people are concerned about and are in need of additional personalised and expertly provided information.

## Top 10 Conversation Themes 2021



# Conversation durations

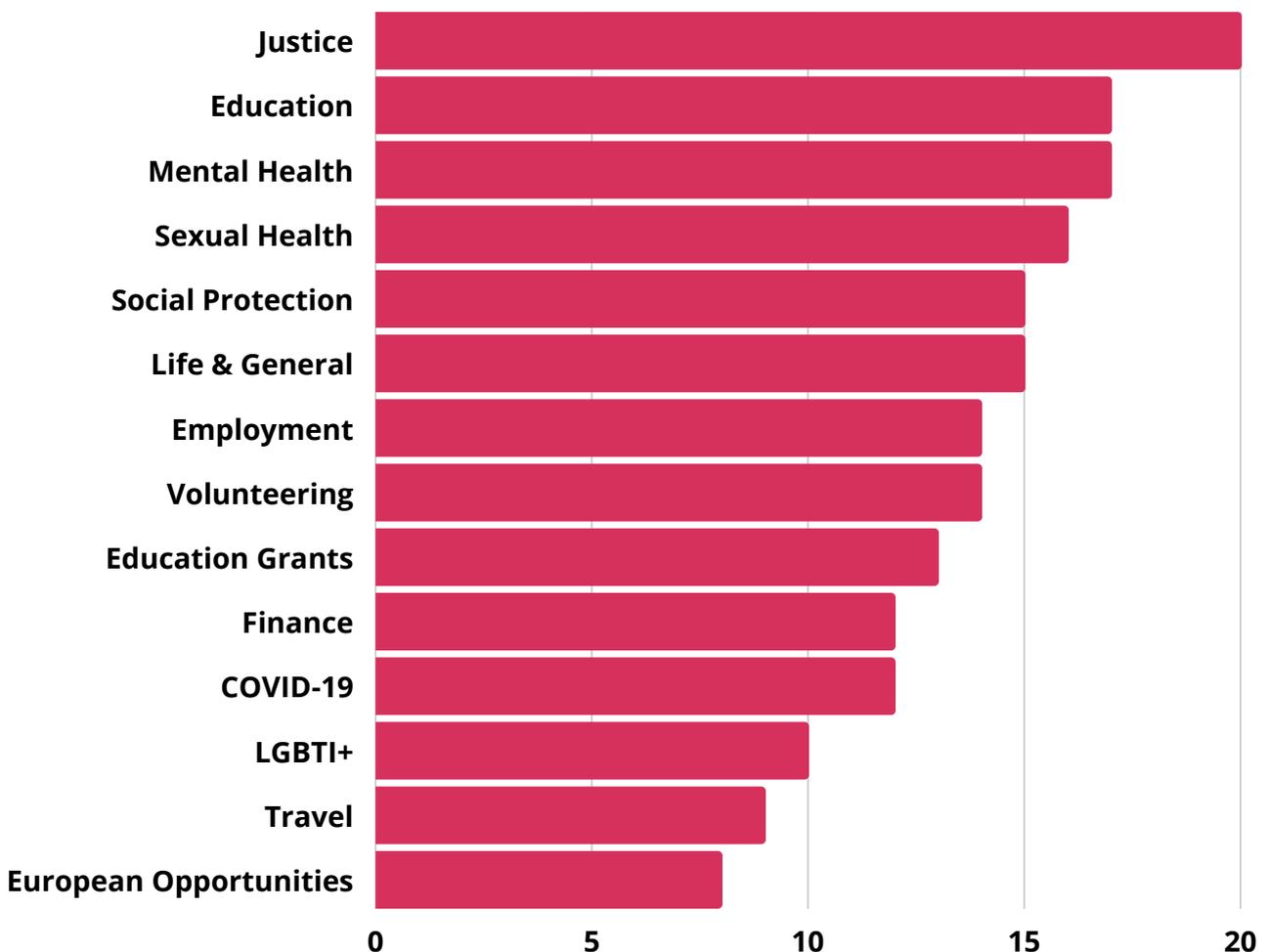
## Conversation Duration

Quality conversations about the issues that matter most to young people is what we are here for. Youth Information Chat gives people the chance to discuss topics and ask questions that they may not otherwise ask. Overall, the average duration for conversations was 13 minutes and 29 seconds.

The average duration of chats was calculated based on the conversation theme. The longest lasting conversations had on YIChat are related to Justice, Mental Health and Education. The average duration for a Justice related conversation was 20 minutes and Education and Mental Health lasted on average for 17 minutes.

With such complex topics come complex questions that YIChat was there to answer, advise and guide people through. This is where YIChat plays an important part in facilitating people to be more informed through a dedicated, one to one chat service. We listen to the young person using our service, understand their circumstances, and point them in the right direction.

## Average Duration per Theme



# Media and advertising

Reaching young people where they are online is an integral part of what makes the YIChat effective. A big part of reaching young people is ensuring that we are using the social media platforms that they are using.

Since beginning in 2019, we know that young people want to access information, advice and guidance through online platforms such as social media. When YIChat started, Facebook and Instagram were the two social media platforms used to reach young people about our service. In 2021, we realised that more and more young people were using TikTok so we began to advertise there, too. By the end of the year, we had reached more than 568,000 young people through our social media advertising!

Behind the scenes of our ads are the YIChat Team including our YIChat Officers, Youth Action Panels, Marketing Team, and Funders. All of these players help us to create and share the ads which are promoted to young people across the country, highlighting the availability of information, advice and guidance through the YIChat service.

“

*I have a question about my CAO. I got offered my 3rd choice and accepted it but now I've changed my mind - I would rather have my 4th choice. What can I do?*

**Ash - Age 18 - Tipperary**



In 2021, YIChat identified a new opportunity to reach young people. Through our network of Youth Information Services, there was a need identified for physical, print materials which promoted Youth Information and the ways that young people can connect with a service. We collected a group together and created the Detached Youth Work Cards which can be handed out during detached or street youth work and contain contact information for the YIChat service and local Youth Information Centres.

These cards enabled us to connect with young people offline, for the first time ever, and resulted in 84 conversations with young people that we likely wouldn't have reached through our online ads. The Detached Youth Work cards continue to be distributed and highlight the important role that physical and print materials play in promoting online services to young people.

# Advertising campaigns

## Online Campaigns

We also understand that it is important to create information that is reactive to current issues, and proactive in promoting opportunities to our audience. That is why we created several campaigns in 2021 which speak to issues such as Education, Finance, Social Protection, Justice, and European Opportunities for travel, study and volunteering.

### LGBTI+ Pride

During this campaign, YIChat promoted content related to LGBTI+ issues and the opportunities to share information, advice and guidance on the subject. This included the Pride events around the country, ways to support LGBTI+ loved ones, and understanding of LGBTI+ identities.

### Education Grants, Bursaries & Scholarships

One of the major conversation themes for YIChat is Education and the financial supports for further education. In 2021, 26.1% of our conversations focused on Education Grants such as SUSI. The YIChat Officers expertise in finding opportunities to fund further education was a huge benefit to this campaign, which allowed us to promote the grant, bursary and scholarship options for young people looking to continue their learning.

### CAO Applications

The CAO is an important milestone in young people's education as they chose the courses they would like to pursue. During this campaign, we promoted information about applying for courses, changing course choices, accepting offers and deferrals. The YIChat Officers were on hand to offer their expertise on navigating the CAO system and provide the information, advice and guidance needed.

### The Leaving Cert

This campaign centred on the Leaving Cert, another big milestone in young people's education. In 2021, we guided young people through the changed process for the Leaving Cert in response to COVID-19 restrictions such as accredited grades, in-person exams, and how results are shared with students.

### European Opportunities

While international travel was not always possible in 2021, our European Opportunities campaign offered young people information, advice and guidance so they can plan ahead for when restrictions lifted. During this campaign, we promoted the opportunities to work, study and volunteer in Europe including ways to get your costs covered and winning free Interailing tickets.

“

*Hi there, I'm trans and I'm trying to figure out how I can change my name. Do you have any information on this?* 

**Jess - Age 19 - Dublin**

# Advertising campaigns

When can I register for my COVID vaccine? 📅

Let me find that information for you

My best friend came out, how can I best support them? 🌈

Great question, I will get some information for you now



## WIN INTERRAILING TICKETS



FIND OUT MORE



I am living in direct provision. Are there grants available for college?

Let's talk through your options

Can I remove courses from my CAO choices? 🎓

You can change your CAO choices. Let me tell you how.

# Summary

While 2021 presented many challenges, Youth Information Chat rose to meet the demand for factual, evidence based information from young people in Ireland. Since our pilot in 2019, our service has been there to offer information, advice and guidance about the issues that matter most to young people. Working as a partnership, Crosscare, spunout, YMCA and Youth Work Ireland have been a sector leader in providing youth information in the digital space. The Youth Information Officers, Working Groups, and Youth Advisory Panels have all played an integral role in the formation, launch and progression of this vital service.

Before launching Youth Information Chat, much of the youth information provision was done in centres and services through face-to-face work. In dealing with the challenges of lockdowns, many of these settings had to suspend their service. While availability was restricted, demand continued to grow. One of the major strengths of Youth Information Chat as a digital youth information service meant we were able to be there to support young people throughout lockdowns.

## Funding for YIChat

The service secured €80,000 from the Community Foundation of Ireland through the RTÉ Comic Relief fund to continue our work in YIChat. This funding was an essential part of enabling us to reach more young people in more diverse ways in 2021. Funding to continue the service in 2022 was granted by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Our thanks to all funders for their support of our work in YIChat.

## Plans for the future

The success of the YIChat service during a year such as 2021 highlights the ongoing need for a free, online, non-judgemental service for young people to access the information, supports, and guidance that they need to make informed decisions within their own lives. The future work of Youth Information Chat will focus on increasing the reach of the service to connect with even more young people, with a particular focus on marginalised young people. A key part of this drive to increase reach will be to make the platform accessible over WhatsApp. This is a substantial piece of work that is expected to begin in 2022. The move to WhatsApp will enable YIChat to continue to offer support to young people in the places where they are online.

## Conclusion

The work that YIChat does has been motivated by the desire to provide young people with the information, advice and guidance that they need about the issues that matter to them. And, importantly, for that to be done in a one-to-one, confidential and non-judgemental space which meets them where they are. The team in YIChat have continued to provide this essential service for young people across the country in 2021 while adapting to the changes that the year brought. Ultimately, YIChat was there to have 3,546 conversations with young people and provided them with the information, advice and guidance that they needed. We look forward to continuing this work in 2022!

# YOUTH INFORMATION CHAT

## Youth Information Chat Partners

### **Crosscare**

crosscare.ie  
info@crosscare.ie

### **YMCA Ireland**

ymca-ireland.net  
admin@ymca-ireland.net

### **Youth Work Ireland**

youthworkireland.ie  
info@youthworkireland.ie

### **spunout**

spunout.ie  
hello@spunout.ie

## Youth Information Chat Funders



**The Community  
Foundation for Ireland**



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,  
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige  
Department of Children, Equality,  
Disability, Integration and Youth

