Better Internet for Kids (BIK) Policy Monitor Country Profile 2024: BELGIUM

The Better Internet for Kids (BIK) Policy Monitor is a tool used to compare and exchange knowledge on policy making and implementation in EU Member States, Iceland and Norway on the pillars and recommendations of the European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children (BIK+ strategy). The 2024 edition of the BIK Policy Monitor report examines the implementation of the BIK+ strategy in 29 European countries, including all EU Member States, Iceland, and Norway.

The country profile outlines findings about the implementation of the BIK+ strategy based on BIK policies and BIK+ actions across the strategy's three pillars as surveyed in the BIK Policy Monitor (as per February 2024). Download the full BIK Policy Monitor report 2024 from the Better Internet for Kids website.

BIK policies

Policy frameworks

Policy frameworks describe the overarching approach for a better internet and establish the underlying goals, principles and guidelines that shape individual policies within this area.

- This topic **is an important and emerging policy priority**.

- There are **separate, dedicated policies** which address the topic of children and the digital environment (protection, empowerment, and participation).

- The BIK/BIK+ strategy **is explicitly referenced in national policies** on children and the digital environment

- National/regional policies and policy documents **explicitly recognise children's rights in the digital environment**.

	High	Medium	Low	Other
Coverage of BIK+ issues in national policies		X		
Integration of policy provision		X		
Influence of the BIK+ strategy	X			
Recognition of children's rights	X			

Table 1: Topic summary - policy frameworks

Key national policy frameworks are:

- In 2023, in the Belgian federal parliament approved a Resolution to Ensure Children's Online Safety. The resolution aims to create an overarching framework and will establish a national coordinating body with a focus on the BIK+ strategy.

- Previously, there were more general policies regarding different aspects of online protection for children.

Policy design

Policy design asks whether evidence and research support BIK-related policies and whether systems are in place for monitoring and evaluating those policies.

- A **regular nationally representative survey specifically focused on children's digital activity** informs national policies on this topic.

- **Systems are in place at the government level** to gather information on children and the digital environment

- **There is a dedicated research fund/research programme** on children and the digital environment.

- **Policies are monitored and evaluated but not systematically**. It depends on the needs at a particular time or when policies are being considered.

	High	Medium	Low	Other
Regular data collection	X			
Other information supports	X			
National research fund	X			
Monitoring and evaluation		X		

Table 2: Topic summary - policy design

Recent national research studies include:

- A biannual study called Apenstaartjaren is conducted in Flanders. This study by Mediaraven, Mediawijs, the research group imec-mict-Ugent and Link in de Kabel, investigates the media use and media literacy of 6 to 18-year-olds every two years.

- At the start of the 2023 school year, Média Animation and the Higher Council for Media Education (CSEM) launched the second edition of the major French-speaking survey on the digital practices of children and adolescents #Generation2024.

Policy governance

Policy governance examines how policies are coordinated at the governmental level, whether other implementation bodies are involved in their delivery, and whether structured mechanisms are available to guide their implementation.

- **Policy development sits across a range of ministries, and there is no lead with specific assigned responsibility** for developing government policies, guidelines, and programmes related to children and the digital environment.

- **There is currently no coordination mechanism in place**. Policies, guidelines and programmes relating to children and the digital environment tend to be implemented independently of one another.

- Currently, **no national action plan, strategy or equivalent is in place** that gives government policy on children and the digital environment defined timelines, assigned responsibilities and key performance indicators (KPIs).

	High	Medium	Low	Other
Lead ministry for policy development			X	
National coordination body			X	
National action plan or strategy			X	

Table 3: Topic summary - policy governance

Stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder involvement enquires how different stakeholders can participate in policy development. Children's involvement in policy-making is one such key issue. Additionally, international knowledge exchange about children's digital participation is also relevant to this topic.

- **Various ad hoc multistakeholder groups exist** across different branches of government, in which stakeholders may contribute to policy deliberation and development.

- **Members of the public are consulted on occasion** in the course of the development of new policies. However, this is not always the case

- **Children are listened to directly in the policy development process** (e.g., through hearings, consultations, specific surveys) but are not formally involved in decision-making.

- **Policy makers actively participate in various EU-level and other international inter-governmental groups** focused on the topic.

	High	Medium	Low	Other
Stakeholder forum		X		
Public consultation		X		
Involvement of young people		X		
International knowledge exchange	X			

Table 4: Topic summary - Stakeholder involvement

BIK+ actions

Pillar 1 – safe digital experiences

Safe digital experiences refer to actions taken to protect children from harmful and illegal online content, conduct, contact, and risks as young consumers and to improve their well-being online through a safe, age-appropriate digital environment created in a way that respects children's best interests.

Responses to EU laws:

Four competent authorities have been designated in Belgium to monitor the enforcement of the Digital Services Act (DSA).

- The regulatory authority, the Belgian Institute for Postal Services and Telecommunications (BIPT), was designated at the federal level by the Act of 21 April 2024, and is the national coordinator.

- The Flemish regulator Voor De Media (VRM) was designated by the Flemish Community (Decree of 27 March 2009).

- The Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA) was designated by the French Community (Decree of 4 February 2021).

- The Medienrat was designated by the German Community (Decree of 01/03/2021).

Addressing harmful online content:

- National legislation does not define harmful online content beyond what is contained under the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) Art28b.

- Children may complain to an administrative body, i.e., a government ministry or agency, about the availability of potentially harmful online content with the help of the national helpline Child Focus.

- In 2022, the Flemish Media Regulator (VRM) published a new Content Creator Protocol. This protocol contains rules influencers must follow when sharing commercial video communication. This new regulation comes in addition to the existing Influencer Marketing Guidelines and the advertising rules from the Belgian Code of Economic Law.

Addressing harmful online conduct:

- On July 1, 2020, Belgium introduced new legislation directly addressing the non-consensual sharing of intimate images of "revenge porn." The amendment also introduced provisions allowing for the removal of images from the web in cases where the infringer is under Belgian jurisdiction. Also, in 2022, a new sexual penal code came into effect.

- Under the amendment, the legal competence of the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men (IEFH) was extended to support victims of revenge pornography.

- National/regional laws, regulations and policies are also in place under the penal code to protect children and young people from cyberbullying

Age verification and digital identity systems:

- Policies regarding age verification to restrict minors from accessing adult online content services are currently under discussion.

- Digital identity systems available for minors in Belgium are not currently available but are under consideration.

	In place	In development	Not in place	Other
DSA legislation enacted		X		
Codes of practice of digital services		X		
Consumer code of practice	X			
Definition of harmful content				X
Children's complaints mechanism	X			
Bodies can order content removal				X
Intimate image abuse laws	X			
Cyberbullying laws	X			
Age verification for adult content		X		
Digital identity systems			X	

Table 5: Topic summary - pillar 1: safe digital experiences

Pillar 2 – digital empowerment

Digital empowerment incorporates actions so that all children, including those in vulnerable situations, acquire the necessary skills and competences to make sound choices and express themselves in the online environment safely and responsibly.

Supports in formal education:

- In Belgium, there are many regional differences regarding online safety in the school curriculum. Wallonia has a regional school curriculum with a comprehensive l'Education à la Vie Relationnelle, Affective & Sexuelle (EVRAS) subject area.

- In Flanders, by contrast, eSafety is a minor part of the school curriculum.

- Support for online safety policies in schools is supported by Media Animation (Wallonia) and Mediawijs (Flanders). Both are part of the Belgian Safer Internet Centre.

- Teachers' online safety training is also part of the national teacher curriculum.

Informal education:

- There are also national/regional activities supporting informal online safety education. Supports are primarily from welfare and parenting organisations.

- Peer-to-peer training and support programmes in online safety is also available. The Cybersquad.be initiative developed by Child Focus is based on peer-to-peer support.

Empowering through digital skills:

- Activities to support young people's digital literacy skills for online communication and collaboration (e.g., interacting, sharing, engaging, collaborating through digital technologies, managing e-presence and digital identity) primarily come from organisations such as Mediawijs and Media Animation rather than from education.

- This is also the case with regard to children's media literacy, including how to analyse, compare and critically evaluate the credibility and reliability of sources of data, information and digital content, and activities to encourage bystanders to challenge online hate speech.

	In place	In development	Not in place	Other
Teaching online safety		X		
Online safety policies in schools	X			
Adequate teacher training	X			
Informal education about online safety	X			
Peer-to-peer training in online safety	X			
Support for digital literacy skills	X			
Children's media literacy	X			
Challenge hate speech/digital civil courage	X			

Table 6: Topic summary - pillar 2: digital empowerment

Pillar 3 – active participation, respecting children's rights

Active participation, respecting children's rights, refers to actions which give children and young people a say in the digital environment, with more child-led activities to foster innovative and creative safe digital experiences.

Active participation:

- Activities to promote active participation, youth civic engagement and advocacy in the digital environment are supported by the Ministries of Youth.

- However, laws, regulations or policies that mandate youth participation in decision-making bodies at the national or regional level are not yet in place.

- Activities to promote better awareness of children's rights in relation to the digital environment are currently being developed.

- While there is no government system for publishing child-friendly versions of policy documents or initiatives relevant to BIK+ topics, this is supported through the Belgian Safer Internet Centre (SIC Belgium).

Inclusivity:

- Activities to ensure inclusiveness regarding children's active participation (e.g., ensuring a balance of age, gender, urban/rural, inclusion of seldom-heard and hard-to-reach youth populations, etc.) are in place at the national level.

Digital creativity:

- The Belgian SIC supports activities to stimulate the production and visibility of positive digital content and services for children.

- Similarly, the Belgian SIC also promotes activities to encourage children's digital creativity and promote creative uses of digital technologies.

	In place	In development	Not in place	Other
Activities to promote active participation	X			
Laws that mandate youth participation			X	
Awareness raising on children's rights		X		
Inclusiveness regarding active participation	X			
Child-friendly versions of policy documents				X
Positive digital content	X			
Activities encouraging digital creativity	X			

Table 7: Topic summary - pillar 3: active participation, respecting children's rights

BIK+ index 2024: Belgium

The BIK+ index has been developed to provide an aggregated at-a-glance overview of the levels of implementation across the two dimensions, BIK policies and BIK+ actions, in Belgium compared to the EU27+2 average. Values are shown in per cent.
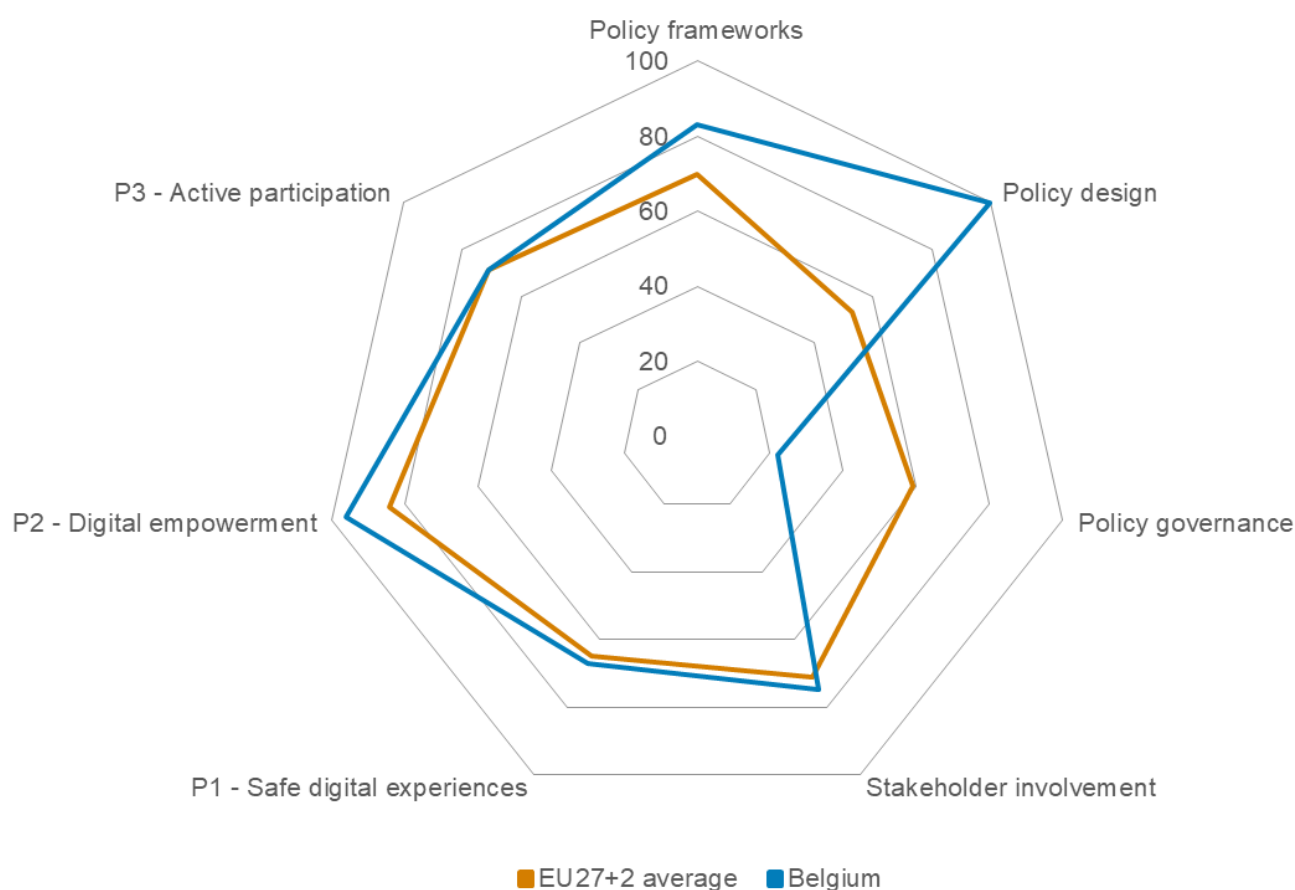

Figure 1: BIK+ index 2024: Belgium - EU27+2 average comparison

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