

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

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**.
- It is **covered by broader policies rather than separate dedicated policies** that address the protection, empowerment, and participation of children and the digital environment.
- The BIK/BIK+ strategy **has not influenced national policies** on children and the environment.
- Children's rights in the digital environment **are not explicitly recognised in national/regional policy documents but receive implicit support in policies** dealing with children's digital activity.

	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:

- BIK-related topics are partly covered in several strategic documents, action plans and legal acts such as the [National Child Protection Programme 2018](#).
- However, a comprehensive horizontal policy approach is still being developed in Bulgaria.

### 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.

- Surveys of children’s digital activities **are undertaken only irregularly**. The [Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre](#) is the only organisation gathering specific data about children’s digital experiences on a daily basis.
- **There is no system in place at the government level** to gather information on children and the digital environment.
- **There is little or no funding available for research** on children and the digital environment.
- **There is no systematic monitoring or evaluation of policies** on children and the digital environment.

	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:**

- **Bulgarian Children Online** – a nationally representative study conducted in 2016 by Market Links Sociological Agency and Applied Research and Communications Fund (ARC Fund), coordinator of the Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre.
- **Young Children (0-8 years of age) and Digital Technology (2016)** – a qualitative exploratory study conducted in the framework of the JRC’s project ECIT (Empowering Citizens’ Rights in Emerging ICT).
- **Young Children and Digital Technology (2017)** – one-year follow-up.

### **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 no lead is specifically assigned responsibility** for developing government policies, guidelines, and programmes related to children and the digital environment.
- **Coordination happens more informally across the different departments and entities** contributing to government policies, guidelines, and programmes regarding children and the digital environment.
- **One or more programmes of action are underway to support children’s online safety and participation in the digital environment.**

However, these lack accountability mechanisms such as defined timelines, assigned responsibilities, or 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

The Bulgarian [National Council for Child Protection](#) is a body under the State Agency for Child Protection and has advisory and coordination functions. The chairman of the council is the chairman of the State Agency for Child Protection, who organises and directs its activities, coordinates the implementation of its decisions, and represents it.

The [Safer Internet Centre \(SIC\)](#) in Bulgaria was established and is coordinated by the non-governmental [Applied Research and Communications Fund \(ARC Fund\)](#). Its mission is to protect, support and educate children in order to empower them to use digital technology for learning, communicating, socialising and entertainment in a safer and positive way. See [Public Report of the Bulgarian SIC for 2021](#).

### 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.

- A **formal mechanism has yet to be created** at the government level for stakeholder groups to contribute to policy deliberation and development.
- **Members of the public are regularly and routinely consulted** as part of the policy development process.

- **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.
- There are **occasional opportunities** for policymakers to participate in international knowledge exchange on digital policies for children.

	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*

The **Public Council on Safer Internet Use** (SIC Advisory Board) was founded in April 2006. Its members are representatives of the major stakeholders – public institutions, industry associations, private companies and non-governmental organisations. The Public Council discusses and approves activity reports of the Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre and gives recommendations for improving its work. The **Applied Research and Communications Foundation** (ARC Fund) and Parents Association, which coordinate the **Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre**, are active **National Network for Children** (NNC) members, which unites 135 civil organisations working with and for children and families across the country.

## 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:*

- Legislation to implement the [Digital Services Act \(DSA\)](#), e.g., designate competent authorities, and provide necessary powers for its enforcement, is currently in development.
- Draft proposals outline the role and authority of the Bulgarian Digital Services Coordinator (DSC) and designate the [Communications Regulation Commission \(CRC\)](#) as the national DSC. The CRC monitors non-video-sharing intermediary service providers to ensure compliance with the DSA, while video-sharing platforms fall under the control of the [Council for Electronic Media \(CEM\)](#). The CEM already monitors providers of video-sharing platforms for compliance with the Radio and Television Act, which transposes the Audiovisual Media Services Directive.

#### *Addressing harmful online content:*

- Definitions of harmful online content included in laws, regulations or policies at the country level are included in the relevant sections of the Criminal Code dealing with child sexual abuse material, pornography, and radicalisation.
- The Ministry of Interior's Cybercrime department has the power to order the removal or disabling of access to online content that is potentially harmful to children.
- Children may complain to the following administrative bodies about harmful (illegal) content: the Ministry of Interior, the Cybercrime Department, the Safer Internet Centre, including its Hotline and Helpline, or the national helpline 116 111.

**Addressing harmful online conduct:**

- Non-consensual sharing of intimate images is covered under the Criminal Code. Prevention activities are assigned under Child Strategy, which is currently under development. Prevention activities are part of the Action Plan for Child Protection.
- Currently, there are no national/regional laws, regulations or policies in place to protect children and young people from cyberbullying. The Safer Internet Centre is the only organisation that reacts to reports of online bullying and deals with it expertly.

**Age verification and digital identity systems:**

- There are no national/regional laws, technical standards or policies in place regarding age verification mechanisms to restrict minors from accessing adult online content services.
- Digital identity systems available for minors are not available.

	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:*

- Teaching online safety and digital literacy has been incorporated into the national/regional school curriculum. However, not many teachers have been trained to work with children on these topics.
- Currently, there are no national/regional strategies to support online safety policies in schools.
- Teacher training for online safety is in place. The Ministry of Education has a special annual programme for the qualification of teachers

Other examples include:

- Between March 2020 and July 2021, the Bulgarian SIC and the team of the 90th High School Gen. José de San Martín in Sofia have been collaboratively testing the Comprehensive Model for Building Key Competences in Schools.
- In 2021, experts from the Bulgarian SIC and the CEGA Foundation conducted training for teachers from all over the country on how to identify fake news, misinformation, and media manipulation and how to develop the skills of assessing the trustworthiness of information in their students.
- In June 2021, the Bulgarian SIC, together with the [Media Literacy Coalition](#), conducted a series of online trainings for teachers on "Media Literacy Through My Subject". It also developed a series of six educational animation videos for children addressing common online risks, such as cyberbullying, "hacked" accounts, screen time, and "digital footprints". Teachers can use them to initiate discussions on online safety and appropriate and inappropriate conduct in the digital environment at their schools.



**Informal education:**

- Online safety is part of the Pre-school and School Education Law, and the Ministry of Education is in charge of its implementation.
- In 2021, within the Care for Truth initiative, experts from the Bulgarian SIC developed three practical manuals that are available online. The manuals are focused on building capacity among Roma leaders and mediators, Roma and Pro-Roma activists, as well as teachers, equipping them with specific methods and tools on how to detect, monitor and counter misinformation and media manipulation that fuel stereotypes and negative attitudes towards certain communities such as the Roma.
- The [Media Literacy Coalition](#), established in 2017, continued its active work in 2021. The Coalition includes the Bulgarian SIC, the Institute for Progressive Education, the Centre for Inclusive Education, the Association of European Journalists in Bulgaria, Teach for Bulgaria, the National Network for Children, Education Bulgaria 2030, and the Voice of the Children Foundation.

**Empowering through digital skills:**

- National/regional activities are in place to support young people's digital literacy skills for online communication and collaboration. The Safer Internet Centre implements a range of activities in partnership with the Ministry of Education.
- Regional initiatives are also available under the National "Non-violent educational environment", which has a special focus on preventing online bullying and hate speech.
- In 2021, the "Find Another Way" campaign was finalised. The campaign aims to encourage critical thinking and tolerant attitudes in young people aged 14-20. "Find Another Way" was implemented by a partnership between the Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre, the Centre for the Study of Democracy (CSD) and the d:istinkt Communication Agency in the framework of the "Resilient Youth against Far-right Extremist Messaging Online"

(YouthRightOn) Project. The Project was funded by the European Union’s Internal Security Fund — Police of the European Union.

	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 in place.
- Such activities are happening under the regional initiatives under the national "non-violent educational environment" and are part of the school curriculum and different educational forms such as civic education, practical classes and project-based activities.
- A Regulation under the Chairperson of the State Agency for Child Protection stipulates the creation of the National Children's Council, which ensures youth

participation in decision-making bodies at the national and regional levels, including the National Child's Assembly.

- The **Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre's** youth panel is a voluntary structure that has been a successful form of youth participation since 2010. Its members are young people aged 14-18 who meet face-to-face regularly to develop their digital and media skills and play an important role in the initiatives and events organised by the Bulgarian SIC and its partners.
- The Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre also partnered in the annual youth forum "Voice it: opinion matters", organised by the Megaphone Youth Network and the National Network for Children and held on 19 November 2021. Due to the epidemic situation, for the second year in a row, the forum gathered a small group of panellists but was broadcast live on the Facebook page of the National Network for Children.

### ***Inclusivity:***

- Activities to promote awareness of children's rights from part of the school curriculum and different educational forms such as civic education, practical classes and project-based activities. The State Agency for Children also did unanimous research on children's rights in Sofia, Varna, and Plovdiv, which covered over 3500 children. In addition, under the Nation Programme for Prevention of Violence and Abuse and the Action Plan on the Implementation, more than 10 activities are related to children's rights in the digital environment.
- The Nation Child Assembly Initiative and Child's Ombudsman in Schools cover children's inclusiveness and participation. Under these initiatives, children are trained in the role of the Ombudsman in more than 50 schools in Bulgaria.
- The new Strategy on Child Protection, currently under development, contains more than 10 measures relevant to BIK+ topics and will be published (when ready) in a child-friendly version.

**Digital creativity:**

- There are currently no national/regional activities to stimulate the production and visibility of positive digital content and services for children
- There are currently no national/regional activities to encourage children’s digital creativity and to 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: Bulgaria

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 Bulgaria compared to the EU27+2 average. Values are shown in per cent.

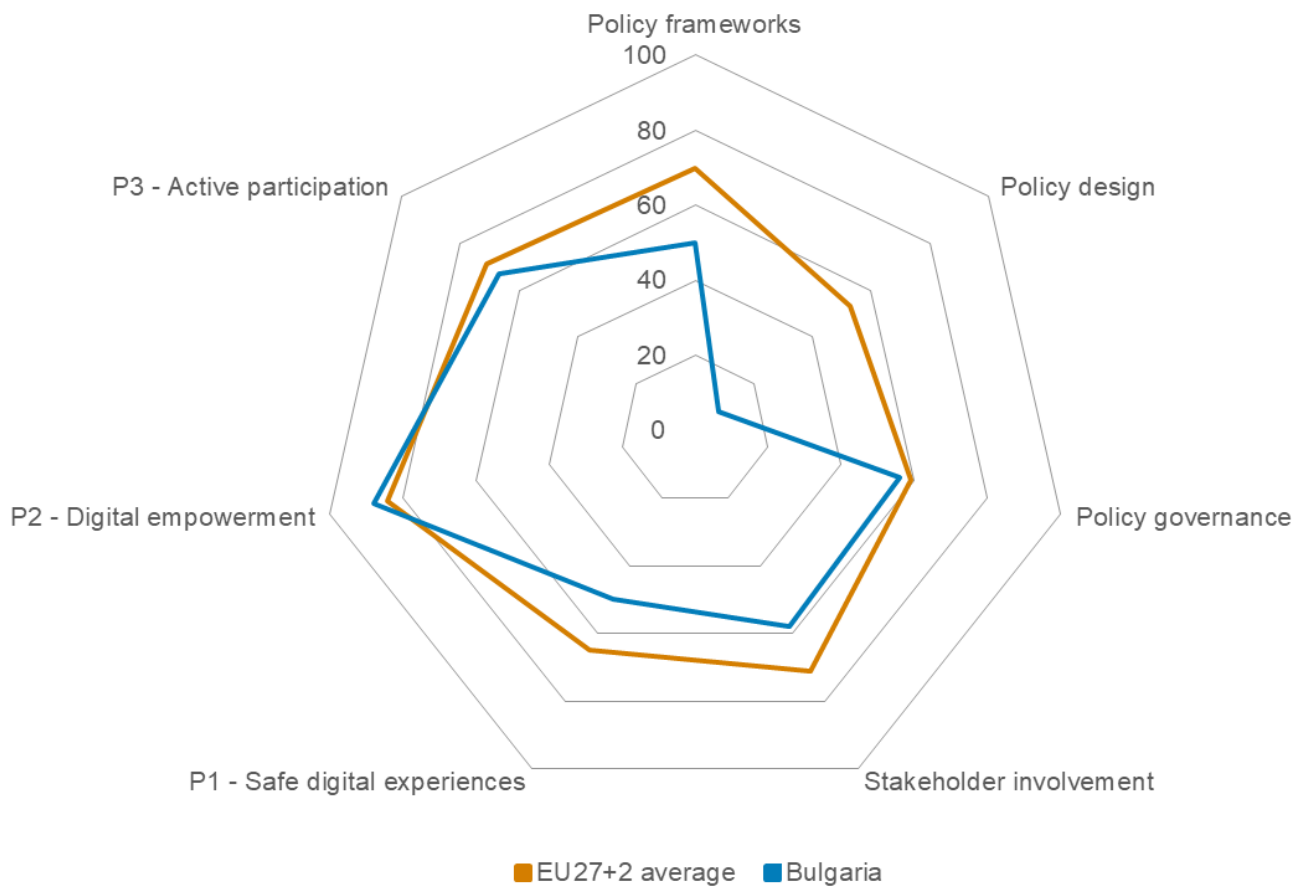


Figure 1: BIK+ index 2024: Bulgaria - EU27+2 average comparison

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