

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

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 **comprehensively addressed** with children's online protection, digital empowerment and digital participation incorporated into national/regional laws, regulations and policies.
- There is **one main overarching policy framework** that addresses 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:

- Malta has addressed the European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children (BIK(+)) strategy) through several different national public policies focused on BIK-related issues. The overarching policy framework is represented by the Digital Malta Strategy, which recognises the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in empowering the economy and society, directly and indirectly, both as critical infrastructure and an enabling tool. Other important policy reference points include the Cyber Security Strategy 2016, which addresses cyber security nationally, and A National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo – 2014-2019, which gives particular attention to digital literacy. Aspects related to cybercrime are covered under the Electronic Commerce Act (2002).
- The **Digital Malta Strategy 2022-2027** (Malta Digitali; “the strategy”) sets out the national strategy for 2022-2027 and highlights how Malta intends to maintain its momentum as a leader in digital transformation while remaining mindful of social and economic opportunities and challenges that arise. It sets out how the government shall act not only in its traditional role as policy maker, promoter and regulator but also as a catalyst for change through digitalisation alongside other social and economic actors.
- The **Child Protection (Alternative Care) Act** (2017) replaces the Children and Young Persons (Care Orders) Act, the Foster Care Act and the Placing of

Minors Regulations to introduce child protection orders to provide for appropriate alternative care and protection for children deprived of parental care or at the risk of being so.

- The **Children’s Policy Framework 2024-2030** outlines the Government’s plan of action to ensure that the State serves and protects all children. The Government will seek to consolidate its efforts towards improving the quality of life of children by dedicating the necessary resources for children to succeed. Priority 3 focuses on providing a better environment for children to promote safe and healthy physical and digital settings. Investing in policy measures that create a child-friendly environment and ensure children's physical, social, and emotional security is crucial. This includes more green spaces, reduced pollution levels, and safer physical and digital surroundings.

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** but only irregularly.
- **Information is regularly gathered to inform policies** on children and the digital environment. However, this relies primarily on third-party sources, and there are limited opportunities to commission new data on children’s digital activity.
- **Existing national research funding is available for research** on children and the digital environment, but this is not explicitly specified.

	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:

- **EU Kids Online 2018-19: Malta.** The Maltese EU Kids Online survey data was collected from March 2018 to May 2018. The aim was to carry out a representative survey on children and online risks and opportunities, taking the cross-national comparative survey conducted in 2010 by the EU Kids Online network as a point of departure.

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.

- **The lead ministry, public agency or regulatory authority is an informal arrangement** depending on the requirements at a particular point in time.
- **Coordination happens more informally across the different departments and entities** that contribute to government policies, guidelines, and programmes regarding children and the digital environment.
- **There is a defined national action plan on children and the digital environment** with accountabilities 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

Government ministries take the lead in carrying activities in relation to BIK with the exception of quality online content for children which is jointly shared.

The key ministries involved are the Ministry of Education and Employment, the Parliamentary Secretariat for Financial Services, Digital Economy and Innovation,

the Ministry for Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity, and the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security.

The Maltese Safer Internet Centre (SIC) is a consortium of key stakeholders from diverse ministries and agencies coordinating some of the BIK-related issues. Children are consulted in the policy process through the Safer Internet Centre (SIC) Youth Panel which is held regularly. The Youth Panel is coordinated by the Office of the Commission for Children, which takes the young persons' views into account when drafting position papers and national guidelines that influence and, often, shape policies.

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.

- There is **a designated multi-stakeholder forum in place** which facilitates the involvement of all relevant stakeholder groups.
- **Members of the public are regularly and routinely consulted** as part of the policy development process.
- **Children are actively involved in the design of policies** related to their participation in the digital environment and there are specially designed structures in place for this purpose.
- **Policymakers actively participate in various EU-level** and other international inter-governmental groups related to 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 Safer Internet Centre convenes an advisory board meeting attended by diverse stakeholders engaged in the care of children, particularly concerning their digital welfare. Within this forum, participants exchange specialised knowledge and consult regarding potential enhancements at the national level aimed at protecting all children in Malta from online abuse.

The [Office of the Commissioner for Children](#) has adopted a proactive approach to ensure their voices are heard and considered in the decision-making process. Through structured consultation processes, children are provided with opportunities to express their views, concerns, and suggestions regarding policies that may impact their lives. These consultations are conducted with sensitivity and inclusivity, ensuring that children from diverse backgrounds and circumstances are given a platform to participate and contribute meaningfully. By fostering a culture of dialogue and engagement with children, the Office of the Commissioner for Children endeavours to promote their rights, advocate for their needs, and ultimately enhance their overall well-being.

BIK+ actions

Pillar 1 – safe digital experiences

Safe digital experiences refers 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:

- In its capacity as the designated Maltese Digital Services Coordinator (DSC), the Malta Communications Authority (MCA) enforces the [Digital Services Act \(DSA\)](#) regulation in Malta.

Addressing harmful online content:

- Malta has been addressing harmful online content through various laws and regulations. One significant piece of legislation is the [Maltese Electronic Communications \(Regulation\) Act](#), which governs various aspects of electronic

communications, including online content. Additionally, Malta has adopted the EU's Directive on combating terrorism and the Regulation on preventing the dissemination of terrorist content online, which imposes obligations on online platforms to remove terrorist content within a specified timeframe.

- As a helpline, the [Maltese Safer Internet Centre](#) hold the status of a trusted flagger with numerous social media platforms. The SIC encourage minors to communicate with the helpline concerning potentially harmful content. This facilitates its ability to assist them in removing such content by promptly notifying the respective platforms thereof.

Addressing harmful online conduct:

- The Maltese Criminal Code addresses various forms of harassment and cybercrime, which can encompass revenge porn behaviour. For instance, actions such as distributing intimate images or videos with the intent to harass, embarrass, or harm another person may be considered criminal offenses under provisions related to defamation, harassment, or the misuse of electronic communications.
- Malta is part of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (known as the Istanbul Convention). This convention addresses various forms of violence against women, including cyber violence, and emphasises the need for legal measures to protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable.
- In cases involving revenge porn or similar behaviour, victims in Malta can seek recourse through civil and criminal legal channels. They may file complaints with the police, pursue civil actions for damages, or seek protective orders through the courts.
- Malta does not have specific legislation solely focused on cyberbullying. However, there are laws and regulations in Malta that can be applied to cyberbullying cases, particularly those related to harassment, defamation, and online abuse.

- The Maltese Criminal Code addresses various forms of harassment and defamation, which can encompass acts of cyberbullying. Additionally, Malta has data protection laws that may apply to cyberbullying cases involving the misuse of personal data online.

Age verification and digital identity systems:

- Malta has implemented an electronic identity (e-ID) system called the **Maltese e-ID card**. The e-ID card serves as a means of electronic identification for Maltese citizens and residents. It incorporates a microchip that stores personal information and can be used for various online services and transactions, including government services, banking, and accessing secure websites.
- The e-ID card enables individuals to securely authenticate their identity online, providing a convenient and efficient way to access digital services while ensuring security and privacy. It plays a crucial role in Malta's efforts to digitise government services and promote e-governance initiatives. However, it is available only for minors who are 14 years and over.

	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:

- Following educational directives within Malta and Gozo, online safety constitutes an integral component of the curriculum offered to all students aged seven to 16 under the subject of Personal and Social Development. The subject matter addressed within this curriculum varies commensurate with the age group of the students, encompassing themes such as critical thinking, management of inappropriate content dissemination, and understanding digital footprints. Furthermore, teachers responsible for delivering this curriculum undergo periodic training sessions conducted by the Safer Internet Centre, ensuring they remain abreast of contemporary trends and methodologies in the field of online safety education. Additionally, the educational workbooks utilised by students within this curriculum are developed and endorsed by the Safer Internet Centre, thereby ensuring alignment with established best practices and guidelines.
- Malta has been actively addressing school bullying through a comprehensive national strategy. The strategy involved various stakeholders, including educators, parents, policymakers, and students, to create a safer and more inclusive learning environment for everyone. One key aspect of Malta's approach to combating bullying in schools was the implementation of clear and robust anti-bullying policies. These policies were designed to not only prevent instances of bullying but also to effectively respond to and address any incidents that occurred. They typically outlined definitions of bullying behaviour, procedures for reporting incidents, and consequences for perpetrators.
- In addition to proactive measures, Malta also focused on providing support systems for both victims and perpetrators of bullying. School counsellors,

psychologists, and support staff were available to offer counselling, mediation, and other forms of assistance to those affected by bullying. Efforts were made to create a culture where students felt comfortable speaking out against bullying and seeking help when needed.

- The Safer Internet Centre conducts regular teacher sessions, supplemented by online sessions facilitated by the Institute for Further Education. Additionally, a dedicated curriculum module focusing on online safety has been scheduled for the forthcoming academic year, specifically tailored for educators enrolled in courses at the Institute for Further Education.

Informal education:

- The Safer Internet Centre provides training sessions to leaders engaged in non-formal educational activities, encompassing entities such as Girl Guides, Scouts, and sports organisations. Recognising the paramount importance of ensuring online safety among children, the Centre has meticulously developed a comprehensive toolkit tailored explicitly for these leaders. This toolkit is meticulously crafted to equip leaders with the necessary resources and guidance to effectively engage with the children under their supervision in matters of online safety.
- The Safer Internet Centre is actively engaged in the development of peer-to-peer training initiatives. Collaboration with educational institutions or engagement with the youth panellists who provide support to the consortium constitutes viable approaches towards its realisation.

Empowering through digital skills:

- Malta places significant emphasis on digital literacy and transversal skills within its education system. These skills are vital for preparing individuals to thrive in the digital age and in a rapidly evolving job market. Here's an overview of what the digital literacy and transversal skills entail in Malta:
- Digital Literacy: The Maltese education system integrates digital literacy across various educational levels. This includes equipping students with the skills to effectively use digital tools and technologies, understanding digital

citizenship, and promoting critical thinking in the digital realm. Digital literacy efforts in Malta aim to empower individuals to navigate the digital landscape safely, responsibly, and confidently.

- Malta has recognised the importance of fostering children's media literacy, including critical evaluation of digital content. The Maltese government, through its Ministry for Education, collaborates with various organisations and educational institutions to promote media literacy among children.
- One notable initiative is the Media Literacy in Malta project, which aims to enhance media literacy skills among educators, parents, and children. This project includes workshops, seminars, and resources designed to teach children how to analyse, compare, and critically evaluate the credibility and reliability of sources of data, information, and digital content. Additionally, schools in Malta integrate media literacy into their curriculum, with a focus on teaching students how to assess the trustworthiness of online information. This often involves lessons on identifying bias, fact-checking, and understanding the potential impact of misinformation.

	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:

- The youth panel in Malta, as part of the youth participation in the SIC on online safety, serves as a crucial platform for young individuals to voice their perspectives, concerns, and insights regarding digital security and safety. In an increasingly connected world where the internet plays a central role in daily life, addressing online safety issues has become imperative, especially for the younger generation who is often the most active user group of digital platforms.
- The youth panel, coordinated by the Office of the Commissioner for Children, comprises a diverse group of individuals, typically ranging from teenagers to young adults, who come together to discuss various aspects of online safety. These discussions often cover a wide range of topics, including cyberbullying, privacy protection, data security, online harassment, and responsible internet usage.
- The youth panel serves as a conduit for feedback and suggestions to policymakers, educators, and technology companies regarding online safety initiatives and regulations. By actively engaging with stakeholders, panel members advocate for measures that promote a safer online environment for everyone, particularly young people.
- In addition to advocacy and awareness-raising efforts, the youth panel also provides a supportive space for individuals to share their own experiences and seek advice on navigating online challenges. By fostering open dialogue and peer support, the panel helps empower young people to make informed decisions and build resilience in the face of online risks.

Inclusivity:

- There are various efforts in Malta to ensure inclusiveness in children's active participation. Organisations like the Office of the Commissioner for Children and local NGOs often organise events and activities to engage children from diverse backgrounds. These initiatives typically strive to ensure a balance of age, gender, urban/rural representation, and inclusion of seldom-heard and hard-to-reach youth populations. Moreover, the SIC also strives to include children from vulnerable backgrounds in their educational campaigns, mainly children facing difficult family situations and residing in residential homes or foster care and children with disabilities.
- BeSmartOnline, which is the Safer Internet Centre in Malta, is a pioneering initiative established in Malta to promote internet safety, digital literacy, and responsible online behaviour. The primary objective of BeSmartOnline is to raise awareness about the potential risks associated with internet use and provide individuals, particularly children, teenagers, and parents, with the knowledge, tools, and resources to navigate the digital world safely and responsibly. The initiative recognises the internet's transformative power in modern society but also acknowledges the need to address the challenges and threats it poses, such as cyberbullying, online harassment, identity theft, privacy breaches, and exposure to inappropriate content.

Digital creativity:

- Safer Internet Centre Malta: This initiative promotes online safety and digital literacy among children, parents, and educators. It provides resources, training, and awareness campaigns to help children navigate the online world safely. Moreover the Safer Internet Centre launches different campaigns around the creation of positive online content by children. For this year's Safer Internet Day, two videos were created, which were the sole production of young people.
- In addition to educational initiatives, BeSmartOnline operates a comprehensive online platform that serves as a centralised hub for information, guidance, and support related to internet safety. The platform

features resources such as informative articles, how-to guides, interactive tools, videos, and links to relevant organisations and helplines. It also provides updates on emerging trends, news, and events related to online safety.

- Another crucial aspect of BeSmartOnline's work is advocacy and policy development. The initiative actively engages with policymakers, industry stakeholders, and civil society organisations to advocate for effective legislation, regulations, and industry standards that promote online safety and protect users from harm. By participating in national and international forums, BeSmartOnline contributes to shaping the digital landscape in Malta and beyond, ensuring that the rights and well-being of internet users are safeguarded in an ever-evolving digital environment.

	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

Best practices

Example 1

A competition for Safer Internet Day for children to create a song related to online safety. The children had to provide the lyrics and the music. The winning song was then produced in a professional music studio, and the children involved recorded their song and a video with the lyrics was then produced with the Awareness Centre and circulated with all Primary schools in Malta and Gozo.

Example 2

Digital Detox Campaign: Held over six weeks, the campaign encouraged children to participate in different offline tasks and then promote them online to encourage online/offline balance and positive online content. Among the tasks, they had to cook something, prepare a dance choreography, draw a poster on cyberbullying, and do a meditation exercise.

Example 3

Young people's participation: Consultation with young people on different themes related to online safety and on how best to address their peers in the creation of resources and awareness campaigns

Theme Selection: Select relevant themes related to online safety. These could include cyberbullying, privacy protection, identity theft, online predators, digital well-being, misinformation, and more. These themes should resonate with young people's experiences and concerns.

Consultation Methods: Employ a variety of consultation methods to ensure inclusivity and engagement. This involves focus group discussions, workshops, or even creative activities like storytelling or role-playing exercises. The aim is to create an environment where young people feel comfortable sharing their perspectives openly.

Peer Involvement: Encourage young people to actively participate in creating resources and awareness campaigns targeting their peers. They can offer unique

insights into effective communication strategies, preferred channels of information dissemination, and the types of content that resonate with their age group.

Empowerment and Ownership: Empower young people by giving them ownership of the process. Provide opportunities for them to lead discussions, make decisions, and contribute ideas. This not only enhances their sense of ownership but also fosters leadership skills and confidence.

Collaboration with Experts: While young people bring invaluable perspectives, it's also important to involve experts in fields such as awareness centre representatives, and education, and law enforcement. These experts can provide guidance on best practices, legal frameworks, and the latest research findings.

Education and Skill-building: Use the consultation process as an opportunity to educate young people about online safety practices and equip them with the necessary skills to navigate digital spaces safely. Provide resources, training, and support to help them become advocates for online safety within their communities.

Sustainability and Follow-up: Establish mechanisms for ongoing engagement beyond the initial consultation phase. This could involve setting up youth advisory boards, organising regular check-ins, or creating online platforms for continued dialogue and collaboration.

BIK+ index 2024: Malta

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

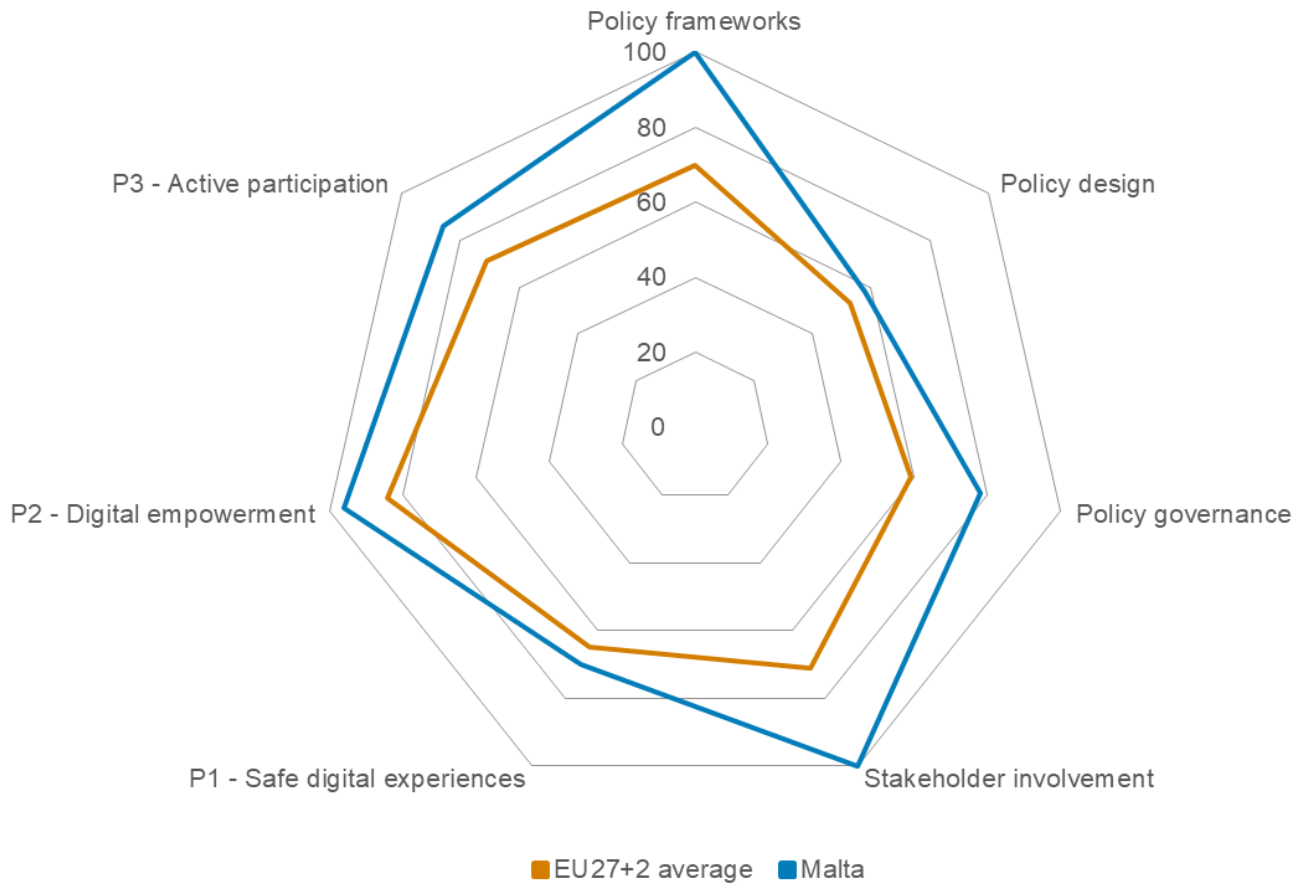


Figure 1: BIK+ index 2024: Malta - EU27+2 average comparison

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