

Protocol for targeted consultations on how to make *Europe's Digital Decade* fit for children and young people

1. Background information

Overall objective of the targeted consultations

From May to October 2021, European Schoolnet will consult – on behalf of the European Commission – children, young people, parents, carers and educators from across the European Union on the priorities they see to promote, protect, respect and fulfil children rights in a digital world. This consultation process is organised as part of the www.betterinternetforkids.eu initiative in partnership with the Insafe network of European Safer Internet Centres.

European Schoolnet has developed this protocol in preparation for Phase 1 of the consultation. From May to July 2021, the Insafe network of European Safer Internet Centres and a number of other child rights organisations will run a series of consultation sessions with the following groups of children and young people:

- Children (<12) and adolescents (12-18) from across the European Union as they are being consulted by national Safer Internet Centres.
- Additional groups of children and young people in vulnerable and marginalised situations, in particular:
 - Children with disabilities
 - Migrant/Roma/refugee children
 - Children in care
 - LGBTQ+ children
 - Children living in poverty

The main objective of these targeted consultation sessions is to get a better understanding of how the digital world impacts (the rights of) children and young people, what they themselves view as key opportunities and challenges, and the expectations they may have for policy makers. A BIK Youth Advisory Group is actively involved in different stages of the consultation process.

Based on findings from the Phase 1 consultations, a report will be written summarising key messages from children and young people for EU policy makers, in particular the European Commission. This will feed into a set of digital principles and rights for an interinstitutional declaration between the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council and an updated Better Internet for Kids Strategy to be adopted in 2022.

More information is available at www.betterinternetforkids.eu/digitaldecade.

Methodology

The methodology for the Phase 1 targeted consultations is child-centred and rights-based and has been informed by a variety of existing benchmarks for meaningful child

participation, including recent international and EU experiences with consulting children and young people about key issues, opportunities and priorities for their rights in the digital age.¹

More specifically, the current protocol builds upon the following set of methodological principles:

	Principle	Guidelines/requirements
BPG1	Transparent and Informative	Children should be provided with all relevant information and offered adequate support.
BPG2	Voluntary	Children should be informed about their right not to participate, sign a consent form, be able to withdraw consent at any time.
BPG3	Child-centred, Age-appropriate, Child-friendly	The working methods, the means of expression children can choose from, the format of the consultations should be adapted to the participating children's capacities.
BPG4	Respectful	Children's views should be treated with respect and they should be given opportunities to initiate their own ideas and activities.
BPG5	Relevant	Children should be asked to participate in relation to issues that are of real relevance to their lives. There should be room for them to highlight and address the issues that they themselves identify as relevant and important.
BPG6	Non-discriminatory, Inclusive	Participation must be inclusive, and all children should be treated equally.
BPG7	Training & support	Train facilitators of the consultations (e.g. information package, online conferences where they can ask questions, provide tips on how to facilitate sessions).
BPG8	Safe & sensitive to risk	Facilitators should create a safe and relaxed environment in which children can choose to speak or not and which supports their well-being.
BPG9	Accountable	A commitment to follow-up and evaluation is essential. Children must be informed about how their views have been considered and used, and should be given the opportunity to participate in follow-up processes or activities.

To ensure the quality of data generated, all facilitators will have to comply with the minimum

¹ These initiatives and experiences have been mapped and integrated into a best-practice guideline document *Children's rights in the digital environment: Moving from theory to practice*.

requirements set out in this protocol.² They will equally receive a more elaborate information package alongside including a flyer and a number of activity and reporting templates. A one-time webinar with facilitators will also be organised to accompany the protocol and information package. This session will be recorded and used to inform other facilitators about the process.

2. Protocol for the Phase 1 targeted consultations

The current protocol has been organised around a number of predefined steps. To be able to contribute to the Phase 1 consultation process, all facilitators need to go through *Step 1* to *Step 6* in the proposed order. The table below includes an indication of the minimum amount of time to be spent on each of these steps. Facilitators are warmly encouraged to exceed these minimum time indications so as to be able to gather more in-depth input and feedback.

For each of these steps, activity templates have been prepared in all EU languages with a full overview available in **Annex 3 – Activity sheets**. We have designed all templates in an editable format so they can be used both in an offline or in an online meeting setting, depending on what is possible given current COVID-19 restrictions.

As part of *Step 7*, all facilitators will have to submit a report to European Schoolnet within two weeks after the consultation session has taken place, using the reporting template available in **Annex 4 – Reporting template**. While consultation sessions should take place in the participant's own language, summary reports must be completed in English.

Nr	What?	Minimum requirement?
Step 1	Informing and sensitising	1 week before session
Step 2	Start of the consultation session	5 min
Step 3	Children and young people's digital media use	10 min
Step 4	Children and young people's views on online opportunities and risks	30 min
Step 5	How to make the digital world a better place?	20 min
Step 6	End of the consultation session	5 min
Step 7	Data collection/submission by the facilitator through reporting template	To be submitted max 2 weeks after the consultation session

² Please note, the current protocol has primarily been designed for adolescents (12-18). Facilitators who will consult children (<12) or who will work with the additional groups of children and young people in vulnerable and marginalised situations will receive complementary guidance, based on the specific characteristics of the groups they are working with.

Step 1: Informing and sensitising (one week before the consultation session)

Objectives

The main objective of *Step 1* is to provide children and young people with sufficient background information about the targeted consultation session.

Step 1 will encourage children and young people to start thinking in advance about their day-to-day online media experiences, reflecting on both positive and negative aspects. As such, they will start developing their views on what they like in the digital world and which changes they would like to see. This will allow the facilitator to build upon participants' pre-existing knowledge, views and experiences while motivating them to participate more actively.

At the same time, *Step 1* will ensure that participants receive all relevant information from an ethical point of view. This includes more detail on:

- How to give informed consent and their right not to participate in the consultation session.
- The scope of their participation and the expected outcomes – how their views will be considered and by whom; what the roles and responsibilities will be of those involved; how participants will receive feedback.
- How their data will be processed and for what purpose.
- Who they can contact if they have any questions about the consultation process making it clear that questions can be raised both before and after the session has taken place.
- Who they can talk to about any concerns they may have in relation to the consultation session or topics raised, while encouraging them to get support from someone they trust if needed.

How will participants be informed?

At least one week prior to the consultation session, all children and young people should receive from the facilitator the **Annex 1 – Flyer** which has been developed in a child-friendly language, including all relevant background information about the consultation process.

In addition, all participants and a parent/carer should be asked to complete and return a consent form in line with the consent form templates which are provided in **Annex 2 – Consent forms**.

Please note! European Schoolnet has designed this targeted consultation process in such a way that the collection, processing and transfer of personal data is limited as much as possible.

More specifically:

- Consent forms should be collected and stored by the facilitator at local/national level for a limited time period. After this time, forms should be securely disposed of (as relevant to their format). While we provide model consent form templates in Annex 2, facilitators may wish to tailor or adjust these templates according to established child or data protection policies and practices they may already have in their respective organisations.

- Facilitators should refrain from collecting and processing personal data as part of the consultation process beyond what is required for the specific purpose outlined in the information package.
- Facilitators should refrain from sharing with European Schoolnet any personal data from children or young people who participate in the consultation session. In this sense, each facilitator will be both the controller and processor of personal data which may be collected.
- In a later stage, European Schoolnet may wish to reach out to participants to more actively involve them in the Phase 2 campaign or to invite them to the 2021 BIK Youth Panel and Safer Internet Forum. If so, this contact will be newly established via the facilitator and additional consent will be obtained by European Schoolnet if needed. Importantly, no direct connection will be made with results from the Phase 1 consultation process to avoid undue exposure to personal or sensitive data from participants.

Activity 1

One week beforehand, the facilitator will also instruct participants to keep a short diary of their online activities which they should bring to the consultation session, following the template included in **Annex 3 – Activity sheets (Activity 1)**. This will help children and young people to start reflecting on their personal online media experiences. This should also enable them to express their views during the consultation session in a more considered manner. The diary will be used as an icebreaker activity at the start of the consultation session and serve to initiate the dialogue among the participants, in their own words.

Suggested wording for the facilitator when sharing the flyer, the consent forms and the Activity 1 sheet:

Next week, you will have the opportunity to take part in a consultation activity organised on behalf of the European Commission.

This is your chance to have your say on the things that matter to you about being online. We're talking to children and young people just like you, right across Europe, to gather views and feedback on how you use the internet.

During a group session, we will work with you to listen to your stories and ideas. We'll ask you some questions, set some activities, and take notes on what you say. We especially want to know:

- The ways in which you use technology and what you do online.
- What you care about most when it comes to being online, but also which challenges or risks concern you.
- What could make the digital world a better place in the future.

There are no right or wrong answers, and this is not a test or experiment... we just want to find out what's important to you!

Anything you tell us will be kept private and safe – we won't share your personal details or use anything that you tell us to single you out. You don't have to answer any questions if you don't want to, and if you don't feel like talking, no problem! You can decide not to take part at any point.

To get prepared:

- We would like you to look at a flyer we have prepared.
- We would like you and a parent or carer to complete and return a consent form.
- We would like you to start working this week on a first warm-up activity. We have prepared a sheet for you to write down up to 10 activities you have done online this week! This can be things you've done on a computer, laptop, tablet or mobile phone. This can be at home, in school or anywhere else, alone or with friends or family. For example, you might have played games, watched videos or listened to music, connected with others or checked what they are doing, searched for information, or found inspiration online. You might have done many other things too! All of this is fine, and there are no wrong or right answers. Just think of the activities which stand out.

Important note for facilitators! If possible and appropriate, we encourage facilitators to collect and share with European Schoolnet (scans of) the completed Activity 1 sheets, which also include an (optional) drawing. When doing as such, facilitators should make sure not to share any personal data. They should also make sure that individual participants explicitly agree to this approach, as indicated in the activity sheet.

Step 2: Start of the consultation session (5 min)**Objectives**

As part of *Step 2*, the facilitator of the session will remind participants about the purpose of the consultation session and all relevant background information in line with the flyer they have received in advance. The facilitator will confirm whether the participants have read and understood the flyer, underlining once more that their participation is voluntary.

Suggested wording for the facilitator:

We are here to listen to your stories and ideas. There are no right or wrong answers. This is not a test or an experiment – we really just want to hear your views, whatever they are. We also expect you to be respectful of each other and of what your peers are saying today.

The European Commission needs your help! The internet is an exciting place for children and young people, but you might not be happy with everything that happens online. This is your chance to explain to us what kind of changes you would like to see. What can policy makers do to better support or protect children and young people online? How can we make sure everyone is playing their part in making the digital world a better place?

Your ideas and opinions will help policy makers to identify key opportunities, challenges and areas for improvements. You will be asked what needs to happen to make your digital life better. How can we make the digital world a better place for European children and young people?

If you don't feel like talking, no problem! You can also decide not to participate.

Before we go on, does anyone have any questions?

Step 3: Children and young people's digital media use (10 min)**Objectives**

The purpose of Step 3 is to get a better understanding of children and young people's everyday experiences of the digital world. Facilitators will start having a discussion with them in their own words, trying to create a safe and inclusive space for participants to actively participate.

Activity 2

As an icebreaker exercise, the session will start with an open-ended group discussion (with the whole group together) based on Activity 1 (the diary of their online activities from Step 1). The facilitator of the sessions will ask participants to talk about their diaries.

Suggested wording for the facilitator:

Thank you all for keeping a diary of your online activities this week!

Today, we would like to start by discussing together how you all are using the internet and digital media in your everyday life. Therefore, we have prepared a number of short questions to discuss with the whole group:

- *What kind of activities did you write down in your diaries?*
- *How often do you go online? Where? For how long?*
- *How do you usually get online (e.g., do you use a computer, mobile phone, tablet, etc.)?*
- *Why do you typically go online? Do you sometimes try to disconnect instead?*
- *Do you sometimes have any difficulty getting online? Why?*
- *Was there anything you liked or didn't like? Perhaps something interesting happened which you'd like to share?*
- *Did someone talk with you about the things you do online? Perhaps a parent or someone in your family? A teacher in school? Anyone else?*

Important note for facilitators!

- All facilitators will be asked to provide a brief summary of main answers/themes coming out of this activity in the reporting template. More information on how to report is available in Step 7.
- If possible and appropriate, we encourage facilitators to collect and share with European Schoolnet (scans of) the completed Activity 1 sheets, which also include an (optional) drawing, as mentioned under Step 1.

Step 4: Children and young people's views on online opportunities and risks (30 min)

Objectives

In Step 4, participants will be prompted to develop and express their views about what they see as key opportunities and risks in the digital world. This will help to gain insight into the priorities children and young people see for policy making in this space.

Activity 3 (15 min)

In the previous step we looked at children and young people's everyday digital media use. Now, we will discuss a list of online opportunities as previously identified in international research. Participants will be able to add items to this list. Participants are then asked to indicate which benefits or opportunities for participation they find most important.

For Step 4 and 5, facilitators will have to split the group in smaller teams of 3 or 4. This will help to make sure everyone feels comfortable to participate in the debate. For each activity, a separate activity sheet is available in **Annex 3 – Activity sheets (Activity 3, 4 and 5)**.

Suggested wording for the facilitator:

Now that we know a little bit more about the activities you do online, we'd like to know what you care about most when it comes to being online. Looking at the table below, are there any online activities which are missing? Which activities do you care most about? What makes you happy online? What would you miss if you could no longer do it?

First, read the suggestions and add to the table (using the blank spaces) if you feel that anything is missing. Next, put a circle around the top five online activities that you care about the most.

Search for information	Play games	Post photos or comments	Listen to music
Watch videos	Communicate and connect with family or friends	Create my own video or music and share it	Do schoolwork
Get inspiration for activities, outfits, places to go...	Talk to people from places or backgrounds different from my own	Look for resources or events about my local neighbourhood	Look for information about work or study opportunities
Discuss political or social problems with other people	Create a website, blog or social media account for a project, a hobby...	Update my social media account(s) or check what my friends are doing	Look for breaking news or catch up on current affairs

Connect with others who share the same interests as me	Use instant messaging services (e.g. WhatsApp)	Get involved in campaigns or raise awareness of issues that I feel strongly about	Support my learning
Anything else?			

Important note for facilitators!

- Be sure to allow sufficient time for the groups to report to each other what they have discussed and agreed upon.
- You will be asked to provide a summary – for each of the smaller groups in your consultation session – of main answers/themes coming out of this activity in the reporting template. More information on how to report is available in Step 7.
- To improve the quality of reporting, we encourage you to collect the completed activity sheets per group for future reference. However, for Activity 3, 4 and 5, you will not be required to submit these raw materials to European Schoolnet.

Activity 4 (15 min)

This time, participants will discuss a list of risks as previously identified in international research (in particular ongoing work on the 4C's of online risk – content, contact, conduct, contract). Participants will again be able to add items to this list, and will be asked to prioritise the risks that they are most concerned about.

Suggested wording for the facilitator:

Let's think again about the things you do online. We'd also like to know which challenges or risks worry you the most about being online. Looking at the table below, is there anything that you feel is missing? What are the things which bother or upset you online? What makes children or young people like you most unhappy? This can be about the online content which is out there, the online contacts you have, how you and others behave online, how people may exploit you or your personal data, or any other issue.

First, read the suggestions and add to the table (using the blank spaces) if you feel that anything is missing. Next, put a circle around the top five online activities that concern you the most.

The content which is out there	The contacts you may have	How you and others behave	How people may exploit you
Violent or hateful content	Bullying	Too much time spent online	Unwanted ads
Sexual content	Harassment or stalking	Promotion of self-harm	Personal data being collected without you being aware
Everyone looks perfect on social media (beautiful, happy, glamorous...)	Pressure to behave in a certain way	Pressure to share something intimate	Identity theft, scams or blackmail
Fake news and disinformation	Exclusion or fear of missing out	Gambling	Viruses and malware
Anything else?			

Important note for facilitators!

- Be sure to allow sufficient time for the groups to report to each other what they have discussed and agreed upon.
- You will be asked to provide a summary – for each of the smaller groups in your consultation session – of main answers/themes coming out of this activity in the reporting template. More information on how to report is available in Step 7.
- To improve the quality of reporting, we encourage you to collect the completed activity sheets per group for future reference. However, for Activity 3, 4 and 5, you will not be required to submit these raw materials to European Schoolnet.

Step 5: How to make the digital world a better place? (20 min)**Objectives**

In Step 5, participants will continue to work in smaller groups and will have an opportunity to explain to the European Commission – in their own words – what needs to happen to make the digital world a better place for European children and young people. This will help to further gain insight into the priorities children and young people see for policy making in this space. It will also help to collect their ideas on possible solutions and the role to be played by policy makers, industry, educators or any other relevant actors.

As previously mentioned, an activity sheet for Step 5 is available in **Annex 3 – Activity sheets (Activity 5)**.

Activity 5 (20 min)**Suggested wording for the facilitator:**

In this final activity, we'd like to hear your ideas on how to make the digital world a better place. Think one more time about the things you do online, and the opportunities and risks this brings. If you could change one thing about the digital world to make it a better place, what would you change and why?

To give you an idea, this can be about things like:

- **Access** – making sure all children and young people can go online.
- **Digital skills, literacy and education** – making sure children and young people learn how to participate in the digital world, in school or at home, by talking with teachers, family or friends.
- **Raising awareness** – making sure children and young people are aware of online opportunities and risks, and how to respond to them.
- **Protection** – making sure children and young people don't need to worry about risk or harm, with online platforms, services and content being safe and appropriate for their age.

These are some of the examples policy makers have put forward already. But we really want to hear from you about what you think needs to change and why! We understand this is not an easy question, so try to answer with three specific statements:

- A. Thinking about the many things which children and young people do online, YOU think the most important problem or area for improvement is...*
- B. YOU think this is important because...*
- C. YOU think EU policy makers can help to make the digital world a better place for children and young people by...*

Important note for facilitators!

- Be sure to allow sufficient time for the groups to report to each other what they have discussed and agreed upon.
- You will be asked to provide a summary – for each of the smaller groups in your consultation session – of main answers/themes coming out of this activity in the reporting template. More information on how to report is available in Step 7.

- To improve the quality of reporting, we encourage you to collect the completed activity sheets per group for future reference. However, for Activity 3, 4 and 5, you will not be required to submit these raw materials to European Schoolnet.

Step 6: End of the consultation session (5 min)**Objectives**

The main objective of Step 6 is to properly close the consultation session, thanking participants for their contribution, while reminding them how their input will feed into the ongoing policy making process.

Suggested wording for the facilitator:

Times up! Excellent work everyone.

We are now going to make sure that your messages reach the European Commission, so that they can take your views on how the internet can be improved into account. Based on your key messages and the messages of other groups of children and young people, we will write a report which will be sent to the European Commission. We will also make sure that a child-friendly version of this report will be available, so that you and your teachers and parents can see how your messages have been reported and summarised.

Facilitators can also ask children to evaluate the consultation process. Such insights could be used to inform existing practices of child participation in policy making. Facilitators may wish to do this in a written manner, so participants can give feedback in an anonymous manner.

Last but not least, facilitators should remind participants about:

- Who to contact if they have any questions about the consultation process. In the first instance, this should be the facilitator. This being said, facilitators should not hesitate to let participants know that they can also contact European Schoolnet at digitaldecade@betterinternetforkids.eu if they would like to get more detailed information.
- Who they can talk to about any concerns they may have in relation to the consultation session or topics raised, while encouraging them to get support from someone they trust if needed. This may also be a good opportunity to point to the national awareness centre or helpline (or any other similar counselling service) as a place where children and young people can get further help or guidance.

Suggested wording for the facilitator:

Before we close, some quick final questions out of interest:

- *Did you enjoy the consultation session?*
- *What did you like about it? Was there anything you didn't like? Was everything clear?*
- *If you would change anything in the consultation session, what would it be?*

If you have any further questions about the consultation, don't hesitate to contact me. If you want even more information, you can also get in touch with the people at European Schoolnet who are coordinating this process at European level. You will find more information about European Schoolnet on the flyer you have received.

Also, if you have any concerns about the things we talked about – or anything you encounter online in the future – make sure to reach out to a person you trust. You can also contact your national awareness centre or helpline who are there to give you support or advice whenever you need it.

Step 7: Data collection/submission by the facilitator through reporting template**Objectives**

As part of *Step 7*, facilitators will submit key results and outcomes from the targeted consultation sessions to European Schoolnet.

For this purpose:

- Facilitators should make notes during the consultation activity.
- To improve the quality of reporting, we strongly encourage facilitators to collect the completed activity templates per group for future reference.
- While we encourage facilitators to submit the completed sheets from Activity 1 (without any personal or sensitive data included), we do not expect you to submit any other raw materials to European Schoolnet, unless you feel that this will substantially improve the quality of reporting.
- After the workshop, the facilitator will have to summarise main answers/themes coming out of the various activities by completing the reporting template (**Annex 4 – Reporting template**) in **English**.
- Facilitators will need to submit these reports within two weeks following the consultation activity to digitaldecade@betterinternetforkids.eu.
- Once the report has been submitted, European Schoolnet may contact the facilitator for an online follow-up meeting to further discuss key findings and results from the consultation session.
- All reports need to be submitted by end of July 2021 at the very latest – if this is not possible, please contact European Schoolnet as soon as possible at digitaldecade@betterinternetforkids.eu.

European Schoolnet will start aggregating and analysing findings in July 2021 in preparation for a final targeted consultation report to be submitted to the European Commission by August 2021.

Important reminder for facilitators!

- When reporting, facilitators should refrain from sharing with European Schoolnet any personal data from children or young people who participate in the consultation session.