

Report on the proceedings of Safer Internet Forum 2023

(including annexes on the preparatory work of the SIF
Youth Advisory Group and BIK Youth Panel)

Further information, including the Forum booklet with full agenda and contributor biographies, presentations and session recordings (where available) can be found at www.betterinternetforkids.eu/sif.



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Safer Internet Forum 2023 was organised in a youth-led manner. We take this opportunity to thank the members of the SIF Youth Advisory Group, BIK Youth Panel and other youth contributors for their dedication and commitment to helping to create a safer and better internet for their peers, and young people across the globe.

We also take this opportunity to thank all speakers, panellists and video contributors for their input to the Forum, and all participants who contributed so fully to the discussions of the day both onsite and online.

In case of queries, please contact the Safer Internet Forum Secretariat at saferinternetforum@betterinternetforkids.eu.

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Overview

The **Safer Internet Forum (SIF)** is a key annual international conference in Europe where policymakers, researchers, law enforcement bodies, youth, parents and caregivers, teachers, NGOs, industry representatives, experts and other relevant actors come together to discuss the latest trends, opportunities, risks and solutions related to child online safety and making the internet a better place. This year's edition took place in a hybrid format in Brussels, Belgium and online on **Thursday, 23 November 2023** with a theme of ***Empowering YOUTH with skills for the Digital Decade***.

The event was organised in a youth-led manner, with 41 young people from 22 European countries playing an active role in planning, preparing and delivering the Forum through the Safer Internet Forum Youth Advisory Group (SIF YAG) and the BIK Youth Panel. More than 150 participants joined the event in person, with an additional 700 registering to participate online, jointly representing 93 countries across the globe.

The event aimed to allow participants to:

- keep informed of emerging trends and issues, especially as they relate to the rights of all children and young people to be protected, empowered and respected in the digital environment.
- be aware of the skills needed for young people to thrive in the increasingly digital world.
- facilitate knowledge, experience and good practice sharing, across generations, stakeholders, and geographic and cultural boundaries.
- identify opportunities to collaborate with others on new ideas, resources and projects.
- contribute to the implementation of the European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+) and ongoing policy work in this field.

The European Union has designated 2023 as the [European Year of Skills](#): a year which “*puts skills centre-stage*”, highlighting the critical importance of equipping people with the competences they need to succeed in an increasingly digitised world. This designation seeks to support the EU’s ambitious [Digital Decade plans for 80 per cent of all adults to have basic digital skills by 2030](#). The subsequent [European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade](#) set out a specific priority that “*Children and young people should be protected and empowered online*”. As part of this communication, the European institutions commit to “*providing opportunities to all children to acquire the necessary skills and competences to navigate the online environment actively, safely and make informed choices when online.*”

Furthermore, the [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#) is a major policy initiative put forward by the European Commission to better protect all children, to help them fulfil their rights and to place them right at the centre of EU policymaking. The [European strategy for a](#)

[better internet for kids](#) (also known as the BIK+ strategy) represents its digital arm and is built around three key pillars:

- **Safe digital experiences 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.
- **Digital empowerment** so all children, including those in situations of vulnerability, acquire the necessary skills and competences to make sound choices and express themselves in the online environment safely and responsibly.
- **Active participation, respecting children** by giving them a say in the digital environment, with more child-led activities to foster innovative and creative safe digital experiences.

Throughout 2023, we are increasingly seeing the impact of the Digital Services Act (DSA): a new set of European rules to make sure that all users, and especially children, young people and vulnerable users, are included and safe online. Moreover, the DSA seeks to ensure that all organisations that provide online platforms and services protect the rights of all users, limit risks, and stop the spread of harmful or illegal content. Alongside this, under the BIK+ strategy, a comprehensive EU Code of Conduct on age-appropriate design is being developed. This will build on the regulatory framework provided in the DSA and assist with its implementation to ensure the privacy, safety and security of young users online.

Within the framework of the European Year of Skills and these other policy provisions, this year's Safer Internet Forum specifically focused on pillars two and three of the BIK+ strategy, exploring **digital empowerment** and **active participation/respect** as it relates to children and young people. Throughout the day, participants heard from many young people and experts alike about the skills needed to thrive in today's online world, and the most effective way to foster digital skills. Discussions focused on mental health and well-being, new and emerging technologies such as the metaverse, immersive environments, and generative AI (artificial intelligence), and content creation. It also explored the whole range of stakeholders who can help to support skills development.

Please read on to discover more about the event. Further information, including session recordings and presentations (where available), can be found at www.betterinternetforkids.eu/sif.

Safer Internet Forum (SIF) 2023 was organised by European Schoolnet (EUN) on behalf of the European Commission in the framework of the EC's Better Internet for Kids (BIK) initiative, with funding provided by the [Digital Europe Programme \(DIGITAL\)](#). In case of queries, please contact the Safer Internet Forum Secretariat at saferinternetforum@betterinternetforkids.eu.

Opening videos and welcome address



To kick off the proceedings, June Lowery-Kingston (Head of Unit, Accessibility, Multilingualism & Safer Internet, DG CONNECT, European Commission) welcomed onsite and online participants and unveiled the Digital Services Act (DSA) booklet that provides an overview of the legislation and the implications for young people. The booklet is available in English, French and German, with other translations coming soon. The [booklet is available to view and download here](#).

June continued to express her delight, on behalf of the European Commission, of hosting this year's Safer Internet Forum (SIF) and wished everyone a fantastic and inspiring day. She also stressed the importance of the day being youth-led and gave the floor to Karl Hopwood (European Schoolnet (EUN)).

Karl welcomed all participants and remarked on how much had changed in the twelve months since the last Safer Internet Forum – the rise in the use of artificial intelligence (AI), the introduction of the Digital Services Act, the rebrand of Twitter to X, and the closing of Omegle. He reflected that the ever-changing online environment fits the theme of SIF 2023 well, with the need for skills to manage the changes.

Karl continued with some brief housekeeping notes and instructions for onsite participants, before introducing two SIF Youth Advisory Group members; Ruth (Austria) and Adrián (Spain).

Ruth and Adrián took to the stage and gave a brief overview of the key topics which were to form the focus of this year's SIF: the digital skills and competences needed to thrive online as a young person, and the important work of young influencers in spreading much-needed positive messages, and the responsibility of all stakeholders for fostering a better life online for children and young people in Europe and beyond.

After giving a brief outline of the day, Ruth and Adrián set the scene for a video that had been produced together with children and young people from across and beyond the European Union. In this video, the young people share their thoughts on what being online means to them, what they enjoy and what they are bothered by when going online, and what skills they deem important to navigate the online world safely. Furthermore, they comment on how they view the opportunities the internet holds for them, what could be improved, and how it can become a space that helps spread the word of people that often go unheard.

Here's what youth from around the world had to say:



(watch the video on YouTube at youtu.be/xpZ1WMf--rA)

The session then continued with two high level video addresses.

Video address by Commissioner Dubravka Šuica, Vice-President for Democracy and Demography

In this video address, Commissioner Šuica highlighted the opportunities and risks that being online presented to youth. She highlighted significant risks such as online bullying (affecting around one in three young people) and exposure to disturbing content. She also stressed the need for a child rights-based approach, providing access and protection to youth, as well as giving them an active role in contributing to solutions to tackling the issues they face. Commissioner Šuica emphasised that the Safer Internet Forum is a good example of active youth participation in creating a better internet for kids. Peer-to-peer approaches are also key, and she referenced the [470 events involving youth that took place across the network of European Safer Internet Centres \(SICs\) during 2022](#).

Commissioner Šuica highlighted other ways that youth are being involved, including the development of the code of conduct on age-appropriate design and involvement in the [European Children's Participation Platform](#). She expressed her thanks to the [network of Safer Internet Centres](#) and the [Better Internet for Kids \(BIK\) platform](#), which collectively

reach 30 million people each year. She also thanked the Insafe and INHOPE networks of helplines and hotlines.

The address ended with Commissioner Šuica stressing the need for collaboration across sectors, generations and national borders, with the need for safety by design being a collective responsibility.

Watch the full content of Commissioner Šuica's video address here:



*Video address by Commissioner Dubravka Šuica, Vice-President for Democracy and Demography
(watch the video on YouTube at youtu.be/X2RxiVJDbx5)*

Video address by Commissioner Thierry Breton, Commissioner for the Internal Market

Commissioner Breton began his video address by welcoming all participants and by expressing the importance of 2023 for online safety. He cited the compliance of the 19 very large online platforms and search engines (VLOPs and VLOSEs respectively) in August 2023 to the Digital Service Act, which brought changes such as greater safety of minors, the stopping of targeted advertising towards minors, changes in content algorithms, the ability to opt-out of profiling, and new reporting routes. The ability to issue fines for non-compliance (up to 6 per cent of global turnover) was also highlighted.

Commissioner Breton stressed the importance of making the rules work to create meaningful change. This includes creating awareness for all, bringing understanding of the DSA to schools, protecting and empowering youth, and developing the digital skills needed for all online users to be competent and critical thinkers. He also cited that two-thirds of European citizens want more digital training, and that digital skills aid education and career development as well as safety, so it is apt that 2023 is the European Year of Skills.

He closed the address by thanking Safer Internet Centres across Europe for the important work that they do and imploring everyone to work together across countries and generations. Commissioner Breton wished everyone an inspiring conference!

Watch the full content of Commissioner Breton's video address here:



Video address by Commissioner Thierry Breton, Commissioner for the Internal Market
(watch the video on YouTube at youtu.be/KrsvTshuAeA)

A graphic illustrator was present throughout the Forum recording the content of the various sessions; these are provided throughout this report:



Keynote session: Life online – the skills and competences needed to thrive



Ruth and Adrián introduced this year’s keynote speaker, Professor Amanda Third from Western Sydney University, Australia.

Professor Third began by welcoming all participants and acknowledging the active role of young people in the Safer Internet Forum. She also offered acknowledgement of the traditional custodians of her native land, as per Australian tradition. She then continued by posing the question, “*What skills do young people need?*”. She highlighted that, as part of the Digital Decade and the continuing work on the EU Rights of the Child, we should take the lead from children and young people themselves. She explained that her work has involved talking to youth all over the world and that there are five key skills/capacities that have arisen from this work. The [Young and Resilient Research Centre at Western Sydney University](#) has worked with over 6,000 children across 79 countries and over 130 collaborating organisations to identify these skills.

She continued by explaining why these skills are important, referencing the [Ladder of Digital Participation from EU Kids Online/Global Kids Online](#) and how activities and skills change as children move up the ladder. Starting at ages 9-12, entry-level skills are required to complement online activities such as listening to music, watching videos and playing games. From ages 13-14, social activities develop, as does more active use of online platforms for schoolwork. At ages 15-17, the internet is used more heavily in following news, for work and study, and pursuing interests. The more skills/activities, the greater the opportunities. However, very few young people reach the top of the ladder to develop higher-order skills such as creative, evaluative, and civic skills. Professor Third also cited findings from EU Kids Online that more active online users are more exposed to risk, but not necessarily to greater harm.

The keynote continued by exploring how to nurture these skills, using findings from [Project Rokit](#) and the [Office of the e-Safety Commissioner \(Australia\)](#) through qualitative workshops with 50 children aged 10-18. The key findings were that online safety education often misses the mark by focusing on issues and ‘extreme’ risks rather than the risks that tend to worry youth, such as those involving social harm (for example, friendship issues). Another finding was that education continues to separate the offline and online domains rather than teaching skills to manage harms across both. Youth also remarked that they were often taught technical skills, but ‘softer’ skills such as developing social and emotional intelligence, or understanding values, were also wanted.

Professor Third highlighted that traditional online safety teaching suggests that there is an intergenerational misunderstanding where adults ‘don’t get it’. She cited a classic example of the advice: ‘don’t interact with strangers’, which sits at odds with the normal online experiences of youth. She shared a model for traditional online safety teaching and suggested that this needed to be flipped to decentre the extreme risks and address lower-level issues. The approach to skills should also focus on digital capacities over technical abilities. She then outlined the five key skills/capacities to develop in youth:

1. **Effective communication** – including listening and attention skills.
2. **Robust and respectful relationships** – knowing how to navigate challenges and give/receive support.
3. **Establishing and maintaining boundaries.**
4. **Thinking critically** – being able to assess and evaluate.
5. **To be resilient** – face challenges with confidence and bravery, and overcome adversity for growth.

Minimising the risks and maximising the opportunities is crucial, and protection, participation, and empowerment are core to this approach.

Professor Third suggested that trusted adults (including policymakers) need to support youth by providing time to participate and develop online skills – disconnecting from being online can prevent youth from practising and developing their skills. Adults also need to be encouraging and recognise the benefits/values that online experiences bring to youth. Trust needs to be built between youth and adults, including trust in governments, online platforms, and others. Finally, an approach combining hope, empathy, and action is also important: listening, reflecting, and responding to the concerns of youth, moving beyond a mindset of fear while still staying focused on child safety, and moving from a protective approach to a participative one.

The concept of a ‘holding space’, first put forward by psychologist Donald Winnicott in 1966, was also explored. In a mother-child relationship, as part of attachment theory, a mother guarantees a safe environment in the form of a ‘holding space’ – being in close physical proximity to a child. In this concept, the child is able to venture away from this space but always look back to it for reassurance, and in turn move further away from the holding space as they learn to take risks and explore. The holding space helps create flexible boundaries that move with the child as they develop.

Professor Third highlighted this concept as a good metaphor for online safety, where a safe 'holding space' hasn't existed in the past. However, regulations such as the DSA bring more certainty and guarantee that online environments will rule out the worst harms and give youth greater agency to help them flourish. It is important for both formal and informal education to support this message.

The use of tech can facilitate endless creation but also allows users to imagine themselves in different ways. In the same way that reading a newspaper allows readers to imagine their role as a citizen in their nation, technology can enable children to be members of a global political constituency; to rally, call for change, and have a voice for causes. They can reinvent a world that needs reinventing. Professor Third concluded that how to do this presents the perfect challenge for everyone gathered at Safer Internet Forum 2023.

Professor Third thanked the audience and then took several questions:

Question: The Ladder of Digital Participation suggests that digital skill development starts around age 9, but surely younger children also develop skills?

Response: Professor Third acknowledged that digital skill development does occur in younger children, even very young children, and that she was merely citing the EU Kids Online model as an example. She stressed that it is critical to consider skill development for early childhood and more understanding of technology use in younger years across countries is needed.

Question: A Belgian delegate highlighted the trend in Belgium where the typical age for getting a smartphone has changed from age 12 (in 2018) to around age 8 today. He asked why developmental psychologists don't have an answer for this.

Response: Professor Third explained that online safety education often tries to retrofit strategies to meet changing technology habits, whereas futureproofing strategies is more important. She also highlighted the importance of developing 'softer' skills in children and young people, such as establishing values and being a 'good' person online.

[Access the PPT presentation of the session here.](#)

Watch the [full recording of the keynote presentation here](#) (timestamp 00:18:31 to 00:54:27):

Plenary panel discussion



The first plenary panel discussion of the day was introduced by members of the SIF Youth Advisory Panel, Selma (Czech Republic) and Ingeborg (Norway). They welcomed attendees and introduced the panellists:

- Renate Nikolay, Deputy Director General, DG CONNECT, European Commission
- Lígia Azevedo, Ministry of Education, Portugal
- Ann Becker, Video Games Europe

Each panellist was asked to introduce themselves and to highlight one priority and one challenge pertinent to their work.

Renate Nikolay explained that she is part of the team overseeing the BIK+ strategy. She drew attention to the Digital Services Act (DSA) and Digital Markets Act (DMA) as key legislation that offers promises for fairness, safety and protection for minors. She explained that a challenge is to ensure that these legislative acts make a real difference on the ground. She cited several examples of changes that have already come into effect, such as the changing of algorithms on very large online platforms, the ability for minors to opt out of data profiling, and the increased focus on the privacy of minors. Renate also explained that there were greater requests for information from these platforms, along with the requirement of risk assessments to demonstrate how they are protecting younger users. She stressed that it is vital to keep the momentum in this area.

Lígia Azevedo, from the Ministry of Education in Portugal (part of the Portuguese Safer Internet Centre), identified the digital transition plans for schools in Portugal as a key focus. This introduced laptops for all students, along with digital action plans for schools to move forward, including the extension of digital competence training for teachers. She highlighted that this initiative provided equal opportunity for all learners in Portugal, and would help prepare children for the digital world. Lígia explained that the challenges came from

protecting vulnerable youth, and ensuring that all children and young people were using technology in a safe and critical, but also healthy, way.

Ann Becker explained the role of Video Games Europe, to represent trade associations and members that include large European video game companies. She also highlighted the Digital Services Act as a priority for the videogame industry. Ann highlighted an end-of-year awareness campaign, [Seize the Controls](#), which supports parents and carers to understand and use the tools available to help manage their child's use and experience of video games. The campaign launches in December 2023.

Renate was asked how DG CONNECT is fostering digital skills in youth. She drew attention to work in empowering education ministers to agree on the skills and training required, and taking actions within the BIK+ and Digital Decade initiatives. She also highlighted digital skills as a key political item that is used to stimulate debate among the Member States, and encourage the sharing of best practices. Connectivity and skills have been identified as key challenges, and educating teachers to empower youth and raise awareness is also key.

Lígia was asked if the education system in Portugal is ready to support children, and what the national priorities are in this area. She explained that the systems are complex and that there are new challenges. Portugal is making a long-term investment in digital; through initiatives such as awareness campaigns, teacher training, and Digital Citizenship education. The main priority is for youth to be safe and healthy in the digital environment. To achieve this, the Ministry has worked with entities that provide support in order to raise awareness, with industry to develop tools, and with academia to research innovative practices and stimulate national debate.

Ann was asked what skills youth need to gain, and how these can be nurtured. She reminded the audience that 2023 is the European Year of Skills, and that video games are a viable way to learn through play. Skills that can be learned in this way include social, language, decision-making, and emotional skills. Ann highlighted how the use of games in schools can aid literacy, numeracy, and concept-based learning. They can also act as socially inclusive tools in schools to aid error identification, learning of rules, and the development of individual learning pathways.

Ann stressed that nurturing teachers' skills was crucial, and highlighted the continued running and success of the [Games in Schools MOOC](#) (massive open online course) which encourages teachers to explore the use of games in education through collaboration and teamwork. Thousands of teachers have taken the MOOC, which demonstrates the need to be relevant in the classroom. Ann also signposted attendees to the updated [Games in Schools handbook](#).

The following question was then posed to Renate:

'Will the DSA be a game changer for skills? How will citizens be made aware?'

Renate responded that it will, indeed, be a game-changer. She explained that there is regular interaction with the nineteen very large online platforms and search engines (VLOPs and VLOSEs) (with 45 million+ active users per month) – through risk assessments, transparency, access to data by researchers, and regular reporting on systemic risks such as the impact on mental health.

She felt that solutions were becoming more concrete and that there was a broader ecosystem to raise awareness of rights and obligations. This includes the development of further research, but also active engagement from other key stakeholders. Renate pointed to the [Digital Services Act Stakeholder Event](#) held in June 2023 which was attended by online platforms alongside NGOs, trusted flaggers, and law enforcement. The role of critical media and journalism also remains an important one.

Lígia was asked about the role of education in the DSA and how to address issues. She highlighted important initiatives such as the [BIK+ strategy](#), the [Insafe network of Safer Internet Centres](#), and the [INHOPE network of hotlines](#). She explained that there is a discussion with national entities in Portugal on the benefits of the DSA, alongside the development of an information campaign in schools to raise awareness among teachers and students.

The final question was put to Ann as to how the DSA will change the video game industry, and what the outcomes for youth might be as a result. She explained that the same obligations for platforms also apply to video game services, in particular the need to publish transparency reports. She highlighted that the DSA also applies to copyright issues, and that standards introduced in 2007 already help the video game industry to comply in this area. Ann also highlighted how the [PEGI code of conduct](#) signatories (including the major developers) provide tools and systems to protect minors.

Ann also mentioned how she had asked her ten-year-old daughter why she loves video games. Her daughter said it allowed her to discover new worlds, that these worlds can be beautiful, and that games can allow her to inhabit the role of a character.

Ann also pointed to an [Ipsos survey on multiplayer games](#) that found around 70 per cent of children don't play multiplayer games, that many children have a high awareness and good experience of using reporting tools in-game, but that they also wish to learn other strategies to improve resilience. Another key finding was the need for these tools to be accessible.

Watch the [full recording of the discussion here](#) (timestamp 00:54:28 to 01:26:00).



Renate Nikolay (DG CONNECT, European Commission), Ligia Azevedo (Ministry of Education, Portugal) and Ann Becker (Video Games Europe) took part in a plenary panel discussion at Safer Internet Forum 2023 (watch the video on YouTube at youtu.be/ojny9C-mDsg)



Panel discussion: Life online – the voices of young influencers



A panel discussion session around how young people can make a difference in the digital world was introduced by BIK Youth Advisory Group members Emily (Cyprus) and Guilherme (Portugal). The discussion involved the following panellists:

- Kate Grant, Model, Ireland
- Deirdre Grant, Mother of Kate Grant, Ireland
- Tereza Kráčmarová, Fakescape Association, Czech Republic
- Bianca Adam, Content creator, Romania

Kate began the panel discussion by introducing herself. She is 25 years old and the first model in Ireland with Down Syndrome. She wants to change society's preconceptions around models and bring diversity and inclusion to the modelling world. She believes social media helped change views and give worth to people. She explained that her mother posted a formal photo of her online and it went viral. As a result, she was invited to attend a fashion show and walk the catwalk during London Fashion Week.

Kate explained that it is her mission to change the thoughts of people with disability about what they can or cannot do. She suggested that people 'should not judge a book by its cover', and she sees herself as giving a voice to those who don't have a voice because they have the same hopes, dreams and aspirations as everyone else. She concluded by stating that 'different is beautiful, not less'.

Tereza was the next panellist to introduce herself – her work involves teaching media literacy, cyber security and digital citizenship via gamification in schools. Resources are provided in Czech, English, Polish and Slovak, including free card games to download and print for use in the classroom. These include topics such as tackling mis- and disinformation on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok.

Bianca, often known as 'Tequila' online, has been creating content for 10 years on YouTube and other platforms. She has tested different content types over the years and puts audience well-being at the centre of her work. She described some of her most popular content, such as object/treasure hunts, where two groups of members of the public compete to find five random objects. Other content includes challenges where teams must travel from Bucharest to another city by hitchhiking and completing challenges. Bianca explained that some content involves a production team of around 20 people.

She also explained how some content explores therapy and self-development. She shares with her audience how she continues to grow as a person, and she is currently studying psychology at university in order to better understand her audience. Bianca also created the 'How I cured my anxiety' documentary and wants to support her audience to be safe online. She remarked about how short-form video on social media can lead to users consuming a lot of content for a long time. She recommends to her followers that they reduce their time on scrolling media, take care with who they follow, and reflect on whether they feel fulfilled or drained by the content they consume. Bianca also encourages her audience to explore hobbies and interests away from technology, and to use the internet to inspire rather than lose yourself.

Following on from this, Kate and her mother Deirdre discussed the challenges that Kate faced online. Deirdre talked about her experiences as a parent of four (now adult) children and the desire to raise them to meet their full potential. She explained that, when Kate was born, society placed little worth in people with learning difficulties. Kate is proof of how belief, support and encouragement can help someone meet their potential.

Deirdre continued by explaining she faced a steep learning curve in understanding social media in order to promote Kate and manage the public aspect of Kate's presence online. She cited the positive opportunities such as the global awareness of what individuals with learning difficulties can achieve, and how Kate has been a strong advocate of this. However, she also explained that the family had to regularly check Kate's feeds and messages for hate and hackers. Deirdre also had to refrain from reacting as a parent, and instead tried to shield Kate from these experiences as far as possible and, instead, encourage positive experiences.

Kate and Deirdre were asked if vulnerable people face difficulties online. Deirdre explained that it is harder for people with learning difficulties or physical disabilities to navigate social media, though some services do provide accessibility tools. It is also important to teach youth to treat platforms with respect and to be aware of the risks.

Tereza was asked what needs to be done to help young people to be safe online. She believes that influencers are important role models who need to consider the influence they have on young people, and ensure they share reliable information through their content, particularly if they include product placement. She highlighted the important role of parents/carers to talk with children and to build trust and a safe space for young people to

come to them with any issues. They should also help children with how to evaluate online information and not judge them for believing things that aren't true.

Tereza further explained that teachers find it hard to teach media literacy due to the frequent changes online, but that they can still listen to young people's experiences and learn from them. She also explained that governments and the European Commission also play an important role by communicating about these issues clearly, putting a focus on young people and providing trustworthy sources for information.

Bianca was asked what role influencers play in empowering young people to be responsible online citizens. She responded by saying that influencers must be aware of their responsibilities. They must research the topics they cover in their content and recognise that their audience may try to be like them, so portraying the best version of themselves is important. They must show perseverance and adaptability, and also be willing to develop themselves. She also explained that they must 'hate manage' due to the negative comments and reactions they may receive. Bianca concluded by highlighting the importance of support lines for anyone being bullied online, and that we have to work for a society of happy and safe people.

Watch the [full recording of the discussion here](#) (timestamp 01:26:12 to 01:57:13).



A panel discussion allowed young influencers to share their experiences of life online (watch the video on YouTube at youtu.be/qHrIvrSuZSY)

SAFER INTERNET FORUM 23 NOVEMBER 2023

PANEL DISCUSSION
Life Online - The Voices of Young Influencers

EMPOWERING YOUTH WITH SKILLS FOR THE DIGITAL DECADE

FAKE SCAPE BECAUSE THERE IS A LOT OF FALSE INFORMATION ONLINE

WE CAN DO THIS & SHOULD NOT BE TREATED DIFFERENTLY

I BRING AWARENESS TO INCLUSION IN THE MODELLING WORLD

CHALLENGES

HOW TO CURE MY ANXIETY

WELL-BEING

HELP MY AUDIENCE WITH THEIR WELL-BEING

INCREASED NEED OF CONTENT CONSUMPTION

CLEAN YOUR FEED IF YOU FEEL DRAINED

I'M A MOM, SO I NEEDED TO LEARN

BELIEVE, SUPPORT, ENCOURAGEMENT WE DO LOOK AFTER HER SOCIAL MEDIA

EMILY

KATE

TEREZA

BIANCA

WILLIAMI

KATE'S MOM, DECIDE

European Commission

BY JUNE 14, 2023 @ 10:00 AM GMT+01:00

Interactive youth session: Being a teen online in 2023

This session began with all members of the BIK Youth Panel assembled on the stage. They introduced the session by explaining that the internet is a universal platform but that it is sometimes hard to understand each other, and that people sometimes exist in bubbles online.

They introduced their slogan: *Empower, Inspire, Transform*, and explained how the session would cover how to behave online but also explore some solutions to these issues. There were explored through performances/sketches for each of the three words in the slogan, each lasting around five minutes. In-person attendees were then asked to react to the situations depicted by using emoji signs provided on their tables.

The first performance covered cyberbullying and explored the impact of a friend posting a photo of themselves with another friend online. Comments about the photo started out positive but then quickly turned negative. One of the friends became upset and anxious, whereas the other friend was also affected but reached out to offer help and support. The sketch highlighted the power of words online; positive words can lift spirits; negative words can bring people down.

The second sketch explored how the internet inspires. It portrayed how young people may draw inspiration from others who post on social media. The examples portrayed a young person scammed by content advertising an energy drink to increase strength, and a positive influencer who reviews books in order to encourage young people to read them and be inspired.

The third performance explored the theme of transform and how an individual can transform the experiences of a group by their actions. Two members of the youth panel shared a number of statistics from EU Kids Online 2020, and asked members of the in-person audience to stand up to help represent those figures.

They shared the following statistics:

- 14 per cent of 9-16-year-olds have been cyberbullied.
- 77 per cent of 15-16-year-olds use social media every day.
- 10 per cent of 12-16-year-olds feel they cannot control their use of the internet.
- 41 per cent of 12-16-year-olds have experience hateful online content.
- 22 per cent of 12-16-year-olds have received sexual messages.
- 42 per cent of 10-19-year-olds in Austria have spent money within online games.

The session then moved on to table discussions with in-person attendees.

[Access the PPT presentation from the interactive youth session here.](#)

Watch the [recording of the BIK Youth Panel's performances](#) (timestamp 01:57:32 to 02:27:16).



BIK Youth Panel members encouraged peers to use digital technologies to Empower, Inspire, Transform (watch the video on YouTube at youtu.be/1dMpSQfZX5s)



Deep dive session 1: What are the skills that children and young people need to thrive online?

This first deep dive session, introduced by SIF YAG members Marianna (Greece) and Karl (Ireland), provided an opportunity for participants to identify and discuss the skills that children and young people need to have in order to have safe and healthy online experiences. Discussions focused on the following topics:

- Mental health and well-being.
- The metaverse and immersive environments.
- Generative AI (artificial intelligence).
- Girls and ICT careers.
- Content creation.
- Civic participation.

Both onsite and online participants heard from several experts (via a video presentation for onsite participants, and via a panel discussion for online participants) who shared their thoughts on the skills that children and young people need in order to be able to participate fully and safely in online life.



A video of expert opinions set the scene for the first set of deep dive discussions on the skills that children and young people need to thrive online (watch the video on YouTube at youtu.be/ZfBYE-qbdz4)

Onsite discussions

The onsite deep dive sessions took place as table discussions, which each table having a mix of stakeholder types present, including a BIK Youth representative. Key points were fed back in plenary format; a summary of the discussion follows:

Mental health and well-being

In relation to mental health and well-being, it has been noted that while being online can hold risks (such as becoming a victim of cyberbullying or getting addicted to scrolling apps),

at the same time it offers a range of opportunities. Outcomes from the deep-dive table discussion suggested that adults needed to develop better digital skills and capacities. These have been deemed as critical in supporting their child when they are struggling with negative experiences they encounter online. In addition, and to facilitate improvement of online safety education, parents and caregivers need to better inform educators on the topics and themes which their children care about to make lessons more relatable for students more generally.

The metaverse and immersive environments

Regarding the metaverse and immersive environments, it was noted that all risks that exist on the internet presently would exist in the metaverse too (for example, risks associated with becoming a victim of catfishing). Beyond that, the discussion brought to the fore that some risks seemed specific to the metaverse, where, for instance, skills and capacities to better identify what is real and what is not would become increasingly important. The discussions concluded that everyone navigating this new digital world would have the need for robust digital literacy and critical thinking skills to stay safe and empowered.

Generative AI

The deep-dive table discussion focusing on generative AI emphasised that, while this can certainly be a beneficial and productive technology, it is, at the same time, a risky one that lacks regulation. Overall, participants concluded, that with generative AI, the need for robust formal and informal (digital) education is indispensable.

Content creation

Participants focusing on the topic of content creation emphasised the opportunities that come with creating one's own content online, such as being able to express oneself, fostering artistic and technical skills, and so on, and noted that it can also help with fostering connections with like-minded people. While participants acknowledged the risks associated with having an online presence, such as feeling under pressure to maintain a certain image, they emphasised the skills that young people can hone when creating online content, such as increasing their digital literacy, creativity, critical thinking, and communications skills. Lastly, participants noted that parents and teachers should build better capacities in monitoring and guiding young people, alongside staying up-to-date on latest technological developments and improving their own privacy awareness.

Girls and ICT careers

In relation to the topic of girls and ICT careers, the deep-dive table discussion revolved around the still-existing notion that this type of career was not apt for girls and women. Participants noted that more must be done by industry to raise awareness and promote girls' confidence to follow more technical career pathways. The gaming sector was highlighted as a great first access point for girls getting into coding, for example. Policy approaches should also be encouraged to make this career pathway more attractive to girls and women.

Civic participation

The deep-dive table focusing on civic participation started their summary of what they discussed with the request to the plenary to raise their hand if they would have liked to vote, or would like to vote, at the age of 16 years. The floor gave a mixed picture, with slightly more hands raised signifying being in favour of voting at the age of 16 years. Participants then continued to note that they understood voting as one part of citizens involvement in the political process, and noted that participating online, was another part. To do that more actively, young people need critical thinking skills in order to seek out trustworthy sources to stay informed. Furthermore, participant discussion brought to the fore that adults must act more professionally in order to become better “educated advisors” to young people. Lastly, participants noted that it was critical to refrain from ‘youth-washing’ and tokenism when it came to young people’s engagement with, and participation in, political decision-making processes.

Online discussions

This online deep dive session was moderated by Hans Martens, Head of Digital Citizenship, European Schoolnet (EUN). He was joined by the following panellists:

- Mitch Prinstein, American Psychological Association (video only)
- Steven Vosloo, UNICEF Innocenti
- Steve Muller, Ministry of the Economy, Luxembourg
- Amanda Timberg, Google
- Ana Radišić, Content creator, Croatia

Each panellist focused on one of the above topics. Hans began the session by asking each panellist to provide an overview **of the risks and opportunities** for their topic.

Mental health and well-being

Mitch Prinstein of the American Psychological Association provided input through a video whereby he highlighted some of the challenges around social media – it offers asynchronicity of communication, is available 24/7, and can present communication challenges due to the absence of non-verbal signals (for example, sarcasm is harder to infer or interpret online). He also pointed to the risk of quantifiability – that worth and relevance might be measured by the number of likes, follows or comments. Mitch also highlighted how some social decision making can be outsourced to algorithms; that is, technology makes the decisions on what a user views/likes/interacts with.

The metaverse and immersive environments

Steven Vosloo, a Digital Policy Specialist for UNICEF Innocenti, pointed to his work in a report on the metaverse, extended reality and children. He stressed the popularity of virtual worlds with children, citing 26 million daily users on Roblox who are under 13 years of age, and the attraction of permanent worlds that might be created on platforms such as Roblox and games like Minecraft.

He explained that the metaverse offers opportunities for education and learning – such as workplace training taking place in immersive environments, where dangerous tasks could be practised safely. He also pointed to the support for mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression, where virtual reality and extended reality spaces have been created to support individuals facing these challenges. VR has also been used to support neurodiversity, such as a pilot VR project around autism in Nigeria.

Steven stressed the importance of learning through play in these virtual spaces, enabling creative world-building, and socialisation. He concluded by highlighting several risks such as harassment, abuse, bullying and hate speech, and how these can feel ‘real’ in immersive online spaces. He also pointed to risks around data collection that can be wider and more novel than that collected on other platforms – for example, VR technology might collect data such as gaze tracking, heart rate, and facial expressions in reaction to content.

Generative AI

Steve Muller, from the Ministry of the Economy in Luxembourg, spoke about the risks and challenges of generative AI. He stressed that AI poses challenges for both individuals and society, but that it offers many opportunities to students in their learning; for example, AI tools could provide immediate feedback on their work. Additionally, the need to use multiple prompts when interacting with an AI can also lead to greater creativity. However, Steve drew attention to the difficulty in distinguishing content created by generative AI and content created by a human, especially in cases of mobbing or sextortion.

Steve also explained that generational differences in critical thinking skills can cause problems, with the current and future generations requiring greater critical thinking skills than previous generations. This poses implications for education and schools. Children’s online relationships may also be affected by their interactions with AI assistants. In addition, generative AI presents significant misuse risks around disinformation, phishing and spam. Steve concluded by highlighting that legislation around AI is still in the early stages.

Content creation

Ana Radišić, a content creator from Croatia, produces podcasts and social media content. She stressed the need for creators to recognise their role as examples in society, and that they have a significant responsibility in this regard. They must be educated about these responsibilities, act as an inspiration, and model positive behaviour, both online and offline.

Girls and ICT careers

Amanda Timberg spoke about her work at Google focusing on girls and ICT careers. She talked about the benefits of computer science and digital skills, and how girls are still greatly underrepresented in this area. She highlighted how, in Europe, only 18 per cent of computer science graduates are female, and that women only make up 22 per cent of roles in the tech industry. Amanda explained that there are many stakeholders who feed into this – educators, families, policymakers, and industry.

Amanda also pointed to the risks of generative AI on the experiences, profile and social barriers of women and girls. She highlighted the opportunities for developing pedagogy and skills in educators that can help encourage girls into tech education and roles. She also summarised the disproportionate risks that women and girls face online with regards to online safety, and the need for the development of other skills (for example, in areas such as citizenship) in order for girls to be safe and confident online.

Hans then switched the discussion to consider what skills are needed in each of these topic areas, and invited panellists to share their thoughts.

Mental health and well-being

Mitch highlighted the importance of social media literacy and the ability to question validity online as key skills. He suggested other important skills that sit within this area, such as understanding how social media and technology affects us and others, learning how to deal with conflict, and recognising how social media pushes users to draw comparisons between themselves and others. Recognising online hate and knowing how to defend against it is also a key required skill, as is knowing how and where to find reliable information, protecting our mental health, and understanding the ways in which our personal data is used; we can then leverage these skills to help ourselves rather than always benefit companies. He concluded by suggesting that these skills are needed by all children, and that emotional regulation and digital citizenship skills are vital to support good mental health and well-being.

The metaverse and immersive environments

Steven also highlighted digital literacy and citizenship skills and felt that these have become more important than ever. Key requirements are respecting others, displaying empathy, building a sense of community, and behaving appropriately. Steven also pointed to the need for all users to be critical consumers, users and producers in online spaces, including immersive environments. Like others working in this space, he is unsure of what skills young people need for the future, as it is unclear what the future online will hold in store! However, learning skills that allow youth to adapt to different situations is key, as is the need for AI literacy and an understanding of how algorithms operate.

Generative AI

Steve agreed with all the points raised so far and added that training of educators and teachers is also key. We cannot expect them to teach children these skills if they have not got to grips with the skills themselves. It is important to acknowledge and address this issue, while also recognising that adults find it harder to leave their comfort zone as they mature, so a nurturing and supportive approach is vital.

Content creation

Ana believes that, while online users will always flock to and adopt new media types, the values that they hold can last forever. She pointed to her experience in traditional media that helped prepare her for 'new' media online. Skills in this area include clear communication skills, thinking ahead before posting online content (to consider its potential impact), and the need to consider your audience. Ana believes that knowing about online

risks has made her a better content creator, a more critical thinker, and has empowered her to take responsibility.

Girls and ICT careers

Amanda pointed to the importance of lifelong learning and a need to reset our mindsets around skills education in order to adapt. She cited the example of how the pandemic improved cross-generational learning of digital skills out of necessity; it helped reduce people's feelings of isolation during lockdowns and restrictions globally. Amanda also mentioned the need to overcome barriers in research; there are still many misguided perceptions about women/girls and computer science. She felt that role modelling was vital to ensure that women and girls see themselves represented in the tech and online industries to prevent them from pulling back from entering and engaging in these areas.

Amanda felt, like other panellists, that digital citizenship should be integrated across the curriculum and more should be done to ensure that computer science teaching aligns well with real-world applications. She also highlighted the role of families in understanding the available careers in tech and in supporting youth (and especially girls) to learn in this area.

Hans concluded the panel discussion by asking each panellist to identify an area/gap to invest in or where big gains could be made. Steven pointed to greater support for teachers and increased use of new technology in order to acquire the necessary skills and literacy around these tools. Steve highlighted the value in 'train the trainer' initiatives to raise awareness and skills, sharing good ideas and practise, and provide concrete materials for use in the classroom. Ana stressed the importance of not only learning new tools but also understanding how social values apply online. And finally, Amanda felt that more accessible resources for parents, carers and teachers were required.

Deep dive session 2: Effective ways to foster digital skills

In the second deep dive session, introduced by SIF YAG members Alide Kristine (Estonia) and Theodora (Romania), participants discussed the best ways to ensure that children and young people acquire and develop these skills and competences identified in the first deep dive session, focusing on the following topics:

- Formal, informal and non-formal learning.
- Working with professionals who support vulnerable users.
- Peer-to-peer and child-adult approaches.
- The role of industry in helping to foster digital skills.
- Working with parents.

Again, both onsite and online participants heard from several experts who shared their thoughts as a way to stimulate further discussion.



*A video of expert opinions set the scene for the second round of deep dive discussions on effective ways to foster digital skills
(watch the video on YouTube at youtu.be/ddknV3kpQ8c)*

Onsite discussions

Again, the onsite deep dive sessions took place as table discussions, with participants switching tables for this dialogue to bring new perspectives. Key points were fed back in plenary format; a summary of the discussion follows:

Formal, informal and non-formal learning

In relation to formal, informal and non-formal learning, discussions highlighted that it is necessary to look at how learning takes place, and how formal education in schools is being approached. While participants acknowledged that formal education in the current mode is needed and important, education about online safety must become more nuanced. The teaching should not focus on 'what is right' or 'what is wrong' to do online. Instead, more formal education is needed, for instance, to raise awareness among teachers, parents and

caregivers on how to effectively take measures and properly set child safety settings on digital devices. Furthermore, participants noted that informal learning is useful for learning things by doing them, which applies to many skills needed to navigate the online world safely and more effectively. Lastly, participants emphasised that they deemed peer-to-peer and child-to-adult learning as most effective in relation to digital skills and capacities.

Working with professionals who support vulnerable users

In the context of working with professionals who support vulnerable users, discussion revolved around the issues that such users are typically very hard to reach. At the same time, reaching out to vulnerable groups was deemed essential as it was believed to be particularly critical for them to know that there are places to learn, but equally that they can get help and to find support that is accessible to them. The main barrier that participants identified was that the most vulnerable users are not always properly informed about how and where to access assistance. Consequently, more must be done to reach children and young people from vulnerable backgrounds.

Peer-to-peer and child-adult approaches

Discussions focusing on peer-to-peer and child-to-adult approaches emphasised that peers often give better, and more meaningful and helpful advice, and thus are better in supporting the navigation of a difficult situation online than attempting it on one's own. To minimise and/or mitigate risks online, seeking advice and support from an adult can be important. For that to take place, participants noted that there must be a space for that characterised by empathy, trust and understanding. In relation to child-to-adult approaches, participants noted the example of an elder family member asking a younger one to help them select their desired settings on, for instance, their new smartphone, illustrating that child-to-adult teaching is important and can create meaningful learning outcomes. In terms of the question of what can be done in addition to fostering learning and effective education, participants noted they wanted more events and conferences like the Safer Internet Forum.

The role of industry in helping to foster digital skills

Participants focusing on the role of industry in helping to foster digital skills noted that any learning interaction must be a two-way process. On the one hand, online users must be the ones to identify what skills they want and need to have. On the other hand, industry needs to take the initiative, instead of waiting for incentives from politicians, and proactively provide capacity-building and skills-development opportunities. Equally, they need to find robust approaches to make better need assessments for the respective user groups of the online services they provide, such as the [Youth Pledge for a Better Internet](#) approach or co-creation sessions organised together with Safer Internet Centres and young people.

Working with parents

Regarding work with parents, discussion revolved around the issue of parents often and largely not lacking interest, but instead, lacking the training and education to support their children with the issues they encounter online. More money should be spent on capacity-building, training, meetings, courses, and the like, that are targeted at parents. Finally, participants emphasised that a robust environment and family network shaped by support,

compassion, approval, and understanding can help to keep kids safe in their digital lives, as that leads to them feeling less of a need to seek these things elsewhere online.

Online discussions

For this second online deep dive session, a different group of panellists came together to share their thoughts and ideas on the topics outlined above. Hans Martens again acted as moderator for this session. The panellists involved were:

- Andy Demeulenaere, Belgian Safer Internet Centre/Mediawijs
- Signe Sandfeld Hansen, Danish Safer Internet Centre (helpline)
- Sarah Achahbar, Criminologist, The Netherlands
- Bojana Bellamy, Centre for Information Policy Leadership (CIPL) (video only)

Hans began the panel discussion by asking each panellist to reflect on their topic and the successes in this space.

Formal, informal and non-formal learning

Andy Demeulenaere from Mediawijs (part of the Belgian Safer Internet Centre) explained that there are lots of initiatives in formal education in Belgium as well as more policy implementation. He pointed to the development of digital literacy and media literacy competencies in Flanders (the Flemish Region of Belgium) and the training available for teachers, to act as both coaches and also deliver training on how to teach students. In non-formal education, the focus is typically on social processes through youth work. Andy referenced a number of initiatives that empower youth in media/content creation, such as youth groups who support in the creation of podcasts and other digital media. Other initiatives include developing the skills of vulnerable youth and other cultural activities through gaming events and arts events.

He highlighted that young people often don't turn to their teachers for support with online issues; they typically turn to peers or family first. Therefore, peer-to-peer coaching programmes are also valuable in empowering youth to support each other with issues around their digital lives.

Working with professionals who support vulnerable users

Signe Sandfeld Hansen, from the helpline at the Danish Safer Internet Centre, spoke about their work with vulnerable youth. The helpline created social learning spaces to support vulnerable young people through the use of a group chat tool that permitted youth to communicate anonymously, purely through text, on shared topics of interest. This significantly removed barriers to joining as there were no negative consequences and youth felt they could talk freely without reaction or judgment. Counsellors are present during these sessions to monitor behaviour and also offer support. She explained that the goal of this work was to reach more young people, open up discussion, and show them that they are not alone. It also offers a way to demonstrate natural connections that youth can make

through technology, and the use of youth mentors (that is, empowered young people to lead on facilitating these sessions).

Peer-to-peer and child-adult approaches

Sarah Achahbar, a criminologist from The Netherlands, explained her work in online sexual transgressive behaviour (OSTB). For youth and young adults, this often takes the form of the unwanted sharing of sexual images and text. She highlighted that minors were often victims in vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities and migrant groups, where they are exposed to 'normal' content that is considered inappropriate in their culture or country of origin.

Sarah brought attention to a Dutch hotline, offlimits.nl, that provides advice on how to remove sexual images from platforms and sites. She also highlighted the increase in training for professionals and the creation of the [Commission for Sexual Transgressive Behaviour](#) to help move this training forward. There has also been a broadening of the law to enable greater victim reporting, as well as greater research in the area of sexual exposure. She explained that some vulnerable groups affected by OSTB are 'not seen' or recognised by the law in the way that they should be, which leads to vulnerable victims not reporting due to a lack of trust in authorities, a feeling of not 'being heard', and other cultural differences. Sarah highlighted the example of 'tell your parents' as advice that is not always appropriate for these victims; telling family can lead to further problems for a victim but, conversely, not telling anyone can lead to further exploitation such as forced prostitution.

Sarah concluded by explaining that the terminology in this area can be very complicated and difficult for both victims and professionals to understand, and that avenues to remain anonymous in reporting are vital.

The role of industry in helping to foster digital skills

Bojana Bellamy, from Centre for Information Policy Leadership, provided input via a video. In this, she explained that organisational accountability is key for privacy, safety and security of youth. Alongside this, the promotion of digital literacy is also important, as is transparency from industry around risks and harms, and the need to embed these requirements into their product/service design.

She pointed to the resources that some industry figures have developed to educate youth on how to exercise their rights online and manage privacy, as well as stay safe. An effective approach is often through gaming as a means to educate about these issues, and she cited Google, The LEGO Group, and others as companies who offer resources in this area. Bojana also highlighted the importance of resources for parents and caregivers, and how industry investment and support in NGOs can help raise awareness, develop initiatives, and positively affect policy.

Hans then turned the discussion to where the gaps or limitations lie in these different areas, and invited panellists to share their thoughts.

Formal, informal and non-formal learning

Andy explained that there is a disconnect between the education of younger children and their experiences of tech use; for example, children as young as 8 years of age in Belgium may get their first smartphone, but not learn skills related to safe use until later in their education. He suggested that digital/media competence can therefore sometimes fall through the cracks and not be covered at the right time. Andy also pointed to the fact that non-formal initiatives are often small in nature, and not scalable to have greater impact. Equally, initiatives do not always occur in all sectors where vulnerable youth exist (such as the care sector). He also remarked that there is a balance to be struck between running a wider awareness campaign versus stoking a moral panic in the public. He felt that the use of digital spaces to foster more open discussion and support for youth was key.

Working with professionals who support vulnerable users

Signe raised the constant issue faced by helplines and NGOs on how they can get their services/campaigns more into the mainstream or do more to reach youth. She explained that, in Denmark, they are quite ahead of the curve on digital services for both formal and non-formal learning, but that there are limitations in understanding how digital spaces can help issues in the physical space. For example, there is a tendency to point young people to offline activities/experiences rather than online/digital activities that may be more suited to their needs. She also explained that digital services can be beneficial for ethnic minority youth. Another area of limitation was in funding for advertising, but also reaching youth with advertising – the Digital Services Act prevents targeted online advertising to youth, which also makes it hard to reach them with key messages about support services available! Therefore, the helpline has used direct contact with schools as a way to reach young people.

Peer-to-peer and child-adult approaches

Sarah explained that she is often asked how she manages to reach victims of OSTB. Online domains are where these victims are, so that is where to find them. She will often watch or observe in online spaces where OSTB occurs and then directly reach out to victims when they are spotted. She discussed the difficulties that victims can have and the role of experts in supporting them, such as helping them to complete forms or report to law enforcement. She feels that more should be done to demonstrate the consequences of OSTB; for example, some schools have excluded or expelled students who are perpetrators as a way to signal the seriousness of this behaviour.

She also felt that parents need further help to understand online life better and how to talk to their child about tricky or taboo issues. She also pointed to a trend of 'outsiders looking in' that negatively impacted on the behaviour and freedoms of girls and women, such as changing their clothes or online activities to reduce the likelihood of becoming a victim. Sarah also expressed concern about the growing use of AI to create deepfake content as another route to target victims.

Hans concluded the session by asking each panellist for one constructive idea/suggestion for how industry can support in these issues. Andy believed that industry should move towards greater support for the work of NGOs, rather than creating their own resources that explain

the ‘technical’ skills, rules or reporting routes on their services. Signe expressed a need for an easier route of communication to reach target groups such as youth and parents. She highlighted initiatives such as lunchtime learning, where industry employees can learn digital education skills (to support their children) during their working hours. Finally, Sarah called on industry to do more to denormalise transgressive sexual behaviour. She gave the example of Pornhub moving quickly to remove content of minors from their platform when major payment providers threatened to withdraw their payment services from the site.

Next steps

Next steps

Chair


Manuela Martra
 Deputy Head of Unit 'Accessibility,
 Multilingualism & Safer Internet'
 DG CONNECT, European Commission

Panellists


Matthias Jax
 Austrian Safer Internet Centre


Professor Amanda Third
 Western Sydney University
 Australia


Oleksandra Voychyshyn
 Zolishchyky State Gimnasio
 Ukraine


Selma
 SIF Youth Advisory Group
 Czech Republic

SAFER INTERNET FORUM 2023 | EMPOWERING YOUTH with skills for the Digital Decade | European Commission | insafe

This session was introduced by Manuela Martra, Deputy Head of Unit Accessibility, Multilingualism & Safer Internet, DG CONNECT, European Commission. She started by providing a reflection on the different emotions that were attached to the experience of Safer Internet Forum 2023, by holding up some of the emoji signs used by youth in their session earlier in the day. She gave thanks to European Schoolnet for the organisation of the event, and to all collaborators who provided input to the day.

Manuela then gave the floor to each panellist to introduce themselves in more detail.

Selma, SIF YAG member from the Czech Republic, talked about her background in learning sciences and politics, and explained that she has been part of BIK Youth for two years and is active in youth advocacy. She remarked that there are very few conferences that are youth-led like the Safer Internet Forum; many are just 'youth-washing' (tokenistic).

Professor Amanda Third highlighted the importance of the Safer Internet Forum in raising awareness of how online safety is viewed in other parts of the world. Throughout the day, child rights had been brought to light in a tangible way. She was impressed by the approach and the high energy of youth participation in the event.

Oleksandra Voychyshyn is a school leader from Ukraine and she explained that her (and her school's) goal was to transform the world for her students; for them to be happy and safe, to empower 21st century skills, digital citizenship and human rights education. She explained that war also exists in the digital environment, in the form of cyber threats, bullying, hate speech and other issues. Discussion and making decisions together are key to protecting youth, and young people are key actors in shaping the future for all.

Matthias Jax expressed that it was great to see how motivated young people are at SIF. It helps convince others to listen to them and then take back their learning to their own country to reflect upon and share.

Manuela then provided a quick recap of the day's sessions and asked each panellist to give one main takeaway from the day.

Selma felt that digital literacy education needs to start as early as possible in a child's life. She explained that digitalisation is becoming part of youth's DNA and that there is a need to prevent mental health issues for the future generations.

Amanda gave two takeaways – firstly, the power of intergenerational conversation, which leads to more real, tangible, and better ideas and solutions. Secondly, that the Safer Internet Forum shines a light on the incredible amount of work done by all the individuals and organisations in attendance. It provides an opportunity to consolidate and share the learning across everyone involved.

Oleksandra felt that there was a need to enhance media literacy, as well as a need to consider how to encourage parents and caregivers on how to behave online alongside how to better support their children. She thanked all the young people involved in the Safer Internet Forum for their commitment and enthusiasm.

Finally, Matthias expressed that it feels like everyone feels stressed online, not just from the length of time spent online, but from issues such as bullying, negative content, and impact from influencers. He highlighted a need for greater digital resilience and safer navigation of online spaces.

Manuela also provided her own thoughts on SIF, and stressed how impactful the session with the young influencers was: they play an important role in speaking across generations. They must also be accountable for their influence. She then proceeded to ask each panellist what they predict will have happened or changed a year from now.

Selma believed that there will be continued discussion, particularly around breaking the stigma around digitalisation in wider society that can cause fear in parent and caregivers' generations.

Amanda highlighted the radical potential of the Digital Services Act and hoped that the rollout will lead to changes on the ground for youth.

Oleksandra planned to implement things she had heard and learned about at the Forum in her own school. She felt that teacher training would be important, along with the need to help students develop resilience and move on from failure. She also thanked schools across different countries for taking in Ukrainian children to ensure their continued education during the war.

Matthias concluded the discussion by expressing his belief that there was further work to do on AI and the issues around it. He hoped to talk with children and parents/caregivers to learn if the implementation of the DSA is having a positive impact.

A question from an online participant was posed to the panel: Is the online safety of children considered in the EU's [Artificial Intelligence Act discussions](#), or is it something that the Digital Services Act covers?

Manuela explained that it is premature to comment on the AI Act as it is still under negotiations. She stressed that any EU legislation to make Europe fit for the Digital Decade takes into consideration the EU's values and fundamental rights, including protecting and empowering children.

A question from the floor asked what the balance needed to be between skilling children and parents/caregivers against the responsibility of online platforms to protect youth.

Amanda replied by explaining that everyone is responsible, but that there is a need to consider the most vulnerable online. She felt that peer support mechanisms were often underestimated, as they provide benefits to well-being for the helper as well as the person being helped. This horizontal approach is valuable. Matthias explained that parents and carers are the hardest group to reach, but that other caregivers and contact points for children also need support and teaching.

Watch the [full recording of the discussion here](#) (timestamp 00:00:00 to 00:28:50):



(watch the video on YouTube at youtu.be/QhJXXoytA0)

SAFER INTERNET FORUM 2023
23 NOVEMBER 2023

NEXT STEPS

BIK+ STRATEGY ACTIONS

EMPOWERING YOUTH
WITH SKILLS FOR THE DIGITAL DECADE

MAIN ACTIVITIES & ACTIONS BY NEXT YEAR?

- ✓ **BREAK THE STIGMA**
- ✓ **Roll out DIGITAL SERVICES ACT**
- ✓ **IMPLEMENT CASES AND LET MY TEACHERS TAKE TRAINING ON DIGITAL LITERACY**
- ✓ **INDUSTRY IMPLEMENTING DSA**

KEY TAKE-AWAY?
SAFER INTERNET FORUM 2023

Notes and Diagrams:

- Think CREATIVELY - HOW TO HELP & CARE FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN
- CHILDREN UNDER 12
- INTERGENERATIONAL CONVERSATION
- CONSOLIDATE LEARNINGS
- MEDIA LITERACY
- FEELING SUPER STRESSED WHEN ONLINE BEHAVIOUR OF PARENTS
- ONLINE BEHAVIOUR OF PARENTS
- THANK YOU, EUROPEAN TEACHERS FOR TAKING CARE OF OUR UKRAINE CHILDREN

Participant Quotes:

- MANUELA MARTRA** (Lecturer, University of Coimbra): I'M ENGAGED IN YOUTH ADVOCACY BE SHE IS VERY MUCH YOUR LEADER!
- SELMA** (Lecturer, University of Coimbra): WE NEED TO EMPOWER OUR CHILDREN AND ENSURE SAFETY
- OLEKSANDRA VOYTSUNSKAYA** (Lecturer, University of Coimbra): WE NOW MOTIVATED CHILDREN AND
- MATTHIAS JAK** (Lecturer, University of Coimbra): TAKE THE ENERGY
- AMANDA THOMPSON** (Lecturer, University of Coimbra): INCREASINGLY INTERESTING TO SEE HOW THINGS ARE DONE HERE

Thanks to JESSICA BARNES, JESSICA BARNES

Close of Safer Internet Forum 2023



June Lowery-Kingston, Head of Unit, Accessibility, Multilingualism & Safer Internet, DG CONNECT, European Commission, provided the closing remarks for Safer Internet Forum 2023. She started by saying she felt that this had been one of the best Safer Internet Forums ever! She highlighted how it spanned not only continents but generations. June also gave thanks to Oleksandra Voychyshyn not just for attending, but also for enduring the challenges of teaching in Ukraine during wartime.

June expressed that actions count louder than words (particularly in legislation) and so it is important to value and use youth participation and networking across the generations. She highlighted how this edition of the Safer Internet Forum had provided a lot of things to process and reflect upon from the education sector, industry, civil society, and from young people themselves.

She gave thanks to everyone for their contributions to the Forum, in particular European Schoolnet, the Safer Internet Centres, the SIF Youth Advisory Group and BIK Youth Panel. She concluded with a quote: *“The future is yours to create. Start here, start now”*.

June then gave the floor to Selma from SIF Youth Advisory Group to close the forum with her final words. Selma reminded all participants of the *Empower, Inspire, Transform* slogan and explained that it is up to all of us to put meaning to the words in this slogan, to make a change, and make a safer internet. Digital literacy is the currency of progress and there is a need for equality and equity of skills and opportunities. We must normalise these and inspire young people to be the ethical and democratic architects of the digital future.

Watch the recording of the closing session here:



(watch the video on YouTube at youtu.be/zD-I3KDtdfc)

Outputs from Safer Internet Forum (SIF) 2023, are available at www.betterinternetforkids.eu/sif.

Outputs from previous editions of the Forum can also be consulted at the same location.

Annex 1: Useful links and references

Better Internet for Kids and related activities

- Visit the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) website at www.betterinternetforkids.eu to stay up to date with continuing work.
- Connect with your national Safer Internet Centre (SIC) at www.betterinternetforkids.eu/sic.
- Find out more about the work of BIK Youth at www.bikyouth.eu.
- Subscribe to the quarterly BIK bulletin to receive news and updates direct to your mailbox each December, March, June and September. Find out more, read past editions, and subscribe at www.betterinternetforkids.eu/bik-bulletin.
- Save the date – Safer Internet Day 2024 will take place on Tuesday, 6 February. Join the global action to work "Together for a better internet". Find out more at www.saferinternetday.org.

Documents, reports and initiatives

BIK+ strategy

- European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+):
<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/digital-decade-children-and-youth-new-european-strategy-better-internet-kids-bik>
- Child-friendly version of the BIK+ strategy:
<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/child-friendly-version-european-strategy-better-internet-kids-bik>

Digital Services Act (DSA)

- DSA in all formats/languages:
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R2065&qid=1666857835014>
- DSA PDF version (EN):
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022R2065>
- DSA: Very large online platforms and search engines:
<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/dsa-vlops>
- User-friendly version of the DSA (available in EN, DE and FR – more languages coming soon):
<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2759/576008>

Other

- European Year of Skills:
https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-year-skills-2023_en
- Youth Action Plan:
https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13156-Youth-Action-Plan-involving-young-people-in-EU-external-action_en
- Consultation report: How to make Europe’s Digital Decade fit for children and young people? A report from the consultation with children and young people:
www.betterinternetforkids.eu/digitaldecadereport
- Find out more about Europe’s Digital Decade: digital targets for 2030 at
https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030_en
- 2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade:
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0118>
- The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child:
https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee_en
- Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027): Resetting education and training for the digital age:
https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en

Annex 2: Preparatory work of the SIF Youth Advisory Group 2023

Following the successful work of the first Safer Internet Forum Youth Advisory Group (SIF YAG) in SIF 2022 in leading the event in a youth-centred manner, it was decided to establish a new SIF YAG formed of different young people to support the organisation of SIF 2023. SIF 2023 would once again be organised youth-led with its focus on “Digital Skills”, as the European Union designated 2023 as the European Year of Skills.

In this context, efforts were made to involve young people to engage from the planning and organisation phase to the facilitation of the SIF 2023, which would provide a relevant opportunity for the young people to discuss their needs in acquiring such skills and determine the priorities in this regard. To achieve this goal, EUN formed the SIF YAG including ten experienced BIK Youth Ambassadors who have been actively contributing to the BIK Youth programme and activities over the years.

Starting in June 2023, the SIF YAG members came together with the BIK Coordination Team in nine online planned meetings, in addition to several ad-hoc meetings. During these meetings, the SIF YAG contributed to the creation of the event since its inception by voicing their opinions and recommendations on the title, the agenda, and the structure of the interventions during the various sessions. Moreover, the SIF YAG had an important role in deciding which influencers to invite to deliver speeches and join the panel debates during the event, by proposing and short-listing several candidates which they believed to be suitable for the focus of the SIF 2023. As the agenda was shaped, the SIF YAG also decided on their own roles as moderators and co-hosts during SIF 2023 alongside the BIK Coordination Team, and worked in pairs to adapt their sessions with their inputs and questions. Against this background, the SIF YAG met a representative from the European Commission (EC) closer to the day of the event to discuss their roles and responsibilities, the progress they have made, and their ideas for chairing their sessions.

The SIF YAG meetings took place alongside the BIK Youth Panel meetings (see also [Annex 3](#)), and they were progressively updated on each other’s plans. Indeed, the two groups met together twice online in June and November 2023 to introduce themselves and to achieve cohesion in their respective preparations. In addition to meeting online, the two groups of youngsters also met together in Brussels just in advance of the Forum (21-22 November 2023) to work together and to prepare the final details for the event.

During the preparatory days, both groups brainstormed together on the different topics related to the main focus of the event (digital skills) and prepared their sessions based also on these inputs. Finally, both groups, along with the members of the BIK Coordination Team, used this time to rehearse the full extent of the SIF to ensure a smooth progression during the main event. Some of the SIF YAG members had also the possibility to have a conversation with the experts and the panellists of SIF before the actual day of the event.



SIF YAG representatives Adrián (Spain) and Ruth (Austria) opening Safer Internet Forum 2023

SIF YAG members not only hosted all the sessions at SIF and moderated the deep-dive table discussions, but also opened and closed the event and chaired important high-level panels, such as the plenary discussion where they interviewed Renate Nikolay (Deputy Director General, DG CONNECT, European Commission), Ligia Azevedo (Portuguese Safer Internet Centre) and Ann Becker (Video Games Europe). Furthermore, the influencers who took the stage as panellists during the event were identified as a result of the recommendations and preparatory work of the SIF YAG members.



SIF YAG members Ingeborg (Norway) and Selma (Czech Republic) chairing a high-panel discussion with Renate Nikolay, Ligia Azevedo and Ann Becker

Besides the main event of SIF 2023, some SIF YAG members also participated in two side events.

The first side event was the BIK Advisory Board which took place on 22 November 2023, and involved one member of the SIF YAG, Emily (Cyprus). During this high-level meeting, different stakeholders discussed the Better Internet for Kids project, sharing their views and priorities, concerning also the enforcement of the Digital Service Act (DSA). Emily had the opportunity to contribute to the conversation about the possible next steps to guarantee the full realisation of the BIK+ strategy, and what future actions the BIK initiative should pursue.

The second side event was the first annual stakeholder meeting on the BIK Age Assurance Toolkit, which took place on 24 November 2023 and involved five young people: Guilherme (Portugal), Ingeborg (Norway) and Selma (Czech Republic) from the SIF YAG, and Ragnhild (Norway) and Sofia (Portugal) from the BIK Youth Panel. During this meeting, the young people provided insights on how to better implement age verification tools to multiple stakeholders, and offered suggestions on what should be the next steps.



The SIF Youth Advisory Group and BIK Youth Panel at Safer Internet Forum 2023

Find out more about the BIK Youth programme generally at www.betterinternetforkids.eu/youth.

Annex 3: Preparatory work of the BIK Youth Panel 2023

Within the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) project framework, an annual BIK Youth Panel is convened before and during the Safer Internet Forum (SIF). This initiative empowers a group of young panellists to articulate not only their individual perspectives and concerns on internet safety and improvement, but also to advocate for the views of their peers on a European scale. These BIK Youth Panellists are often engaged in various other activities at both national and European levels, and a considerable number transition into the role of BIK Youth Ambassadors, championing the BIK agenda at prominent events such as the Digital Services Act (DSA) stakeholder event in June 2023, an online Microsoft focus group in September 2023, and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in October 2023 among others.

This year, the BIK Youth Panel and SIF 2023 events were conducted, once again, in an in-person format. Nevertheless, certain successful approaches from past online editions were retained. This encompassed an increased number of online preparatory meetings, spanning eleven weekly sessions over a two-month period. Additionally, secure open-source online meeting and collaboration tools, such as BigBlueButton, were employed for these preparatory sessions.

Approximately two months before the Safer Internet Forum, 31 young individuals from 23 countries participated in a series of eleven preparatory online meetings. During these sessions, they acquainted themselves with internet safety awareness topics, deliberated on a slogan for the event, and commenced the planning of their presentation for the SIF sessions. Over the course of these meetings, BIK Youth Panellists began refining the specifics of their live theatrical performance and identified the subjects to be addressed in the table discussions during the deep dive sessions.

As the SIF this year had a theme of *Empowering YOUth with skills for the Digital Decade*, the BIK Youth Panel split their live performance into three acts each of which focus on one of the words of their slogan: *Empower, Inspire, Transform*. On this basis, and with guidance from privacy expert Chris Pinchen and Austrian Safer Internet Centre Youth Coordinator Barbara Buchegger, panellists scripted their live performances which aimed to convey the general idea of empowering young people to be more resilient against online threats, making them capable of distinguishing between positive and negative influences on the internet, and helping them transform themselves and their peers into individuals better-equipped to cope with problems online, while taking advantage of the new technologies to the fullest.

As was the case in the previous years, the ‘theme nights’ approach was continued to make the preparatory online meetings a more fun and enjoyable experience while creating a relaxed work environment for the young people. During these nights, everybody dressed or presented skills based on a pre-selected theme. These ranged from Halloween costumes to favourite hats and movies to favourite locations as seen below.



The BIK Youth Panel 2023 attended a number of online preparatory meetings

Following the conclusion of preparatory meetings, two-day BIK Youth Panel activities took place in Brussels prior to SIF, on 21-22 November 2023. Panellists used most of these two days to finalise and rehearse their live performance. With the guidance of facilitators Barbara and Chris, the BIK Youth Panel divided into various subgroups for each different act.



BIK Youth Panel members Sanya (Italy) and Gabriele (Italy) during SIF 2023

They have also worked alongside the members of the SIF YAG to achieve cohesion between their respective preparations as outlined in [Annex 2 above](#).

Find out more about the BIK Youth programme generally at www.betterinternetforkids.eu/youth.

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