

BIK+ strategy

2025

First evaluation of the European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+)

A summary of consultations with children,
young people, and expert stakeholders



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**First evaluation of the European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+):
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Preface by BIK Youth Ambassadors

Children and young people are the future, and we are excited that this statement is not a mere tokenistic motto but instead a practice-guiding principle of the work in the Better Internet for Kids initiative. Also, in the first evaluation of the European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+), this credo is being lived up to in practice. Thus, we are excited to share our thoughts about this evaluation, which highlights how children and young people experience life online and what they think can be done to make the internet better and safer for everyone. As BIK Youth Ambassadors¹, we contributed to the design of the consultation methodology, providing input on the questions and approaches used to explore these important topics.

This report shows that children and young people have valuable things to say about their experiences on social media, dealing with risks and harms online, and trying to figure out how to balance screen time better. This consultation shows the depth of insight young people bring to these discussions, and we're excited to highlight some of the findings that stood out to us.

The report shows how the three pillars of the BIK+ strategy resonate strongly with children and young people:

- **Staying safe online:** Online safety remains a top priority for many children and young people. Participants identified several challenges, including harmful content, mental health impacts, privacy concerns, monetisation, online scams, and fake news. Many participants expressed frustration that their rights were more often violated online or that enforcement was lacking. They felt a lack of respect from others online and call for policymakers to create safer online environments.
- **Learning the right skills:** Children and young people strongly ask for better education to help them navigate the digital world safely and confidently. They call for schools to dedicate more time to online safety, media literacy, and responsible technology use. Many participants also recognised the importance of equipping themselves with strategies to manage harmful content, identify potential risks, and build resilience against negative experiences. These skills are essential for their well-being in an increasingly digitised world.
- **Having a voice:** Children and young people like to be included in discussions about their digital lives, and emphasise the importance of having a seat at the table when decisions are made. Whether it's policymakers, tech companies, parents, or schools, young people want their perspectives to be taken seriously. Participants shared many ideas about how they could contribute to these processes.

Looking forward, we also wanted to underscore several key points raised by participants, which should guide future policy decisions:

- **Balancing time online:** It is easy to lose track of time online, which can lead to difficulties balancing online activities with responsibilities like homework or spending time with family and friends. Managing and reducing screen time is a significant priority.
- **Avoiding blanket bans:** Banning children and young people from social media is not the solution, as bans can too easily be bypassed.

¹ BIK Youth Ambassadors are those young people who have successfully participated in the annual BIK Youth Panel and Safer Internet Forum and are willing to stay in touch to further participate in activities under the BIK umbrella. For more information about the BIK Youth Ambassador programme, please [visit the BIK portal](#).

- **Holding tech companies accountable:** Children and young people felt that it was important to hold tech companies accountable for enforcing age verification without compromising data protection.
- **Education on artificial intelligence (AI):** Young people ask for more training and education on AI to help them use these tools effectively and responsibly.

This report highlights the thoughtful and meaningful contributions of children and young people across the EU to understanding life online. We hope it inspires action to make the internet a safer, more empowering, space for everyone. By involving us in the decision-making process, we believe that policy-makers can create policies and regulations for the digital environment that are better tailored to our specific needs and respectful of our rights.

Foreword by the European Commission

The evaluation you are about to read is the first assessment of the BIK+ strategy. This first ever child-led evaluation of the BIK+ strategy comes at an important moment in the life of our organisation.

As one Commission completed its impactful term, and the new Commission steps in to guide the future, this review offers a unique opportunity to bridge the past and the future. With the protection of minors being a key priority for the new Commission, the findings of this evaluation will provide valuable insights for shaping new initiatives such as the announced Action Plan on cyberbullying or the EU-wide inquiry on the broader impacts of social media on well-being. This will be surrounded by the continuous enforcement of the Digital Services Act, which the BIK+ strategy complements and supports.

This evaluation represents not just the passage of time, but an opportunity to pause, reflect, and critically assess the journey so far. It offers insights that can help us to measure the successes of the strategy and identify its shortcomings, as well as refine and adapt the approach as we move forward.

Notably, this evaluation serves as a reminder that strategies are not static. They are living frameworks that evolve with the world around them. In all efforts to understand and improve the systems that shape our future, the voices of those who will inherit these systems are essential – and this evaluation is no exception.

The BIK+ strategy strongly encourages the active participation of children and young people in shaping digital policies and in carrying out peer-to-peer activities. This first-ever child-led evaluation stands as a powerful testament to our commitment to involving children in the policymaking process. It serves as a strong acknowledgment that children's views are fundamental to creating policies that truly address their needs.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all the children who took an active role in evaluating the work under the BIK+ strategy so far and shared their lived experience. I also extend my sincere thanks to all the other participants, the European Safer Internet Centres and European Schoolnet whose expertise and dedication made this evaluation possible.



Renate Nikolay

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European Commission*

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The European Commission and the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) team would like to express their gratitude to the more than 750 children and young people across Europe who have played an invaluable role in reviewing and evaluating the BIK+ strategy for the first time since its launch on 11 May 2022. We could not have done this without your support, insight, and willingness to reflect on solutions and recommendations going forward.

We would also like to thank the BIK Youth Ambassadors for their active involvement in the different stages of this review and evaluation process: Andžela (Lithuania), Gabriele (Italy), Jeremy (Malta), Kelyan (Belgium), Kiva (Ireland), Ragnhild (Norway), Sofia (Portugal), Vincent (Croatia), and Wojciech (Poland). Their input and feedback in the early phase of this process have helped establish a protocol and strong set of questions that resonated – in terms of format, the topics discussed, and the language used – with the many children and young people we ended up consulting. Thank you also for taking the time to draft this report's **Preface** and constructively and persistently emphasising what required more attention, nuance, and in-depth understanding throughout the process.

European Schoolnet (EUN), on behalf of the European Commission, coordinated the consultations that have been carried out across Europe and across different stakeholder groups. Yet, our ability to reach and involve so many children and young people was due entirely to the robust and long-standing partnership with the **Insafe network of European Safer Internet Centres**. We thank the participating Safer Internet Centres (SICs) for their strong support and commitment to this important review activity. In addition, we would like to express our appreciation to the expert organisations across Europe who supported this activity by facilitating consultations with children and young people from specific vulnerable backgrounds to ensure that the voices of those who often remain overlooked are heard loudly and clearly.

- AERF — Agrupamento de Escolas Rodrigues de Freitas (Portugal)
- BEE SECURE (Luxembourg) (Safer Internet Centre)
- Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (Croatia) (Safer Internet Centre)
- Child and Youth Friendly Governance Project (Denmark, Spain, France)
- Child Focus (Belgium) (Safer Internet Centre)
- CreaTIC Academy (Spain)
- DCI — Defence for Children International (Czech Republic)
- DKMK — Association for Communication and Media Culture (Croatia)
- DrossInternets.lv (Latvia) (Safer Internet Centre)
- EdVocacy (Greece)
- Estonian Union for Child Welfare (Estonia) (Safer Internet Centre)
- Generazioni Connesse (Safer Internet Centre) and Giffoni Film Festival (Italy)

- International Children’s Safety Service (Hungary) (Safer Internet Centre)
- Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) (Ireland) (Safer Internet Centre)
- Klicksafe.de (Germany) (Safer Internet Centre)
- LINESA (Lithuania) (Safer Internet Centre)
- Media Council for Children and Young People (Denmark) (Safer Internet Centre)
- NASK — National Research Institute (Poland) (Safer Internet Centre)
- NCBI — Narodni Centrum Bezpecnejsiho Internetu (Czech Republic)
- Norwegian Media Authority — Medietilsynet (Norway) (Safer Internet Centre)
- Office of the Commissioner for Children (Malta) (Safer Internet Centre)
- Plataforma de Infancia (Spain) (Safer Internet Centre)
- SAFE.SI (Slovenia) (Safer Internet Centre)
- Saferinternet.at (Austria) (Safer Internet Centre)
- SaferInternet4Kids.gr (Greece) (Safer Internet Centre)
- Save the Children Romania (Safer Internet Centre)
- Webwise (Ireland) (Safer Internet Centre)

List of organisations supporting the delivery of the first evaluation of the BIK+ strategy

Dr Valerie Verdoodt and Professor Eva Lievens (Ghent University) supported EUN as external research consultants in this activity. They provided expert guidance for the co-development with young people of the base methodology and design of the consultation protocol to consult children and young people, while also helping to analyse the data and write up the results, drawing on a Good practice guide produced under the Better Internet for Kids initiative titled **Children’s rights in the digital environment: Moving from theory to practice**. We hope that these guidelines will be helpful and inspire many other stakeholders who wish to carry out similar work building on meaningful engagement and involvement of children and young people.

Professor Brian O’Neill supported EUN as an external policy expert focused on the consultation of expert stakeholders. In doing so, he provided expert guidance by developing a consultation protocol complementary to the base methodology co-developed with the BIK Youth Ambassadors, to consult expert stakeholders from academia, civil society, industry and policy, carrying out consultation activities, and analysing its outcomes.

In a broader sense, we sincerely appreciate the support, commitment, contribution and enthusiasm of the many people involved in this large-scale review and evaluation activity. This has truly been a cross-country, multi-partner and multi-stakeholder effort, and it would not have been possible without you. Together, we look ahead, inspired and determined, to demonstrate that we take children’s and young people’s voices seriously and are committed to making the necessary changes and driving future policymaking based on the recommendations drawn together in this report to create a safer and better internet for kids in Europe and beyond.

Executive summary

The **European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+ strategy)** represents the European Union's commitment to creating a digital environment where children and young people are protected, empowered, and respected online. Adopted on 11 May 2022, the strategy builds on two decades of EU initiatives aimed at fostering safer, age-appropriate online experiences. The first evaluation of the **BIK+ strategy** has provided invaluable insights into its progress and successes, as well as areas for improvement since its adoption in May 2022. Grounded in the perspectives of 759 children and young people², alongside input from 59 expert stakeholders from academia, civil society, industry, and policy across Europe, this report paints a detailed picture of the strategy's achievements and sheds light on evolving needs. The voices of children and young people, including those from vulnerable backgrounds, were instrumental in shaping the findings, ensuring a youth-centred and inclusive approach. In the spring, the present report will be complemented by integrating outcomes from consultations with parents and caregivers, as well as teachers and educators across Europe. Rounding off this exercise will be a family-friendly short report and visual outputs, which will be launched successively.

Objective and methodology

The primary objective of the evaluation was to review and assess the progress and success of the BIK+ strategy since its adoption in May 2022, identify emerging risks and new challenges, and propose actionable recommendations for improvement. The consultations adopted a qualitative approach similar to the focus group method. The methodology was child/youth-centred and rights-based, ensuring inclusivity, transparency, and a safe environment for participants to share their perspectives. Consultations with expert stakeholders complemented this approach to provide a holistic review and evaluation of the strategy.

Key findings

Children's and young people's experiences: Participants appreciated efforts to create safer online environments but highlighted persistent challenges. For example, children mentioned being exposed to harmful content, such as explicit materials or hate speech, and falling victim to online scams like phishing attempts. Privacy violations, including hacking and misuse of personal data, were also frequently cited. Many expressed a need for simplified terms and conditions and privacy policies, or clearer instructions on how to report harmful content, which they felt would make navigating the digital world safer and more manageable.

Inclusivity and accessibility: Approximately one-third of the consultations engaged children and young people from vulnerable backgrounds, including those with disabilities, from low-income families, or ethnic minority communities. Concerning these participants, consultation outcomes emphasised the importance of reducing barriers to online participation. For instance, more accessible features on online platforms were highlighted to create barrier-free access for children with disabilities, in particular with respect to reporting harmful content. Another aspect referred to the persistence of a digital divide caused by limited internet access in rural areas.

² Generally, when referring to "children", we refer to children under the age of 12 years. When referring to "young people", we typically mean children over the age of 12.

Digital empowerment: Many children and young people felt confident using the internet but identified specific gaps in their ability to navigate challenges. For example, some struggled to recognise disinformation or scams, particularly in fast-evolving platforms like social media. Younger participants often expressed a desire for more tailored digital literacy programmes in schools, such as interactive workshops on identifying credible sources of information or effectively managing online privacy.

Active participation: Children and young people expressed a strong interest in contributing to policymaking and participating in decision-making, thereby helping to shape digital environments. For instance, they shared ideas on how platforms could better cater to their needs, such as designing more child-friendly interfaces, or providing clearer and more accessible information about terms and conditions. They stressed that digital service providers, in particular, should more actively involve them in developing new and improving existing platforms, tools and features. They also called for more streamlined and regular opportunities to be involved at the local, national, and EU levels of policy development, arguing that this should become the norm.

Expert stakeholder insights: Experts from academia, industry, civil society, and policy highlighted systemic gaps in the current digital ecosystem. For example, stakeholders from academia underscored the need for longitudinal research into the long-term effects of the digital transformation on children. Industry representatives pointed to inconsistent regulatory requirements across EU Member States, which hinder the development of uniform safety measures. Civil society participants stressed the importance of cross-sector collaboration to ensure that interventions are inclusive and actionable. Policymakers identified the need for stronger alignment between national and EU-level strategies to address emerging risks effectively.

Recommendations

Improving reporting mechanisms: Simplify and standardise processes for reporting harmful content across platforms. Examples include creating more child-friendly reporting processes and interfaces, offering step-by-step tutorials for younger users, and ensuring timely and detailed feedback after a report is filed. In particular, concerning vulnerable groups, current features for reporting harmful content were considered to be too complex or time-consuming.

Enhancing digital education: Implement comprehensive and age-appropriate digital literacy programmes as integral curricular elements in schools. For example, lessons on media literacy can be integrated to help children discern credible information, teach privacy management skills such as setting strong passwords, and educate them on the responsible use of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and AI-powered tools.

Fostering youth participation: Create structured and more accessible channels for children to contribute to policy discussions and the development of digital services, tools and platforms. Examples could include establishing youth advisory boards for tech companies, or organising regular regional forums where children can directly engage with policymakers.

Addressing expert-identified gaps: Act on the recommendations from expert stakeholders to strengthen the strategy's impact. For example, invest in longitudinal studies to better understand the effects of digital engagement on children, harmonise regulatory frameworks across the EU to simplify industry compliance, and promote cross-sector partnerships to develop innovative solutions for online safety and inclusivity.

Conclusion

This evaluation confirms that the BIK+ strategy has made significant strides in creating a better internet for children and young people. However, more needs to be done to address emerging risks such as increased exposure to harmful content, mental health impacts, privacy concerns, or the monetisation of children's and young people's online activities, alongside enhancing inclusivity and empowering young users. These findings and recommendations aim to guide the European Commission and the entire ecosystem of stakeholders in refining the strategy's vision and mission, and implementing effective actions to meet the evolving needs of Europe's youngest digital citizens.



Chapter 1: Background

Children and young people are the most active users of digital technologies and the internet. World-wide, it has been estimated that a third of all internet users online are minors ([UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, 2019](#)). The latest evidence shows that 97 per cent of young people in the European Union (EU) aged 16 to 29 reported using the internet daily ([Eurostat, 2024](#)). A growing body of evidence further suggests that the digital environment is integral to children's and young people's daily lives. Moreover, their engagement with the internet, digital information, and communication technologies profoundly shapes how they interact, learn, and exercise their rights. Equally, being online presents both opportunities and risks for their safety, well-being, and development.

Recognising this reality, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted [General Comment No. 25](#) in 2021. This landmark document reaffirms that children's rights, as outlined in the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#), apply fully in the digital world. It highlights the responsibility of governments, institutions, and stakeholders to ensure that children's rights to protection and participation are safeguarded and promoted online, just as they are in offline spaces. As the digital environment continues to evolve, this interpretation ensures that children's rights remain relevant and actionable in the current as well as in new and emerging contexts.

Children's right to participate means having a 'seat at the table', being heard, and sharing their own insights and experiences. Moreover, it means that these inputs should be taken seriously and fed into the decision-making processes in policy and industry that impact their daily lives in the 21st century, which increasingly sees various realms of civic life becoming digitised. In a nutshell, this means that when laws and policies, or new technologies, apps, websites, and services directed at children and young people are being developed, children and young people must be involved and actively consulted.

The current report presents outcomes from a cross-European consultation exercise to review and evaluate the progress and success of the [European strategy for a better internet for kids+ \(BIK+ strategy\)](#). This exercise has been carried out by European Schoolnet (EUN) – on behalf of the European Commission (EC) – as part of the [Better Internet for Kids \(BIK\) initiative](#).

The methodology for this consultation-based evaluation, which was developed and implemented against the backdrop of ongoing EU policy work to safeguard and promote children's rights in the digital world, facilitated the review of progress and success of the European approach to creating a safer and better internet for kids, as enshrined in the BIK+ strategy, and is aligned with the European Commission's policy evaluation principles.

The [BIK+ strategy](#) is the European Union's flagship policy for safeguarding children's rights and well-being in the digital environment. Adopted on 11 May 2022, the strategy builds on over two decades of European initiatives dedicated to creating safer, more empowering, online experiences for children and young people. As digital technologies increasingly shape our societies and economies, BIK+ reflects the EU's vision of placing children at the heart of Europe's digital transformation, ensuring they are protected, empowered, and respected as digital citizens.

Underpinning BIK+ is the mission to advance the guiding principle that children's rights must be fully upheld in the online world, just as they are offline. This vision aligns seamlessly with the [European declaration on digital rights and principles for the digital decade](#), which emphasises that digital technologies must serve people, respect fundamental rights, and empower all members of society. Notably, the declaration identifies the protection and empowerment of children and young people as a priority, calling for:

- Safe, informed and creative digital engagement for children and young people.
- Access to age-appropriate services and materials that enhance their well-being and participation.
- Robust measures to protect children and young people from harmful or criminal activities facilitated through digital technologies.

The BIK+ strategy operationalises this agenda through three key pillars:

- 1. Safe digital experiences:** Ensuring a secure, age-appropriate online environment that protects children and young people from harmful content, conduct, and risks while supporting their overall well-being.
- 2. Digital empowerment:** Equipping children and young people with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate the digital world safely, responsibly, and confidently.
- 3. Active participation:** Recognising children’s right to be heard by fostering opportunities for child-led, innovative digital experiences.

The BIK+ strategy is deeply rooted in the EU’s long-standing efforts to improve the digital landscape for children and young people. From the first Safer Internet Programmes of the late 1990s to the original Better Internet for Kids strategy launched in 2012, the European Commission has championed initiatives to raise awareness, combat online risks, and promote positive digital experiences. Today, BIK+ brings these efforts into a new era, positioning itself as a cornerstone of the [EU’s Digital Decade](#) vision. By advancing children’s rights, safety, and participation online, the strategy reaffirms the EU’s commitment to creating a digital world where no child is left behind.

The consultation-based activity and its underlying methodology was developed in alignment with the European Commission’s provisions in the [Better regulation guidelines and toolbox](#). Key principles adopted as part of this activity line, therefore, comprised:

- **inclusiveness**, ensuring participation of all relevant stakeholders and diverse approaches to consultation;
- **openness and transparency** both through the consultation process and dissemination of outcomes;
- **effectiveness** by ensuring the inclusion of all key stakeholder groups and networks; and
- **coherence** as defined by the objectives and goals of the BIK+ strategy.

The [EU strategy on the rights of the child](#) provides the wider framework for the actions of the EU and its Member States. It fundamentally informed all stages of the development and implementation of this first evaluation of the BIK+ strategy.

Objective and approach

The main objective of the first evaluation of the BIK+ strategy was to review its progress and success since its adoption on 11 May 2022, while also identifying new and emerging risks, challenges, and opportunities that require targeted action moving forward. A key focus of the evaluation was to gain deeper insights into children’s and young people’s perceptions of their online lives, their experiences of being protected, empowered, and respected online, and any notable recent changes. The consultations adopted a qualitative approach similar to the focus group method. The findings provide a snapshot of how children and young people experience the key priorities and actions of the BIK+ strategy, while highlighting emerging priorities since its adoption.

Additionally, expert stakeholders from academia, civil society, industry and policy were consulted, while consultations with parents and caregivers, and teachers and educators are ongoing at the time of

writing. The outcomes from consultations with children and young people, as well as with expert stakeholders, are presented in this report. Insights from consultations with parents and caregivers, as well as teachers and educators, will be featured in a complemented version of of this report (to be published later in the spring).

Consultations with children and young people

During September and October 2024, 84 consultation sessions were carried out with children and young people³ in 22 countries across Europe⁴. The exercise was supported by members of the Insafe network of European Safer Internet Centres and a wider range of expert organisations who facilitated consultations with children and young people with different vulnerabilities.

In total, the activity included contributions from 759 children and young people. In a structured and systematic manner, in groups with an average of 9 participants each, the exercise continued to uphold the high standard of ensuring meaningful child and youth participation in digital policymaking and evaluation.

About 40 per cent of the consultation sessions involved children aged 12 years and younger, with the youngest participants being six years old. More than 25 groups involved children and young people from vulnerable groups. This extensive engagement reflects the BIK initiative's strong commitment to inclusivity, ensuring that the voices of those who are often underrepresented are heard and valued in co-shaping BIK+. As a result, the majority of the focus group workshops included very young children, children, and young people who identified themselves as members of the LGBTQIA+ communities, children and young people with various types of disabilities (intellectual, hearing, visual and physical impairment), children and young people with emotional and behavioural problems, children and young people with migratory backgrounds, Roma children, children in (foster) care or other public care facilities, children and young people from rural and isolated regions, and from disadvantaged or dysfunctional families.

Throughout this report, the insights drawn from the consultations with children and young people are presented in a more general manner, largely because the shared experiences and issues voiced across groups showed many similarities, regardless of age, gender, or background. Nevertheless, and where useful to illustrate nuances of specific concerns or where representative of frequently mentioned themes and ideas, the report references direct quotes from participants.

The methodology for these consultations was child-centred and child-rights-based, and has been shaped by a wide range of existing best practices for meaningful child participation. These include international and EU experiences with consulting children and young people about key issues, opportunities, and priorities for their rights in the digital age, as documented in a [BIK Good practice guide published in May 2021](#). Each session was facilitated by a structured protocol and focused on questions co-developed with BIK Youth Ambassadors. In doing so, the following set of principles was followed:

³ Generally, when referring to “children”, we refer to children under the age of 12 years. When referring to “young people”, we typically mean children over the age of 12.

⁴ Children and young people from the following countries were consulted: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain.

Principle		Guidelines and 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, and 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, and 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 and support	Train facilitators of the consultations (for example, provide an information package, host online conferences where they can ask questions, and provide tips on how to facilitate sessions).
BPG8	Safe and 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.

Table 1: Best practice guidance developed in the BIK initiative

Consultation structure and focus

The consultation protocol provided to all facilitators, including activity materials translated into all EU languages, led to a series of hands-on activities carried out in the participants' national language. The facilitator packages, including the consultation protocol, the questions and all supporting materials, as well as reporting templates provided, can be accessed on the [Better Internet for Kids portal](#) in all languages.

In a nutshell, the following steps were followed in each of the consultation sessions:

Purpose	Practical approach
<p>Step 1 Informing and sensitising</p>	<p>The main objective of step 1 has been to provide children and young people with sufficient information about the consultation (process), the topics that will be discussed during the session, the objectives, and the personal data that will be processed. This enabled them to make an informed decision about participating in the consultation session.</p> <p>Before participating in the consultations, children and young people received all the necessary information to enable them to develop their own views on the subject matter. This included information about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • their right not to participate in the consultation; • informed consent/assent; • the scope of their participation and its limitations; • the expected outputs; • how their views will be considered and by whom; • how their data will be processed, for what purposes and who they can contact if they have questions about this; • how they will receive feedback; • what the roles and responsibilities of those involved are. <p>Facilitators were asked to provide the above-listed information, including the info flyer provided and the child-friendly version of the BIK+ strategy, at least one week before the consultation session. Additionally, facilitators were entrusted to obtain informed consent/assent before starting the activity.</p>
<p>Step 2 Start of the consultation session</p>	<p>Step 2 focused on setting the scene and starting the session by reminding participants about the purpose of the consultation and all relevant background information in line with the info flyer they had received in advance. The facilitator confirmed whether the participants had read and understood the information provided in the flyer, underlining once more that their participation is entirely voluntary and that they can decide against participating in the consultation at any time.</p>
<p>Step 3 Opinions and attitudes of children and young people about their favourite online activities</p>	<p>The purpose of step 3 was to gain a better understanding of children's and young people's real-life experiences in the digital world. To start the discussions in children's and young people's own words, creating a safe, inclusive, and inviting space for children to participate actively was vital.</p>
<p>Step 4 Children's and young people's perceptions of their lives online and their experiences of the priorities and actions of the BIK+ strategy</p>	<p>The goal of step 4 was to allow children and young people to share their perceptions of their lives online and about observed recent changes. This was meant to provide a snapshot of how they experience key BIK+ priorities and actions.</p>
<p>Step 5 Children's and young people's priorities</p>	<p>Step 5 aimed to wrap up the consultation session. In this portion of the consultation, children and young people could develop and freely express their views about what they are most concerned about in relation to their rights in the digital environment. This aimed at gaining further insights into children's and young people's expectations of policymakers and other actors.</p>

Purpose	Practical approach
Step 6 End of the consultation session	In this step, facilitators thanked all participants for their time and input. They explained what would happen with their input and how it would be processed further. In addition, facilitators informed participants that they could receive the report and all child- and family-friendly outputs based on it once it became available in February 2025 (and beyond).
Step 7 Data collection	It was recommended for facilitators to take notes during the consultation sessions – in an ideal scenario, two facilitators were present during each session, with one person responsible for notetaking while the other guided the discussions. It was recommended that the facilitator summarise the discussions and complete the provided reporting template as soon as possible after the consultation session to capture all outcomes as closely as possible.

Table 2: Structure, aims and suggested approaches from the provided consultation protocol

All facilitators completed and submitted a standardised reporting template to EUN within two weeks after the consultation activity, omitting any personal or sensitive data. These reports detailed the session’s setting, gave an overview of the main outcomes and themes, and provided recommendations that emerged from the discussion. Additionally, organisations working with children and young people from specifically vulnerable situations and backgrounds were asked to adapt the base methodology as provided by the protocol to make it fit for the purpose of consulting the specific groups they focused on. For this purpose, an additional standardised reporting template was provided for organisations to report, in detail, how they adapted the methodology.

In the following pages, the present report showcases children’s and young people’s strong opinions and clear views about Europe’s strategy to create safer and better digital environments for them. In addition, the report highlights new and emergent issues they identified. It provides a structured overview of the recommendations to the various actors involved, particularly policymakers, directly voiced by the children and young people themselves, complemented by recommendations drawn from analysing and synthesising the overall outcomes of the evaluation activity. Lastly, the report is rounded off by insights and recommendations derived from consultations with expert stakeholders from academia, civil society, industry and policy.

Realising children’s and young people’s right to participation does not only entail providing them with safe and inclusive opportunities to form and express their views. Instead, to fully realise this fundamental right, their views and recommendations must reach the right audience, and their views should be acted upon appropriately (Lundy, 2013). In this vein, the European Commission aspires to continuously protect, empower, and respect children and young people online as much as offline. We hope this report will support policymakers and other stakeholders in recognising individual and social needs, as well as challenges and opportunities going forward, and actualising them in practicable solutions, fostering a safer and better internet for children and young people for generations to come.

Consultations with expert stakeholders

In parallel to the consultation with children and young people, workshops were conducted with 59 experts. They comprised a two-hour online consultation session facilitated on the Microsoft Teams platform. Using both a plenary format and breakout sessions, participants were guided through a selection of questions in short segments, each led by a session moderator from the BIK evaluation team. A briefing note was provided to participants in advance to give an outline of the workshop, a background on the BIK+ strategy, and an overview of the workshop topics.

Workshops were held under the **Chatham House Rule** to promote an open and free conversation. As such, workshop reports summarise the main discussion points but do not attribute comments to individual speakers. Organisations are only attributed in the final report when requested explicitly by participants.

Consultation structure and focus

Drawing on the **Better Regulation Guidelines** (European Commission, 2021), which informed the overall approach, the aim of the exercise was to carry out an evidence-based assessment of the extent to which the BIK+ strategy is:

1. effective in fulfilling expectations and meeting its objectives;
2. efficient in terms of cost-effectiveness and proportionality of actual costs to benefits;
3. relevant to current and emerging needs;
4. coherent (internally and externally with other EU interventions or international agreements); and
5. has EU added value — i.e. produces results beyond what would have been achieved by Member States acting alone.

(Better Regulation Guidelines, 2021, p.23)

To support this approach, the consultation workshops were organised around four main themes as follows:

1. Addressing the aims and objectives of the BIK+ strategy.
2. Assessing the successes and gaps of the BIK+ strategy.
3. Lessons to be learned.
4. Looking ahead and future-proofing BIK+.

The workshop agenda was organised according to this schema, providing each segment's main organisational topics and discussion points. Each workshop, comprising separate groups of expert stakeholders, adopted the same structure.

Consulted expert groups

For the consultation, four separate consultation workshops were organised as follows:

Workshop I: Policymakers and policy professionals

Invited participants for this workshop included national contacts for the **BIK Policy monitor**, members of the **Expert Group on Safer Internet for Children**, and officials working closely in designing, developing and implementing BIK-related policies at the governmental level. This workshop had a total of 16 participants.

Workshop II: Academia, civil society, and advocacy organisations

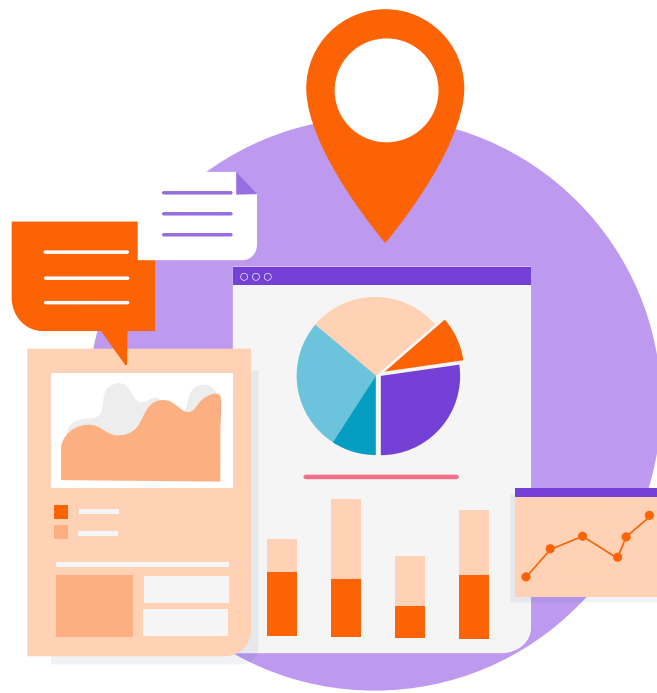
Experts invited to this workshop included researchers and professionals from various civil society organisations who have experience working on BIK-related activities. Academic participants included experts on children's digital experiences, EC-funded research and innovation project representatives, and EU Kids Online network members. Civil society organisations included parents' and children's organisations with particular expertise in children's rights and online safety. A total of 17 experts participated in the workshop.

Workshop III: Industry

Participants included industry members from the **Special group on the EU Code of conduct on age-appropriate design**, and representatives of various organisations across the value chain. Participants from regulatory, civil society and legal backgrounds were also invited to join the discussion to encourage a more cross-disciplinary dialogue. A total of 14 experts participated in the workshop.

Workshop IV: International organisations

The workshop included a wide range of European and international perspectives. Invited participants included representatives from UNICEF, the Council of Europe, the OECD, Europol, the European Audiovisual Observatory, and the European Platform for Regulatory Authorities, as well as members of the European Data Protection Board, the Global Privacy Assembly Working Group, and the European Board for Digital Services. A total of 12 experts participated in the workshop.



Chapter 2: Results from consultations with children and young people

A total of 84 consultation sessions were held, with 759 participants from across the EU and Norway, aiming to ensure a balance between age, gender, background, and ethnicity. The following chapter summarises the main outcomes grouped under six sections below: (I) children’s and young people’s perception of the BIK+ strategy; (II) their favourite online activities and motives to engage; (III) frequency of using the internet and being online; (IV) the priorities and actions of BIK+; (V) their own priorities and expectations; (VI) further observations; and (VII) reflections about limitations.

I. Children’s and young people’s perception of the BIK+ strategy

Before the consultation sessions, children and young people were introduced to the BIK+ strategy by sharing the **child-friendly version of the BIK+ strategy in their native language** and discussing its key components and three pillars before the beginning of the workshop.

Overall, children and young people recognised the child-friendly version of the BIK+ strategy as straightforward and clear. Facilitators used visual aids to explain the EC’s role in drafting and implementing laws. For younger children, they adapted the protocol to provide examples making concepts more relatable.

Younger children, in particular, occasionally found the third pillar of the BIK+ (active participation), which emphasises the importance of offering children opportunities to make impactful contributions, a bit overwhelming. Despite initial hesitation, session facilitators noted that these children often naturally shared relevant insights as conversations progressed. Terms such as “stakeholder”, “interested parties”, and “challenges” were sometimes unclear to children, with the term “challenges” being interpreted as the “viral challenges” they knew from various social networking platforms, rather than grasping the broader meaning of this term. Some children expressed difficulty in imagining how BIK+ could be effectively implemented. In contrast, others had read the provided info flyer before the session with their parents, who had explained key elements to them during the consent process for participation. Facilitators highlighted that such parent-child discussions often extended into broader conversations about online safety. Overall, the child-friendly version of the BIK+ strategy was found to be effective, while additional visuals could improve understanding and engagement.



Figure 1: Visual aids used during the consultation workshops

II. Children’s and young people’s favourite online activities and motives

At the start of the consultation workshops, children and young people were invited to reflect on their favourite online activities, drawing from their own experiences in the digital world. This exercise encouraged them to identify what is important to them when they go online, to start the discussions in their own words, and to set the basis for in-depth discussions around the three pillars of the BIK+ strategy.

Children and young people engage in a wide variety of online activities, serving different – or sometimes joint – purposes and reflecting their diverse interests. The consultation revealed common trends in the types of activities they enjoy, why they engage in them, and the emotional and practical value these activities provide.

Overall, children expressed **predominantly positive feelings** about their favourite online activities. Gaming, in particular, stood out as a source of excitement, connection, and achievement, especially for participants aged between 6 and 12 years⁵. Many children and young people associate their online activities with relaxation, happiness, and a sense of belonging. In addition, the digital world offers a versatile space for self-expression, creativity, and learning. Whether through gaming, streaming videos, or sharing updates with friends, children and young people find that their favourite online activities cater to their emotional, social, and practical needs. The most commonly referenced motives to engage in the digital environment are listed below.

1. Staying close to friends and family

One of the most frequent uses of the internet mentioned by children and young people is **maintaining connections with friends and family**. Participants appreciated how it enables them to stay in touch with relatives living far away, such as siblings studying abroad, or with friends they could not meet in person due to busy schedules, long school days, or reliance on parents for transportation. Many highlighted how online communication makes them feel close to loved ones, offering a way to exchange pictures, videos, and messages effortlessly. While some participants occasionally mentioned making new friends through online communities or shared interests, such as video games, they were primarily focused on maintaining their relationships with family and existing friends.

Children and young people also indicated that the internet helps them **avoid feelings of missing out** (so-called fear of missing out or “FOMO”) by letting them see what their friends are doing or share funny content to stay connected. Popular communication tools include messenger apps, chat functions in games, and multimedia messaging. For many, online communication is not only enjoyable but also practical, helping them organise social events or discuss homework. One participant, for instance, noted that being able to talk to friends online while staying at home sick helped prevent feelings of loneliness.

2. Entertainment and pastime activities

Entertainment was another widely discussed motive among children and young people, highlighting how much they enjoyed certain online activities. Connected to this, several participants emphasised how the positive activities of online entertainment far outweigh the downsides, noting that these activities are fun and relaxing, and often educational.

Gaming was mentioned in all focus groups and emerged as the most popular activity among younger children. Participants consistently described gaming as a **fun and inherently social activity**, with many sharing how they enjoy playing with friends – whether by chatting in-game, talking on the phone while playing, or collaborating during gameplay. The excitement about specific features of games, such as unlocking certain achievements or milestones, or participating in special in-game events, also added to its appeal.

For some, gaming provides an **escape from reality** and an opportunity to



Figure 2: Examples of popular games among participants

⁵ As we discuss under [Chapter 2, section VII. Reflections and limitations](#): not all consultation groups involved exclusively children under the age of 12 and over the age of 12, respectively, and instead, sometimes included a mix of age groups. Please refer to [section VII](#). for further details.

explore new personalities through virtual characters. In addition to entertainment, participants highlighted gaming as a way to develop skills like teamwork and communication, which also contributed to a sense of accomplishment. While many participants approached gaming as a casual activity, a few described it as a more serious hobby, dedicating time to improving their skills and comparing it to sports. Some participants acknowledged playing games with age restrictions or spending money to enhance their gaming experience.

Watching videos was one of the most frequently mentioned activities engaged in, either alone or with their siblings or parents. It serves as a way to pass the time when they feel bored, or to relax or learn something new. Short, fast-paced videos were particularly popular, as they were seen as engaging and easy to enjoy, without requiring serious attention. Participants mentioned various entertaining content, including action-packed clips, funny videos featuring people or animals doing humorous or unusual things, and videos from influencers such as “Get ready with me” or product review videos. Some children and young people mentioned preferring family influencers (which feature children) or content that resonates with their hobbies.

Social media platforms are also valued for entertainment, offering opportunities to follow accounts from their favourite sports club or influencers, to like their posts, and to post one’s own content. A few participants mentioned preferring alternative (national) platforms over the very popular social media platforms, appreciating the freedom to share more honestly without presenting a picture-perfect image.

Content creation is another way participants engage with entertainment online. A few participants mentioned creating videos, including animations or family photo compilations. These creations were sometimes shared privately rather than on public platforms. Others would upload screen-castings from their videogame sessions, illustrating how entertainment intersects with their hobbies, interests and creativity.

Listening to music and podcasts helps participants escape, calm down, or uplift their mood. Often a solitary activity, it lets children and young people express themselves or relax while doing other tasks like drawing.

Watching movies, TV series and anime, as well as watching sports online is also a common pastime, valued not only for its entertainment purposes but also because it provides common ground for conversations with peers.

Children and young people of different ages frequently use the internet to **explore their creative interests and hobbies**, often tailoring searches to their specific passions. Popular activities include discovering DIY projects and experimenting with arts and crafts, exploring new places to visit, looking up baking and cooking recipes, and learning chess strategies or assembling computer parts.

3. Gathering information and keeping up with news

Participants often mentioned gathering information and staying updated with news as key purposes for using social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, which they preferred over traditional news websites. While one group mentioned public broadcaster channels explicitly, **participants generally highlighted social media as their go-to news source**, with hardly any references to traditional news websites.

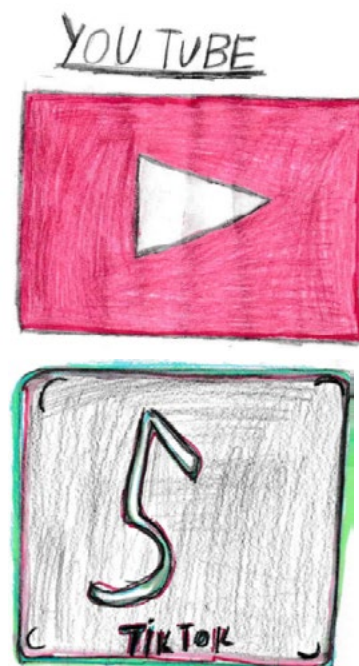


Figure 3: Popular video-sharing platforms mentioned by participants

For many, the internet helped them feel more connected to their communities and gave them a better understanding of global issues. Celebrity news was also a popular interest, along with videos containing reviews of shows, movies, products and general opinions. Gamers frequently sought information about game updates, new strategies, and improvements to enhance their playing experience. **Participants love that it is so easy to find answers online**, as they like to keep up to date. For example, some used online tools to translate foreign languages or ask niche questions. Local events and activities were also a focus, with participants looking up information about cinema schedules, theatre plays for children, or other community events in the area.

4. School and educational purposes

Participants rely on the internet and technology to **support their education** in various ways. They use it for conducting research for assignments, projects, and personal study, looking up unknown words to expand their vocabulary, accessing online schooling, study apps, and exercise plans to supplement their learning, and exploring tools to solve math problems. Only a few of them referenced the use of generative AI tools in this context.

5. Online shopping

Lastly, online shopping was mentioned by a smaller number of children and young people. Participants would refer to fast fashion companies or discounter online stores for their wide range of products and competitive prices whenever it was mentioned. One child mentioned that they were aware of the low quality of the products but found them fun to explore. In one of the focus groups with younger children, participants displayed surprising independence, mentioning that they knew how to make purchases themselves without adult assistance. One young participant even mentioned a platform that compares prices from different online stores.

III. Frequency of using the internet and being online

Children and young people's internet usage forms **a significant part of their daily routines, regardless of age**. Daily engagement with social media platforms, online gaming, or other online activities is the norm. They often engage in these activities during free time, such as when commuting to and from school, during breaks, or at home when bored. Participants mentioned that this usage tends to increase during school holidays or weekends. Children and young people primarily access the internet through mobile phones, with the youngest participants mentioning using their parents' devices, while also utilising laptops and tablets in their households for educational purposes and gaming consoles for entertainment.

Several children and young people mentioned **frequently losing track of the time they spend online**. They were surprised by how easily hours could pass without them noticing. Many admitted that they had initially planned to use the internet for a brief time, whether for games or browsing, but ended up spending much longer than intended. Several participants noted that certain features of platforms encourage frequent use. For example, competitive elements like "streaks" motivate users to engage daily. A streak refers to maintaining a consecutive daily engagement, accompanied by a counter displaying how many days the streak has lasted. If a day is missed, the streak is broken.

Participants also **raised concerns about how intensive use might impact their daily schedules**, including homework and other obligations. This emerged as a typical problem many children and young people encounter when balancing their online and offline lives. While some see this time as potentially wasteful, others emphasise enjoyment and learning aspects. Parental monitoring and restrictions are common, either being used as a reward for good behaviour or as a punishment for bad behaviour.

The consultation highlighted **diverse parental approaches to managing children and young people's internet usage**. Some families lack firm rules, allowing unrestricted online engagement, while others impose specific restrictions. For example, some parents grant unlimited phone access to children with top grades but impose limits in response to poor performance. Many use parental controls to manage screen time, and some require homework completion before internet access. Restrictions can also vary by device. Tablets may have limited usage hours, while laptops are often unrestricted for schoolwork. Additionally, some parents delete specific apps or limit social media and gaming, while some children can only access the internet when parents are present, reflecting varying levels of supervision in managing online activities.

IV. The BIK+ strategy's priorities and actions: Children's and young people's views

Following the introductory discussions, children and young people discussed a series of targeted questions designed to explore the three pillars of the BIK+ strategy. The outcome of these discussions provides a snapshot of how participants experience the strategy's key priorities and actions. It highlights the real-life challenges and perspectives of children and young people, shedding light on the impact of these priorities on their digital lives.

BIK+ pillar 1: Safe digital experiences

1. What do children and young people think are the biggest challenges that they face online?

The consultation outcomes clearly demonstrate that **staying safe online remains a major concern for many children and young people**. Participants mentioned risks and challenges such as harmful content, mental health impacts, privacy concerns, monetisation of their online activities, online scams, and fake news. Teenage participants frequently pointed out that these issues seem more significant for younger children than for themselves.

Perceptions of online safety varied widely among participants. Some expressed a lack of worry about their online activities, believing that their understanding of the digital world protects them from harm or that they do not see many risks or challenges. However, others described the internet as a dangerous place where they feel unsafe. Overall, similar challenges were identified across the vast majority of groups, and many examples were given either of their own experiences or of someone they know.

a) Harmful and inappropriate content, contact or conduct online

Participants frequently raised **concerns about exposure to age-inappropriate material**, including graphic videos of violence, adult content, self-harm videos, dangerous social media challenges, videos trivialising war, eating disorder tips, and encouragement to engage in betting and gambling. Sometimes, they accidentally viewed such content because of misleading descriptions or thumbnails. In several groups, a significant concern was being exposed to topics, trends and false role models on social media platforms which can lead to distorted body perception, reduced self-esteem, and eating disorders.

Hate speech is another issue, with children and young people encountering bad language, disrespectful comments, toxicity, and racist narratives on digital platforms. Some switch off the comment function on their own profiles to avoid such negativity, while others fear discussing important issues because of the risk of becoming a target of hate speech online. Participants were also worried that the prevalence

of hate speech and disturbing messages (e.g., “like and subscribe or your parents will die”) can contribute to the normalisation of brutality and can erode civility and respect among younger generations.

Sexual content and harassment were frequently mentioned by participants. Several reported receiving messages from strangers, often with sexual images or requests, and being exposed to pornographic and sexist content and/or advertisements. Additionally, several participants, in both the above and under 12 years of age groups⁶, expressed concerns about grooming, with some sharing experiences of being contacted by adults on their favourite platforms. Some believe that many adults hang around on these platforms and apps to connect with and gradually manipulate young users.

Bullying and trolling were mentioned as significant problems in numerous groups, with harassment often starting in class and continuing online. Cybermobbing (or cyberbullying), where an entire school class engages in bullying one individual within class group chats, exclusion from such groups, or taking and spreading pictures without consent, were given as examples.

b) Mental health and feeling under pressure to be online

“Apps like TikTok never stop. I wish much more would be done about it. Because to be honest, I’m affected by it myself. I’m also completely dissatisfied with it. But it’s hard to get out of this loop.”

Teenager, Germany

Children and young people are also concerned about the **impact of their online activities on their mental health** and feel under **pressure to always be online**. Many participants highlighted that social media could become overwhelming due to the fear of missing critical updates or social connections (so-called fear of missing out or “FOMO”) potentially leading to **anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem**. Some expressed feeling compelled to share

their lives publicly and, at the same time, feeling alienated when curating content instead of enjoying real-life moments. The pressure to be online also includes difficulties in limiting online time because of constant alerts, push notifications, and receiving messages even during the night. Participants shared that social media creates **response stress**, with unwritten rules regarding response times, leading to accusations of ghosting if responses are delayed, making them feel trapped in a loop of continuous engagement with certain apps. Some participants viewed their online activities as being “**addictive**”, experiencing feelings of wasted time, exhaustion and being stuck scrolling for hours. In contrast, a few participants did not feel worried about their online time, and did not feel like they spent excessive time online.

Several children and young people mentioned the struggles of constantly being exposed to **unrealistic standards of life and success** set by influencers and how it can turn them into unhappy individuals, finding it difficult to meet these unattainable goals. In addition, some struggle with being themselves online without fear of judgment. In some of these discussions, the **role of algorithms** was mentioned, and how they can exacerbate negative thought patterns, as they tend to show more of what users already engage with, making it even harder to escape a negative mindset.

c) Data privacy, protection and feeling (un)safe

When children and young people engage in online activities, **they are concerned about their privacy and data protection**. The consultations show that many are unsure about what companies, governments or individuals can do with the information they share online and that they want to be protected from all these actors. Concerns include **being tracked or stalked online**, particularly through apps that

⁶ As we discuss under [Chapter 2, section VII. Reflections and limitations](#): not all consultation groups involved exclusively “children” under the age of 12 and over the age of 12, respectively, and instead, sometimes included a mix of age groups. Please refer to [section VII.](#) for further details.

show detailed location information. There is also uncertainty about what app providers can see, collect, store and pass on, making them nervous about their online activities. Additionally, **participants perceive having to register and share too much personal data for various online activities as intrusive**, leading some to provide false information. Other concerns include being recorded and videos shared online without consent, and social media platforms monitoring conversations to push advertising.

Online fraud, scams and computer viruses (or malware) were consistently mentioned as a major challenge. Unauthorised additions to large group chats and scam messages were common issues, as were scams directed at them on gaming platforms or scams directed at family members through other ways, for instance, through text messages claiming to be sent by the child, asking parents for help or money. Many participants shared concerns about accessing illegal sites and clicking on fraudulent links, being hacked, and having personal details stolen. In several groups, fake or unsolicited calls, as well as issues like catfishing and identity theft, were also mentioned.

Participants frequently discussed **monetisation** issues in the group, expressing a strong dislike for online ads. They found commercials on video-sharing platforms and in-game ads particularly frustrating, especially when these interrupted the content. Many criticised inappropriate advertisements, such as those promoting online gambling or sexist themes, and raised concerns about the impact of influencers on their purchasing decisions, and the strong focus on consumption on certain platforms. Some participants noted that in-game purchases might harm young users by making them feel inadequate if they did not buy them. Despite recognising “teen profile” options on some social media platforms designed to combat manipulative marketing aimed at minors, concerns about targeted advertising and profiling remained prevalent.

Participants shared challenges regarding **unreliable online sources**. Some frequently encountered fake news about celebrities and personal acquaintances, while others struggled to recognise deep-fakes. When researching for schoolwork, they often find information that seems unreliable or nonsensical, causing them to doubt the reliability of online content.

2. Do children and young people know how to report content online that they think is harmful or inappropriate? And if so, do they do it, and what's their reasoning?

When asked about their knowledge and practices regarding harmful or inappropriate content online, **most participants indicated that they know how to report** such content or profiles on various platforms. This knowledge, however, is less prevalent among younger participants. Children and young people generally figure out the reporting process themselves or seek assistance from friends, parents, siblings, or teachers. They noted that the reporting process tends to be fairly similar across platforms, and some participants had learned about it in computer or informatics classes. However, despite this knowledge, **many barriers to reporting were highlighted** during the consultation workshops. The level of knowledge about reporting channels varies, with younger children more likely to turn to parents or older siblings for help.

Responses across the different groups varied significantly; some children do report content, while others do not, and no generalisations can be made in terms of the frequency of reporting. Several participants mentioned that they would **rather block accounts and unwanted contact than turn to reporting**. The decision to report content often depends on its severity. Some children have never encountered anything they felt needed reporting, while others have reported inappropriate disturbing content, such as content that glorifies weapons, sexual content, racist content, death, fake news, and nasty comments.

Participants put forward **various reasons for reporting**, such as protecting younger users and feeling safer themselves. However, **barriers** like fear of complications, lack of knowledge about the process,

and feelings of shame deter them. Many find the **reporting process too complicated and time-consuming** and express distrust in its effectiveness, believing their reports will not lead to meaningful changes. Younger children often fear consequences from parents or teachers, for instance, not being allowed to be online anymore if they raise an issue.

Participants mentioned several additional ways to report online issues beyond the platforms themselves, such as contacting teachers, school principals, forum moderators, police officers, or using the national emergency number.



Recommendations and proposed best practices

Some participants recommended that the reporting process be made easier, although others thought it was easy and just a click away on most platforms. In one group, they expressed the need for regular reminders and guidance to stay aware of online safety practices due to the potential normalisation of risky situations, content and behaviour online. Some children appreciated options such as “I don’t want to see more from this user” feature, considering it a good practice that empowers them to reduce inappropriate and unwanted content.

3. Have children and young people heard about laws or rules that aim to make the internet better and safer for them?

When asked whether they had heard about laws or rules aimed at making the internet safe for their age group, **most participants responded negatively**. Some of them questioned the effectiveness of such laws, as they believe there are still far too many problems online. The only initiative some had heard of was the BIK+ strategy, because they were discussing it at the beginning of the consultation workshop.

Nevertheless, in some groups, participants mentioned age limits in apps and games. A few of the young people showed slightly more awareness, with two groups mentioning actual legal instruments, including the **Digital Services Act (DSA)**, the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**, and a number of national laws. Privacy policies and cookies were also mentioned a few times, though the discussions did not delve into the existing legislation surrounding these topics. In certain countries, such as Denmark and France, there was some awareness of ongoing legislative discussions to limit access to social media. Additionally, participants sometimes mentioned rules for online behaviour set by schools, including digital etiquette and safety guidelines.

4. Have children and young people encountered websites, platforms or apps that ask for their age before accessing certain content? If yes, which ones? And do they perceive these measures as effective?

Most participants said they have come across websites or apps that ask for their age before letting them access content. They believe this age check can help protect users by confirming they are real individuals and encouraging young users to think about whether the content is suitable for them. Common sites that ask for age include adult websites, social media, video platforms, gaming sites, and dating apps.

However, **children and young people find current age verification methods ineffective**, often bypassing them by lying about their age or using a parent’s ID. Many express indifference to age limits and believe that age verification is more legal protection for platforms than genuine child safety.

“With most apps, I feel like they don’t really care if kids get on. They just have the restriction there so they can say, ‘No, we have something in place’ if someone complains.”

Teenager, Germany

While **parental controls are seen as more effective, some children find them frustrating** and feel they strain relationships with parents. Participants also mentioned that age requirements are only visible during registration and are not consistently enforced during app use, despite varying content appropriateness.



Recommendations and proposed best practices

Children and young people proposed various ideas for improving age and identity verification.

Some suggested alternatives to self-reporting could be submitting a photo, an ID card, or a bank ID with sensitive information omitted, and using a personal phone profile that blocks age-inappropriate apps or content automatically. Technologies such as facial scanning, video verification, and fingerprint scanning were also mentioned.

Concerns about privacy and data protection were raised, with some preferring to share only their birth year rather than the entire date. Participants emphasised the need for a simple verification process to minimise frustration and suggested regular yet quicker updates and checks for continuous verification rather than just at account setup. Age-based restrictions on apps and games to limit interactions between children and adults were also recommended, along with using control questions, possibly assisted by AI.

Lastly, some participants suggested an alternative solution: making services child-friendly by default by only allowing age-appropriate content on social networks, with anyone over 18 being able to opt in for adult content.

5. Have they ever read the terms and conditions (T&Cs) of the apps they use? Do they find them clear and easy to understand?

Almost all participants answered negatively when asked if they had read the T&Cs of the apps they used and whether they found them easy to understand. Only a few participants said they read the T&Cs, often merely skimming through them briefly. Some participants mentioned having attempted to read the T&Cs but found them too time-consuming and unhelpful, leading them to click ‘accept’ quickly in future instances.

There were numerous reasons for not reading T&Cs:

- **Length:** Many felt the documents were too long, repetitive and boring, taking forever to read.
- **Complexity:** The language was often too complex and filled with legal terms, making it hard to understand. This was particularly challenging for children with limited language proficiency or those with learning disabilities like dyslexia.
- **Overwhelming process:** Some participants perceived the overall process of reading T&Cs as overwhelming and inaccessible, with small print adding to the difficulty.
- **Impatience:** In several groups, participants expressed a desire to start using the app immediately, finding it annoying that agreeing to the T&Cs was mandatory for access.
- **Trust:** Some participants mentioned that they trusted game developers or friends who had been using the app without issues, so they did not worry about the details in the T&Cs.

- **Reliance on parents:** Some assumed that their parents or teachers had read the T&Cs, though others noted that their parents did not, either.



Recommendations and proposed best practices

Various platforms, apps and sites were mentioned during the discussions across all groups. However, none of them were recognised as good practice examples. Many participants wished that T&Cs were more understandable and recommended developing child-friendly versions that present clear and concise summaries of key points. Placing the main highlights at the beginning will provide an easy overview, while using shorter text and bullet points can enhance readability and encourage engagement. Offering audio versions was proposed to broaden accessibility further, ensuring that everyone can understand the content. Additionally, incorporating visual aids to highlight important information can make T&Cs more engaging for younger users. For individuals with disabilities, it was suggested that shorter T&Cs in larger fonts be provided, translated into their native languages, along with visual instructions to clarify key concepts.

6. Have they noticed any recent changes in the apps they use?

When asked if they had noticed any recent changes in the apps they use, participants would mostly refer in general to updates to apps, such as visual changes (e.g., new colours, layouts or icons) and new features (e.g., new seasons in online games or new features). Specific examples were given a few times, such as TikTok omitting the phone’s clock by blocking it out with a black field, making it harder to keep track of how much time they spend on the app, or the addition of voice chat in Roblox. Concerning terms and conditions, a few participants noticed that T&Cs are written in less legal language. Some participants also noted an increase in the number of ads on platforms or longer durations for ads that they could not skip anymore. Lastly, some groups mentioned how various apps now check the age of users at the stage of profile creation.

BIK+ pillar 2: Digital empowerment

1. Do children and young people ever wonder whether what they see or read online is true?

Across all groups, **most children and young people know that a significant amount of online content is not real or true** and often express doubts about various information they encounter. Some children say this question is on their minds for most of the time they spend online, while others say they engage with questionable content for entertainment despite their doubts.

Rich examples of content they questioned were given across all age groups. The most frequently mentioned across responses were:

- celebrity news content, such as exaggerated “Hollywood scandals”, altered and photoshopped beauty images, and fake reports about deaths;
- content about politics and wars, for example, concerning the topics of climate change, pandemics such as COVID-19 or Mpox, and the wars on Ukraine and Gaza;
- content about natural disasters featuring AI-generated images or videos;
- information on Wikipedia, as participants acknowledged that everyone could edit the content;

- promotional content that includes exaggerated claims about the quality of advertised products, unrealistically low prices, and similar tactics.

In groups with younger children, responses were more divided. While fake information is a significant concern for many, some participants appear to be less bothered or do not question it as much. Some facilitators of workshops with **younger children** indicated that participants **still lack knowledge** in this area and that some do not worry about the truthfulness of information, as they do not use the internet to follow the news. Instead, they are more focused on information helping them to solve practical problems with apps they know and use. Some younger children fully trust the internet, including AI-generated responses from tools like ChatGPT, and are not particularly interested in the issue of misinformation. Additionally, some of the youngest participants did not understand why someone would want to share something untrue.

2. Do children and young people feel confident finding and understanding information and using different online tools?

Across all focus groups, there were **mixed feelings** about the ability to discern accurate and reliable information from “fake” information. While some felt confident, others felt more anxious and acknowledged that distinguishing fake from real information is becoming increasingly difficult. A range of **indicators that made them question the truthfulness** of content were mentioned:

- **Gut feeling and general suspicion:** Many respondents demonstrated a general sense of scepticism about the content they see online and used logic to evaluate such content.
- **Contradicting prior knowledge:** An often-mentioned indicator is that if the content conflicts with what they already know about a topic, for instance, from school or their parents, they become doubtful.
- **Double-checking information:** Many children and young people double-check information by discussing it with friends, parents or educators, or by checking multiple sources. Some of them also mentioned reading the comments below certain posts or videos to see what others are saying or note whether something important is discussed online.
- **Incredible or exaggerated news:** Many participants mentioned that content that seems “too incredible” to them, “too good to be true”, or “too exaggerated” raises suspicion. Sensationalised headlines and clickbait tactics also contribute to their doubts.
- **Quality of the source:** Various participants expressed being sceptical of content from unknown or untrustworthy sources, particularly if the concerned topics are not reported by official sources (e.g., government sites or public broadcasters). Furthermore, they are doubtful about information posted by influencers known for “silly” posts. Some participants consider the number of followers and the presence of “blue ticks” (signifying that an account is “verified”) as a sign of reliability.
- **Quality of the content:** Another indicator that was mentioned in several groups is the way videos are edited. Cuts and lighting effects, making content seem more dramatic, were mentioned to raise doubt. Some participants also pay attention to how a person speaks, questioning the intent behind dramatic and emotional speech. A number of participants also mentioned poor grammar as suggesting that content is untrue or created by bots.

Many participants reported being able to identify fake information, but they found it **challenging and often needed to cross-check facts**. They commonly used different platforms for verification, with some kids checking social media against search engines or official news websites. Parents were frequently mentioned as reliable sources of information. While some discussed this topic at school, others lacked formal education on how to critically evaluate online information.

However, many participants felt **unsure about their ability to find and understand information and spot fake news**. They were often **overwhelmed** by the sheer volume of content and sceptical about what to believe, thinking that people could deliberately hide the truth. They noted that staying informed about real-world events helped them recognise fake news more easily.

For **younger children**, results paint a **widely varied picture**. Some felt confident in their ability to identify harmful content and even believed they were more capable than their parents. In contrast, others admitted to lacking the knowledge and skills needed to verify information. Many felt frustrated by conflicting sources and often sought help from parents or siblings. Some struggled with how to cross-check facts or navigate complex websites. In certain groups, children seemed indifferent to the issue; they were satisfied with the first search result and did not feel the need to look for additional sources or conduct further research. They believed they could recognise fake news but rarely verified information found online through multiple sources.



Recommendations and proposed best practices

The great variety in responses highlights the need for continued education and support to help children and young people develop the skills needed to critically assess online information. This need was explicitly addressed by participants across several groups. For instance, in one group, children expressed a strong demand for more training and education on AI and how to use AI tools “in a good way”.

3. Have children and young people received any lessons or information at school about staying safe online? What do they think needs to be done to improve teaching students about online safety?

Participants’ responses to the questions related to learning about online safety also demonstrated significant variety. While some have received multiple lessons and talks about internet safety, others have had none. However, universally across all groups, **children and young people call for more training and education on online safety** and have many concrete and interesting ideas on how to develop such programmes. It was clear from the workshops that **many participants believed that school is the most important place to address online safety topics**, as it reaches all children and young people. Some noted that responsibility for these topics cannot be solely placed on parents, as children often know more about digital issues than their parents, or because not all parents prioritise these topics.

Most participants indicated that their schools held at least basic discussions about online safety, primarily in computer or informatics classes. These lessons typically covered topics like cyberbullying, hate speech, and some aspects of privacy and data protection. However, many felt the information was too basic and wanted more in-depth discussions on online safety. Common criticisms included an outdated curriculum focusing more on using tools rather than comprehensive safety strategies, insufficient coverage of social media and gaming safety, and an overall perception that the lessons were boring.

“How is a teacher supposed to tell me what to do when they themselves lack the experience? It’s important that these are people who know what they’re talking about, like in peer-to-peer work. Young people can relate to that better.”

Teenager, Germany

“Have you played Roblox, Fortnite, or used voice chat? No, you haven’t. So how can adults teach us about something they don’t know about themselves?”

Child, Ireland

When discussing the topic of **peer-to-peer learning**, several participants believed it could be beneficial because children and young people can relate more to peers, share real-life experiences, and feel less lectured or judged. However, some of the younger children were less convinced about such learning methods, believing that teachers might know the material better, or they worried that older students might provide incorrect information.



Recommendations and proposed best practices

Children and young people shared many practical tips and suggestions to improve digital education in schools and promote peer-to-peer learning.

1. **Implement mentorship programmes:** Pair older students with younger ones to guide them on online safety practices and facilitate peer learning through presentations and discussions.
2. **Prioritise digital education:** Establish dedicated training programmes on online safety for both students and teachers, making it a core element of the school curriculum.
3. **Engage students in curriculum development:** Involve children and young people in creating digital education programmes to ensure the content is relatable, hands-on, and culturally sensitive.
4. **Focus on prevention:** Introduce media literacy education in primary schools, addressing online safety before problems occur and escalate. Regular discussions on this topic should replace one-off lessons.
5. **Make digital education more comprehensive:**
 - Provide information about frequently used social media and gaming apps.
 - Educate students on self-protection strategies, including privacy management, identifying fake news, and avoiding online risks.
 - Teach responsible use of AI tools, such as ChatGPT.
 - Discuss the importance of respectful and civil behaviour online and the consequences of actions.
 - Create a “Digital Rights Charter” in school in an accessible format and language for students of all ages and backgrounds.

6. Adopt diverse learning formats:

- Organise peer-to-peer projects and mentorship initiatives.
- Host engaging awareness seminars and interactive workshops featuring role-playing and practical exercises.
- Establish support groups and clubs focused on digital citizenship.
- Use guest speakers and real-life examples to enhance engagement.
- Incorporate gamification and include play-based learning for younger students to make workshops enjoyable and practical.

7. Awareness and engagement strategies: Create digital safety materials in children's native language, distribute informative posters, and incorporate educational plays to raise awareness about online safety.

4. Do children and young people think teachers know enough about online safety to help their students, and do they ever talk to a teacher about something that happened online?

Participants had mixed opinions on **whether teachers know enough about online safety** to help their students. Many said it depended heavily on the individual teacher. Some children feel that 'old' teachers had outdated views on online safety and lacked the necessary knowledge, making them hesitant to seek help. They believe teachers underestimated online risks and often could not provide credible advice or understand their students' experiences. In contrast, one group criticised teachers for scaremongering and exaggerating the risks online.

"I think there are only a few teachers who really understand online safety well enough to help with serious issues. Some of them know how to stay safe in general, but for more specific situations, they might not have the experience to guide us. It's helpful, but limited."

Teenager, Romania

Overall, **many participants felt teachers were not well-informed** about the latest trends and popular platforms, which affected their ability to offer effective guidance. Some felt they had more experience with online issues than the adults in their lives, highlighting a gap in practical skills.

Some participants noted that **certain teachers put significant effort into teaching online safety**, bringing in external speakers, and keeping themselves informed. Confidence was often placed in informatics teachers, with younger students occasionally relying on class teachers. Many appreciated the supportive environment created by their teachers, feeling comfortable discussing online safety issues. A few had even talked to school counsellors or psychologists about issues or concerns.

However, most participants said they have not talked to teachers about online issues and often **prefer discussing them with peers or family members**. They feel it is too personal to talk to teachers about online problems and get the support needed. Many children and young people feel more comfortable talking to their parents, while others prefer to talk to friends if they see something unpleasant. Several expressed frustration and a lack of trust in their teachers, fearing that discussing online issues with them could make matters worse or that they may be judged. Some participants mentioned that teachers redirected them to their parents when approached about online issues.

Nonetheless, some participants did say they had talked to teachers about online problems. These conversations were mostly related to cyberbullying incidents, account hacks and class communication through messenger groups. In some cases, the entire class talked about the issue.



Recommendations and proposed best practices

Children and young people offered valuable suggestions to help teachers improve their understanding of online safety. For instance, to effectively educate students on online safety, teachers should participate in mandatory training to keep them up-to-date with the latest trends, issues, and risks. Engaging with social media platforms such as Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube is considered essential for teachers to understand students' struggles, particularly concerning misleading content. Additionally, initiatives like "Educating teachers about mobile phones day," where students teach teachers about the apps and online services they use, can foster mutual trust and understanding.

5. Do children and young people know of any organisations in their country that provide help and information about staying safe online?

When asked about their awareness of organisations in their country that provide help and information about staying safe online, **many participants said they know of several such organisations**. These include national helplines offering support and guidance on internet safety and hotlines for reporting illegal content online. Other examples mentioned were the national Safer Internet Centres, youth social work departments, children's rights organisations such as UNICEF, and emergency phone numbers.

However, several participants also mentioned they were not really aware of such organisations. In relation to this, some highlighted the importance of promoting awareness of these services, as they believe that this can better equip children and young people to seek help when needed and create a safer and more supportive digital environment.

BIK+ pillar 3: Active participation

1. Have children and young people ever created content to share online?

Most participants have created content such as photos and/or videos to keep for themselves, send to friends, or share on social media. In doing so, children and young people mentioned creating content about themselves, sharing personal experiences such as vacations or events, celebrating accomplishments, or simply sharing snapshots of things they did throughout the day with their friends. Some participants said that they have their own accounts, while others shared content on their parents' accounts. Several mentioned posting content about their dogs, nature, or other topics. A few have created accounts for youth organisations they are part of and create content about their activities.

However, the consultation also showed that **several children and young people said they are careful** about whom they share content with, limiting the sharing of content they consider private to close friends and family. Some participants said they do not like to post or do not feel the need to share moments of their lives with others. Others create private accounts on most apps or only share photos that preserve their privacy (e.g., photos taken from the back keeping their faces invisible), sometimes to avoid being shamed or laughed at.

Responses were mixed in various groups with **younger children**. Some participants mentioned they do not create anything to share online, while others create and share photos, videos, music, or screen-casts. Some of these younger children explained that their parents did not allow them to share content online, yet they sometimes share content with friends or family members.

2. What content do children and young people enjoy the most, and how do they decide what is worth their time?

Children and young people enjoy a wide range of content, largely corresponding to their personal interests and hobbies. Many participants mentioned enjoying **content related to their hobbies**, such as sports-related content like news or social media posts from athletes they liked. **Humorous content** was discussed across several groups, as many participants preferred funny videos and clips about jokes and pranks. **Content about politics and culture**, for instance, from activists and political discussions, content about fashion trends, such as “Get ready with me” videos, food-related videos, and content reflecting their personal culture, for instance, Roma culture, are also popular. **Educational content** that teaches something new is also valued, although mentioned less frequently. This includes content that helps them solve a problem, like understanding a math assignment better, providing school information, covering historical topics, keeping them updated on current events, and offering DIY and craft ideas or digital art tutorials. **Social content**, such as digital photo-based diaries, and **content that helps them to relax or fall asleep**, such as ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) videos, are also popular among participants.

When assessing if online content is worth their time, children and young people often rely on a mix of instinct, interest, and visual appeal. Some participants found this question difficult to answer, noting that they had not thought about it before because the fast pace of online video consumption does not allow for much deliberation. Hence, **many noted that they do not make a deliberate choice** but instead choose content randomly, often based on their gut feeling.

Yet, participants prioritise content relevant to their interests, needs or current trends across groups. They mentioned several factors that may play a role in their decision-making process, most often unfolding subconsciously however, as they tend to quickly assess whether the content is worth their time, often in just a few seconds. **Engaging beginnings and immediate explanations** are crucial for retaining their attention. They frequently rely on **meta-information about the content**, such as hashtags, descriptions, thumbnails, likes, and view counts, to evaluate content before watching. **Visual appeal**, bright colours, and **emotional engagement** were mentioned to be key to keeping them interested. They prefer **high-quality, well-produced content** and typically favour **shorter videos**. **Peer recommendations** significantly influence their choices, as do trusted accounts like favourite influencers. Practical value is another important aspect for them.

“I usually follow certain accounts, and I know that it’s worth my time.”

Child, France

“I fall into doom scroll. I don’t know what I am doing there. I don’t know why I am there. It is not a very pleasant experience.”

“You can easily scroll your weekend away.”

Teenagers, Denmark

They appreciate content that teaches something new or enhances their gaming experience. Additionally, some participants mentioned that social media algorithms often guide them to content aligned with their past interests, while some continue scrolling until they find something engaging.

In several workshops with **younger children** (aged 12 years and under⁷), a number of participants expressed that they **find everything online worthy of their time**, particularly on social networks or online games. Whenever they have the opportunity (i.e., when parents allow them), they are online, having fun or looking for entertainment. These children typically do not experience issues related to time management due to closer parental guidance and monitoring, and facilitators noted that they might not yet be able to grasp the value of their time fully.

⁷ As we discuss under [Chapter 2, section VII. Reflections and limitations](#): not all consultation groups involved exclusively “children” under the age of 12 and over the age of 12, respectively, and instead, sometimes included a mix of age groups. Please refer to [section VII.](#) for further details.

3. Do children and young people think they have the same rights online as offline?

Participating children and young people were divided on whether they have the same rights online as offline. **Many felt that their rights online and offline should not be dissociated or separated**, believing they have the same gravity, impact and importance. Several participants expressed a desire for equal treatment and recognition of their rights online as offline.

They shared various examples of exercising their rights online. They highlighted their **right to protection** by ensuring a safe digital environment through measures like age verification to block harmful content and functions allowing them to report incidents of violence or spam. The **right to express themselves freely** was also emphasised, as many participated in online discussions, engaged in social activism, and shared their opinions on different issues, with some finding it easier to express their views in an online setting. They mentioned exercising their **right to privacy** by managing cookies, using privacy settings on social media platforms to control who could see their posts, and using software to protect themselves from hackers and viruses. Additionally, children enjoyed their **right to play** through online games, as well as their **right to education** through digital tools like free language learning apps.

In contrast, **many children and young people acknowledged that, in practice, their rights were more often violated online** and that enforcement of their rights online was lacking. They particularly felt that others showed them less respect online. Some noted that anonymity on the internet contributes to this problem and that offensive comments are more tolerated online, leading them to perceive life online as not being “equally real”. Some mention that online rules are not as strict, with fewer reports of violations and fewer offenders punished. Examples of rights violations included easier bullying online, lack of privacy regarding data shared online, photos shared without their permission, and the risk of losing control over expressed opinions or content created online.

“Suddenly, people say things they wouldn’t dare to say offline. This happens both in a negative way, such as in cases of cyberbullying, but also in a positive way. Maybe it’s easier to share things or stand up for something online, which would be much harder for them to do face-to-face.”

Teenager, Germany

Several participants found the questions about their rights difficult to understand and answer. **Younger children**, especially, had never thought about the concept and so **found it quite abstract and struggled to come up with examples**. Even when facilitators discussed rights mentioned in the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** and **General Comment No. 25**, it remained difficult for the youngest to grasp. Others mentioned that when they tried to express their opinions online, they faced restrictions from parents who prevented them from sharing certain things or received hateful comments from others online, leaving them feeling dismissed.

4. Do children and young people participate in activities or projects aimed at making the internet a better place? What do they think must improve for children and young people to become more involved?

When asked about their involvement in activities or projects aimed at making the internet a safer and better place for children and young people, **many participants said they had not been involved in such initiatives**. Some mentioned their participation in national Safer Internet Centre (SIC) activities and being part of the national SIC Youth Panel. For most participants, the present consultation workshops were their first experiences sharing their voice on internet issues. School projects were also mentioned a few times, with some mentioning acting as ‘Media Scouts’ or participating in extracurricular activities with their informatics teachers. Additionally, some participated in Safer Internet Day (SID) activities, such as an ambassador programme where they provided training to peers and led SID campaigns in

“I think it would be great if, for example, TikTok did something to prevent people from becoming so addicted. But that’s what TikTok wants; that’s their business model. It’s designed in such a way (...). They do this intentionally. They know exactly that this happens (...). Of course, as a young person, you can suggest great ideas for how to change that. But honestly? As sad as it sounds – it doesn’t matter; they don’t care at all.”

Teenager, Germany

their schools and communities. Some mentioned other national projects and the BIK Youth Panel.

When asked what should be done to engage more children and young people in such projects and activities, many participants felt that this was a difficult question and did not know how to answer it. A few expressed their scepticism about the actual effect of their involvement, thinking it might not significantly influence how platform

providers operate. Nevertheless, across the various groups, several actions for different actors were proposed that they believe could increase the involvement of children and young people.



Recommendations and proposed best practices

Policymakers

Several participants underlined that children and young people should be involved in more consultations about issues that impact them and in regular anonymous surveys on specific online topics. European and national-level policymakers should do more to involve them in rule-creation and decision-making.

Schools

Participants also believed that schools should offer workshops or seminars on digital literacy, online safety, and rights. These topics should be discussed during class meetings, and schools should provide clear, relatable information and resources for students, such as colourful leaflets with contacts for reporting illegal content or harassment. Involving children and young people in the development of such online safety material was considered important.

Kids and youth

Participants had many ideas on how they could support increasing the involvement of children and young people:

- Be active and not indifferent, regularly report content and people that are harmful, and complain to platforms that lack security and safety.
- Become part of organisations that hear children’s and young people’s voices.
- Join discussions and forums on related topics that matter to them. Set up groups, use social media to exchange and share reliable information, and create and share content which can inspire the involvement of other children and young people.
- Help each other by offering advice, sharing experiences or teaching digital skills.
- Participate as much as possible in local, national and international events about online safety.

Big tech

Big tech companies should invite children and young people to contribute ideas about how age-appropriate services should look. They should also carry out surveys among them to learn what they think.

5. Do children and young people engage in discussions and activities related to their rights online?

When asked this question, **the majority of participants indicated they had not been involved in discussions or activities regarding their rights online**, although some expressed a desire to do so. Those who did engage mentioned having conversations with friends, family members, schoolmates, and teachers, often in a classroom or civic education context.



Recommendations and proposed best practices

In some of the groups, participants underlined the need for more education and awareness on digital rights to ensure that children and young people are more aware and capable of exercising their rights online effectively.

V. Children's and young people's priorities and expectations for the digital environment

In the final part of the workshops, facilitators engaged participants to share their specific expectations for policymakers shaping and implementing the BIK+ strategy. This section highlights the key messages children and young people want to convey to policymakers, including their priorities for the digital environment and proposed actions.

Across all consultation groups, regardless of age ranges, gender, and background, one key finding is that **children and young people value the internet as a space for fun and connection**, emphasising the need to enjoy it safely. Discussing their priorities, they revisited their favourite activities, such as playing games, watching videos and communicating with friends and family. Some also underscored the importance of internet access in general, with a few mentioning feeling isolated when their access was limited compared to peers. In addition to prioritising the continuation of the online activities they engaged in, participants discussed the three priority areas (or pillars) of the BIK+ strategy in more depth when reflecting on their own priorities. During these discussions, they revisited earlier recommendations they made during the workshop, proposed more concrete actions, and developed clear messages for policymakers.

Though some younger children found the questions discussed in this section of the workshop challenging, many other groups, including groups that involved younger children, enjoyed the activity. They felt empowered that their views and opinions were heard and taken seriously. They were particularly excited to be able to share their key messages with the European Commission.

Many participants identified making the internet safer as the most important priority, emphasising that this priority **applies to themselves and adults equally**. They called for policymakers to create safer online environments by addressing the previously identified key challenges. Their priorities and proposed actions are summarised in the table below.

Key challenges	Priorities	Proposed actions
General online safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the internet safer for all users, including children and adults. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equip children and young people with tools to build resilience and protect self-esteem. • Advocate for safer online environments. • Ensure age-appropriate applications remain accessible to everyone, while tailoring content to align with intended age groups.
Harmful content/conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect children and young people, especially vulnerable children, from harmful, inappropriate, and extreme content. • Address harmful online trends. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance, increase and speed up moderation efforts to remove harmful content and fake profiles. • Develop a social media platform specifically designed for European youth. • Improve reporting mechanisms with transparency about the outcomes, improving response time and human oversight. • Require service providers to implement more robust age verification measures to protect minors from inappropriate material and cyber-harassment.
Cyberbullying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent and address online bullying to reduce mental health impacts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement robust anti-cyberbullying policies. • Provide resources for victims, including training for educators and peer support programmes.
Online fraud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce scams, fake identities, and cyber threats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement advanced protections against malware, hackers, and online fraud.
Privacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect children's and young people's personal data and prevent inappropriate content sharing by young users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve regulations for content sharing on platforms. • Ensure transparency and security in data handling. • Limit data processing in online gaming.
Monetisation and advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the prevalence of online advertisements and their impact on user experience. • Provide more free and accessible digital content for young users. • Minimise the collection and use of personal data in games and apps. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit advertisements from online platforms, especially in games and apps targeted at young users. • Ensure that games and apps provide free content for children and that they are developed inclusively by involving children, young people, and other marginalised groups in the development process. • Reduce costs for in-game items and eliminate pay-to-advance models in games. • Eliminate the need for cookies and personal data in games. • Ensure strict privacy protections in monetised platforms to safeguard children's and young people's data.
Mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the negative impacts of social media on mental health and self-esteem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote awareness campaigns through influencers and content creators focusing on authenticity, body positivity, and mental health issues. • Limit exposure to harmful content for young children, including sexual and violent content and content that tries to influence their consumption behaviour. • Allocate a dedicated national budget to provide therapy and counselling services for young people.

Table 3: Identified key challenges, priorities and proposed actions in relation to BIK+ pillar 1

During this last workshop section, children and young people were asked to formulate their key messages to policymakers. The below-outlined quotes from workshop participants concerning BIK+ pillar 1 are **representative of the most frequently mentioned themes and ideas**.

**Children’s and young people’s messages to policymakers
concerning BIK+ pillar 1**

“I would like to feel safe. To have confidence in everything I’m exposed to.”

Child, Croatia

“I want to have more content for children, and much less inappropriate scenes.”

Child, Croatia

“It’s concerning how young people are influenced by trends online, including some really harmful ones. There needs to be more regulation regarding what people post. Accounts that repeatedly share problematic content should be banned, rather than just specific comments being removed.”

Teenager, Germany

“We want to be protected so no one can find out our phone number and personal data.”

Child, Croatia

“Make getting help in cases of an online danger easy and accessible – we do not know how, to whom and where to report.”

Child, Czech Republic

“Hold tech companies accountable for enforcing age verification without compromising data protection.”

Child, Spain

“I want the internet to be free. Eliminate ads. [I want] to have games that do not require personal data.”

Child, Croatia

“Advocate for stricter laws around digital safety and data protection.”

Child, Spain

“Implement stricter laws and policies to prevent the spreading of harmful fake news, promote accountability for fact-checking shared information, and combat discriminatory or racist content.”

Child, Spain

Other groups placed greater emphasis on the **importance of the second pillar, highlighting the need for knowledge and skills** that would enable them to use the internet safely. This was frequently mentioned in connection with the purpose of play and entertainment. They emphasised the **necessity of online safety and media literacy education**, suggesting that more time should be dedicated in schools to modern technologies and the safe use of devices. Participants believe that, with proper knowledge, they could use devices more productively during their leisure time. **Learning to protect themselves online and accessing resources to cope with challenging situations** that may negatively impact their self-esteem were seen as essential.

Across the groups, children and young people expressed the need to be equipped with resources to face difficult situations that can pose risks to their well-being, including strategies for managing harmful content, recognising potential online threats, and building resilience against negative experiences. Their priorities and proposed actions related to the second pillar are summarised in the table below:

Key challenges	Priorities	Proposed actions
Education on online safety, digital and media literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate children and enable them to use and search the internet safely. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compulsory education on online safety, digital literacy and media literacy. Develop resources to help children recognise and manage harmful content. Enhance training for teachers and parents to share quality information with their students and children. Establish knowledgeable peer teams within schools that can act as media mentors. Promote awareness campaigns for both children and adults, educating them about online safety, digital literacy, and media literacy. Introduce enhanced sexual education tailored to navigate the highly sexualised nature of the digital environment. Educate young individuals on consuming digital media content mindfully.
Fake news, disinformation and misinformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce the prevalence and impact of disinformation and misinformation online. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prohibit the dissemination of fake news. Provide education to children on recognising disinformation, misinformation and fake content, including deepfakes.
Understanding rights and policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplify terms and conditions and privacy policies for children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop visually engaging, age-appropriate materials, organised in a clear manner and designed in a child-/user-friendly way.

Table 4: Identified key challenges, priorities and proposed actions in relation to BIK+ pillar 2

Again, the quotes from workshop participants outlined below, in relation to BIK+ pillar 2, are **representative of the most frequently mentioned themes and ideas**.

**Children's and young people's messages to policymakers
concerning BIK+ pillar 2**

“There should be more education related to the digital environment so they [children] don't find themselves in unpleasant situations. Parents and teachers need even more education than children.”

Child, Croatia

“I think we should be able to help in the making of lessons to keep us safe on the internet. Also, if you're making lessons about the internet you should listen to kids' opinions and make it harsher.”

Child, Ireland

“Integrate digital literacy into curricula from an early age, with content tailored to children's developmental stages.”

Child, Spain

“Teach children to post content that is safe, respectful, and considerate of others.”

Child, Spain

“Ensure parents are educated on online safety and responsible internet use for their children.”

Child, Spain

“Equip teachers and parents with the skills to discuss internet safety with children before giving them devices, ensuring they understand online risks.”

Child, Spain

“[They suggested that school lessons should include] how to recognise bad stuff on the internet [and] what to do if someone is mean online.”

Child, Greece

“Ensure that users, especially young people, understand what they consent to when using digital platforms.”

Child, Spain

“Encourage children to mentor each other in online safety, empowering them to guide their peers on safe internet practices.”

Child, Spain

Lastly, another set of groups found **the third pillar of the BIK+ strategy was the most important**, emphasising the **significance of expressing themselves and having their voices heard** in relation to topics and issues that directly concern their own lives. Across most groups, **children and young people appreciated being involved** in discussions and valued the opportunity to participate actively, **making them feel included in the decision-making processes affecting their digital lives**.

They see opportunities for their participation in decision-making by various actors, including policy-makers and big tech companies, parents and schools, and find **their inclusion crucial to ensuring their voices are heard**, and that their concerns are taken seriously and are being addressed. Their priorities and proposed actions related to the third pillar are summarised in the table below:

Key challenges	Priorities	Proposed actions
Creating meaningful child and youth participation opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable and empower children and young people to actively participate in decisions that affect them and express their voices publicly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce opportunities to participate by frequent polling online to gather children’s and young people’s opinions. • Enhance transparency and provide feedback from politicians about how children’s and young people’s proposals are implemented, ensuring their voices are heard and impact policymaking. • Social media apps and games could ask children and young people about their views on what they view as appropriate content.
Foster more child and youth participation opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage all actors to implement more activities that promote child and youth participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise more events and discussions where children and young people can actively contribute, similar to this initiative. • Provide and promote good practice guidance on how to best involve children and young people.

Table 5: Identified key challenges, priorities and proposed actions in relation to BIK+ pillar 3

Equally as in the sections above, the quotes from workshop participants outlined below, in relation to BIK+ pillar 3, are **representative of the most frequently mentioned themes and ideas**.

Children’s and young people’s messages to policymakers concerning BIK+ pillar 3

“We want you to ask us more about our opinion.”

Child, Croatia

“We want to have the right to say what we want.”

Child, Croatia

“Children should have more of a say when it comes to changes revolving around video games and the internet.”

Child, Ireland

“Legislation is not enough. Politicians should consult with children locally to identify local solutions. [There are differences] from city to city, from school to school, etc.”

Teenager, Denmark

VI. Further observations from the consultations with children and young people

During the consultation sessions, some overall observations emerged that could contribute to future policy debates. These relate to messages from children and young people that focus on time spent online and addictive design, social media bans, political content on social media platforms, and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools.

A recurring point of discussion among many participants was the **time they spent online** and the difficulties they experienced in logging off. **Managing and reducing screen time emerged as a significant priority** for them. To address this, participants proposed several measures, including introducing “break” notifications and usage timers, developing and providing practical tools to balance online and offline activities, and developing digital spaces with features that reduce their addictive nature.

When developing key messages for EU policymakers, some of the participants emphasised that **banning children and young people from social media is not the solution**. They warned against over-regulating social media, as stricter age restrictions could deprive young people of an essential aspect of their lives. They furthermore mentioned that bans could be easily bypassed, for instance by using parents’ devices and accounts (in some cases secretly). Instead, **they suggested blocking dangerous content and safeguarding social media’s entertainment and fun aspects** to prevent parents from forbidding its use.

A few participants raised **concerns about political content on platforms frequented by young people**. They suggested that politicians should refrain from posting content on social media, arguing that such content could unduly influence young voters and potentially lead to negative consequences. They believed that political topics do not belong in spaces where young people exchange content and communicate.

In several of the groups, the use of AI tools also came up. In these discussions, **participants had varied views on AI**. Some used AI-powered tools like ChatGPT for studying or homework, although there were concerns about AI providing incorrect information. Others found chatting with AI enjoyable, while some found it strange or creepy, particularly referring to a popular app that integrated an AI chatbot by default. Concerns were raised about the misuse of AI and the need for consent when user data is used to train AI. There was also a **demand for more training and education on AI** so that the tool could be used effectively and responsibly.

In addition, some **facilitators shared feedback** about their perception of what children and young people thought about the overall process and exercise. Generally, with very few isolated exceptions, **children and young people enjoyed taking part in the consultation activity**. Facilitators mentioned that children under the age of 12 were particularly eager to share their views. However, some participants seemed to feel hesitant at the beginning of the sessions as they seemed not used to being heard and listened to in such activities and settings.

In terms of the practical approach, the protocol and the materials provided, facilitators noted that **interactive activity elements should be incorporated** into the protocol if there are materials (in the present case, the child-friendly version of the BIK+ strategy) that should be reviewed before the group discussions can start. This would ensure that all participants can develop their views and express their opinions in relation to the topics in focus.

Furthermore, facilitators suggested that future iterations of this or similar other activities should **either reduce the number of questions to be discussed in one session or increase the time allocated to each session**. Furthermore, facilitators suggested recommending smaller group sizes for future activities with around 5 participants per group, as opposed to the recommendation from the protocol for facilitators, which proposed a group size of 5 to 10 participants per group.

To build trust with children and young people and decrease scepticism about such activities, facilitators recommended **following up with participants and sharing with them how their views had an impact and affected actual changes.**

VII. Reflections and limitations

The consultation adopted a qualitative approach, similar to the focus group method. This approach was selected, and the supporting protocol was co-designed with BIK Youth Ambassadors to create an open and supportive environment where participants could freely share their thoughts and ideas. Their feedback on the planned focus group-based consultation activities, including the phrasing and sequencing of questions and the methods for gathering participants' perspectives, fundamentally co-shaped this activity.

Focus group-based research methods provide invaluable insights into children's and young people's experiences, attitudes and opinions, offering in-depth insights that are difficult to attain through other methods. By creating an environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, the focus group-based consultation workshops resulted in authentic and detailed feedback. This qualitative approach captures their rich and nuanced recommendations and priorities for the digital environment, which may help shape policies and programmes that genuinely reflect their needs and priorities. The diversity of participants, including those from different backgrounds and ages, provided a wide range of viewpoints.

However, certain limitations of the focus group methodology must be acknowledged. The findings are not intended to be generalised or quantified, as the conducted consultation sessions were designed to gather detailed input from a relatively small and diverse group of participants. Group interaction dynamics can also introduce potential biases, as some participants may dominate the conversation while others may be more reserved. Furthermore, one child's suggestion or opinion does not necessarily indicate agreement or disagreement from children in the same or in other groups. Some groups, for instance, could not cover all proposed questions from the protocol equally due to time constraints. Thus, a set of core questions was designated in the protocol that were discussed across all groups, and additional questions were provided in case the consultation time allowed for discussion of further questions. The inclusion of mixed groups, spanning across different ages and backgrounds, enriched the range of perspectives but made it challenging to attribute specific comments to individual participants, age groups (i.e., over the age or under the age of 12 years) or other subgroups.

In close collaboration with EUN's external research consultants, the BIK team processed and analysed all data from the 84 session reports submitted by the session facilitators, moving back and forth in an iterative manner from the raw data in the consultation report to a more structured thematic analysis of the main responses, ideas, and key themes that emerged across groups. While consistency was promoted by providing facilitators with a standardised reporting template, variations in the level of detail in facilitators' reports should be acknowledged. Additionally, to some degree, facilitators' interpretations were sometimes involved. While many facilitators tried to capture the exact wording of the participants, others added some of their own interpretations. The final report tries to preserve the voices of children and young people by incorporating a broad variety of insights and, where meaningful, direct quotes, ensuring their words remain central to the analysis.

As a result, the present report aims to accurately reflect the voices of more than 750 children and young people from across Europe, while acknowledging that some level of detail may be lost in an effort to create a concise and accessible report, which cannot do justice to the full complexity of all views and opinions shared. Yet, as mentioned above, the authors of this report have aimed to provide nuance and insight into the richness of the discussions by integrating direct quotes and concrete examples in a meaningful way as much as possible.

Chapter 3: Expert stakeholders' views on the progress and success of BIK+

Four expert stakeholder workshops were held, with 59 experts from the fields of policy development, academia, civil society organisations, industry and international organisations participating. The following report summarises the main issues and topics discussed in these workshops, grouped under the general themes of responding to BIK+'s aims and objectives, its impact to date, and how it can best prepare for the future.

I. Introducing BIK+ and positioning it in the wider legal context

A comprehensive background briefing regarding the evolution of the **European strategy for a better internet for kids+ (BIK+ strategy)** and associated EU policies addressing children's online protection, participation, and well-being in using digital technologies was provided to all participants. BIK+ was described as the umbrella EU policy strategy for the safety and empowerment of children online, supporting and complementing the legal framework, notably the **Digital Services Act (DSA)**, which strongly impacts pillar 1 of BIK+ (safe digital experiences). Various other legal measures were highlighted as also relevant to the strategy, advancing key aspects of its aim to ensure the protection and empowerment of children online.

During each workshop, participants were invited to provide feedback on the underlying vision of BIK+, expressed in the statement: *"to provide age-appropriate digital services where every child in Europe is protected, empowered, and respected online, ensuring that no one is left behind"*.

II. Aims of the BIK+ strategy

In each of the workshops, stakeholders were asked to consider the strategy's overall profile and the extent to which they believed it sufficiently addressed the opportunities and challenges experienced by children and young people when going online. They were also asked to consider if they felt its aims were appropriate and still fit for purpose given the changes in the digital environment in the past two years.

Overall, stakeholders strongly supported the vision and mission of BIK+. The strategy was praised for its **balanced focus** on protecting, empowering, and promoting children's rights in the digital environment. This **holistic approach was regarded as a strength**, although some participants felt the implementation could be more balanced between these pillars.

Policy professionals (workshop I) posited that BIK+ has been effective in setting a framework for child online safety and a unified approach across the EU for discussing the protection of minors online. This has helped align efforts and facilitate consistency in implementation within individual Member States. The three-pillar structure (safe digital experiences, digital empowerment, and active participation) was thought to be a very clear framework, making it easier for stakeholders to align their actions. This framework has also been a very effective lobbying and networking tool, facilitating stakeholder engagement and enabling diverse interest groups to coordinate activities around a single vision.

Academia and civil society stakeholders (workshop II) singled out the recognition of children's rights in the digital environment within BIK+ as a key strength. Contributors argued, however, that not all rights were equally balanced within the strategy and more needed to be done to mainstream children's rights

in relation to the digital environment. However, making children’s rights the foundation of BIK+ was regarded as a very significant achievement.

Industry participants (workshop III) similarly noted that aligning with children’s rights and balancing protection and empowerment was a significant advance on the original BIK strategy and was important for national policymaking, given the need to position individual policy issues or topics within the full spectrum of children’s rights.

Various participating **international organisations** (workshop IV) also positively noted the focus on children’s rights, pointing to the synergies with a range of international strategies and standards. They further argued that more significant efforts should be made to coordinate policies in the international arena.

All participants regarded BIK+ as an appropriate, important, and well-articulated strategy, encompassing a vision that stakeholders easily related to. It was felt to be an essential contribution to promoting children’s digital well-being in the post-COVID era, and it offered a valuable standard for balancing the different dimensions of children’s relationship with digital technologies.

However, experts in each stakeholder group also highlighted the many changes in the digital environment since the adoption of BIK+ in 2022. Among these, policy professionals called attention to the changed regulatory environment, especially with the coming into effect of the DSA. Rapid technological change, including the mainstreaming of artificial intelligence (AI) and generative AI in digital products and services, was also mentioned by researchers and by civil society as a factor impacting children’s digital behaviour in the past two years. International organisations also noted the so-called “techlash”, or growing negative response towards digital technologies, manifested in highly critical public discourse, the introduction of smartphone bans, or legislative measures to restrict the use of social media. More generally, expert stakeholders expressed concern that the strong focus on “protection” – including in the political priorities for the new European Commission – might overshadow other important aspects of children’s engagement with digital technologies. Stakeholders were concerned that an exclusive focus on this dimension may make it more difficult to achieve a balanced approach across the three pillars of the BIK+ strategy: protection, empowerment, and active participation.

III. Successes and gaps of BIK+

Participants were asked to consider if BIK+ has been effective in achieving its aims as well as the relative impact that each of its three pillars of protection, empowerment and participation has had on children’s digital lives. A number of noteworthy successes and achievements were highlighted by participants in the course of the workshops.

Leading with children’s rights: As mentioned above, the representation of children as individual rights holders was identified as a noteworthy achievement. This has helped broaden its reach so that children’s digital lives can be considered more holistically.

Child and youth participation: BIK+ has been particularly successful in mobilising youth participation. Child-/youth-centred activities have been one of the most visible features of the implementation of BIK+ and have ensured that young people’s voices are increasingly heard and considered in the context of digital policy topics.

Awareness raising: BIK+ has been instrumental in raising the profile of children’s and young people’s online safety more generally and calling attention to key issues such as age-appropriate design, age assurance, and safe digital experiences as fundamental policy themes. More generally, BIK+ has raised the profile of children’s and young people’s online safety as a policy priority in EU Member States.

Safer Internet Centres and multi-stakeholder involvement: Safer Internet Centres (SICs) were widely recognised as a major achievement of BIK+ and its predecessor programmes. BIK+ has also contributed to building comprehensive stakeholder communities with SICs central to these collective efforts. BIK+ has also been very important in facilitating the work of SICs, providing them with a strong EU profile, resources and access to policymakers. Tools such as the [BIK portal](#), the [Knowledge hub](#), and the [Policy monitor](#) have also proved very useful in knowledge exchange and provide insights into how Member States approach implementation.

Considering its influence to date and areas where BIK+ has been less impactful, some of the following shortcomings were also discussed:

Complex policy environment: It was noted that there is an overlap between BIK+ and other EU policies and strategies, such as the [EU Strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse](#) and the [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#). This may lead to confusion for end users or miss out on potential synergies with other policy frameworks, including at the international level.

Need for better awareness of BIK+: Some stakeholders in the fields of academia and civil society realised that BIK+ could be better communicated. With the coming into effect of the [Digital Services Act \(DSA\)](#) and the revised [Audiovisual Media Services Directive \(AVMSD\)](#) rules regarding video-sharing platforms, as well as the introduction of many protection-focused measures at the national level, the influence and visibility of BIK+ is less clear. It was argued that BIK+ could do more to ensure the primacy of a balanced approach to children's rights in this context.

More resources to achieve its aims: Expert stakeholders from academia and civil society also commented that BIK+ appears to be not as well funded compared to other high-profile EU initiatives related to digitalisation. Considering the many demands placed on it, for example, to secure children's safe digital protection while promoting their digital skills, promoting their active participation, and respecting their rights online, it was argued that BIK+ would benefit by being better resourced.

Lack of progress on key topics: It was also pointed out by stakeholders that some BIK+ signature policy topics – age-appropriate design and safety-by-design – have not substantially progressed, with many gaps evident in digital products and services. The status of some key action points in the strategy, such as the Code of conduct on age-appropriate design or the monitoring of the impact of the digital transformation on children's well-being (BIK+ strategy, p.15), has yet to be fully realised. The overlap with the work on developing guidelines for the protection of minors under Article 28 of the DSA has also given rise to some confusion, even among expert stakeholders.

Insufficient evidence base: An observation made by stakeholders, especially among academia and civil society, was that BIK+ lacked an appropriate evidence base to monitor progress. Participants expressed the need for robust data as a baseline to effectively evaluate the extent to which BIK+ is meeting its objectives or having an impact. It was observed that in comparison with other key EU policy areas within the Digital Decade initiative, measurable goals and targets are the norm. By contrast, BIK+ is set out at a high level only and lacks these key metrics to guide its approach.

Discussing the relative impact of BIK+, participants were also asked to consider gaps in its coverage or areas that may need further attention for the strategy to maintain its relevance.

Keeping pace with technological change: A general observation made was that the environment is becoming more complex and that programmes and activities under the umbrella of BIK+ need to be continually refreshed to take stock of changing circumstances. The rapid acceleration of artificial intelligence (AI) and AI-driven products and services was highlighted as a key issue for children. This relates both to increased risks for exploitation and abuse posed by AI, as well as the more general challenge of increasing AI literacy to empower children in this complex and changing environment.

Digital literacy needs: Relatedly, it was pointed out that cyber threats and disinformation risks are now more potentially harmful and serious than when BIK+ was first adopted. This has underlined the importance of raising digital literacy skills levels overall, something commented on in most of the workshops. A priority in this context were vulnerable groups such as younger children in the primary school system and those with special educational needs.

Reaching parents: There was a consensus among stakeholders that parents are a key target group and that, as it stands, there seem to be insufficient awareness-raising resources and activities for them. According to some stakeholders, BIK+ appears to be primarily child/youth-focused. It was pointed out that parents and caregivers also need to be empowered to manage the digital transformation. Given that this is not something children can achieve on their own, equipping parents with the relevant digital literacy skills also helps to achieve the goals of BIK+.

From an industry perspective, there has been a shift in focus from parental control to engagement and dialogue with parents and children. Accordingly, parents need to be more actively involved in their children's digital lives rather than just implementing restrictive measures. In this context, there was also a call for a more collaborative approach involving parents, guardians, and educators to navigate digital challenges effectively.

Vulnerable groups and the digital divide: While BIK+ does acknowledge the needs of vulnerable children, experts argued that more resources, targeted measures and increased efforts to ensure their inclusion and empowerment in the digital environment are needed. The digital divide continues to be a prominent issue impacting children's digital participation. Digital inclusion and empowerment, it was noted, are crucial for vulnerable children, for example, those with migrant backgrounds or those facing exclusion through poverty or other forms of disadvantage. In countries which face challenges in implementing digital literacy programmes in formal education, this disproportionately affects vulnerable groups. The importance of addressing the digital skills gap for vulnerable children was emphasised.

Children and young people as consumers: The workshops highlighted several key points regarding children and young people as consumers in the digital environment. Concerns were raised about the commercialisation of young user's digital experiences, with participants arguing that issues like advertising, marketing, and the overall commercial environment that children and young people are exposed to online need greater attention. It was noted that BIK+ does not adequately address what happens after young users agree to terms and conditions for digital services and that more needs to be done to redress the power imbalances between users, especially between minors and industry.

There were also calls for more focus on younger children as digital consumers. It was noted that resources often target adolescents, but there is a growing need to address issues for children from birth onwards, including clear guidance and recommendations for parents and early years educators. Finally, it was argued that BIK+ should do more to address financial scams targeting children and young people, as this was seen as a gap in the current approach.

IV. Lessons to be learned from the experience of implementing BIK+

Experts also addressed the main lessons to be learned from implementing BIK+ from diverse perspectives and offered recommendations for future consideration.

Lack of binding legislation: While recognising that BIK+ has the status of an EU recommendation, its impact has been less than it might have been due to the lack of any binding legislation or enforcement mechanisms to underpin it. By contrast, enforcement under the DSA is legally mandated and consequently has received greater attention in Member States. Experts recommended that the profile of BIK+ could be enhanced by ensuring that there is a legally mandated national contact point for BIK+ matters

in each country. It was further argued that additional legal measures should be considered to underpin BIK+ commitments. Strengthening and sustaining Safer Internet Centres was also proposed as a way to support enforcement efforts and provide evidence for good practices. Finally, experts pointed out that it is vital to ensure that BIK+ is embedded in the EU budgetary planning process.

Engaging with industry: Stakeholders commented that there were fewer opportunities for engagement with industry than previously, particularly since the coming into effect of the DSA. The discontinuation of the Alliance to better protect minors online was noted as a loss. There were suggestions to reintroduce or create a similar forum for structured dialogue between industry and other stakeholders.

Enhancing regulatory cooperation: The workshops highlighted inter-regulatory cooperation as an important area for improvement in implementing the BIK+ strategy. There was a call for more collaboration between regulators working on various aspects of online child safety, data protection, and media literacy. Better coordination among different types of regulators, especially in light of new regulatory actors emerging with the DSA, was recommended. Participants pointed out that while some regulators have experience in promoting young people's digital safety and empowerment, for others, this is a relatively new field. The call for greater collaboration was also extended to further engagement with international organisations working on child online safety and digital rights.

■ V. Future-proofing BIK+

Throughout the workshops, experts from each of the stakeholder groups – policy professionals, academia, civil society, industry representatives and international organisations – were asked to offer recommendations to guide future advancements for BIK+. In this context, they were specifically asked for their responses to the priorities for children's online safety as described in the [European Commission's 2024-2029 political priorities](#).

Mental health and well-being: Participants were strongly of the view that mental health and well-being should be a key priority for BIK+ and that it should be addressed comprehensively, considering various factors such as safety, privacy and security, as mentioned in DSA Article 28. However, there was also a strong emphasis on finding the right balance between protecting children and young people online and empowering them to participate safely in digital environments. There was a recognition that mental health and well-being are highly complex issues, and stressed the importance of gathering more evidence-based insights on how children and parents perceive and experience mental health issues in relation to digital technologies. It was noted that online communities can both support and potentially trigger harmful behaviour in children's and young people's mental health. Among the solutions proposed were large-scale awareness campaigns to address mental health issues, involving recognised experts and interactive methods, as well as involving parents, teachers, and health professionals on the national level in addressing children's and young people's digital well-being.

Addictive design: The need to address addictive design in digital services and its impact on children's and young people's well-being was also much discussed. It was noted how recommendation systems and infinite scrolling features make it difficult for users, especially children, to limit their time online. Online gaming was also highlighted as an area of concern, with addictive design and dark pattern elements like loot boxes and mechanisms that encourage repeated play. The workshops also touched on how influencer messaging can be constructed in addictive ways, particularly affecting young audiences. In addition, concerns were also raised about the effects of AI tools and emerging technologies on children's and young people's mental health.

More generally, it was argued that industry is primarily responsible for taking measures against addictive design, principally through complying with their obligations towards the protection of minors under

the DSA. However, industry representatives pointed out that so-called “addictive design” is not as clear or as simple a notion as it may seem. Moreover, there was a suggestion to move away from the term “addictive design” and instead use “manipulative retention mechanics” to highlight unfair practices, as the term addiction would unnecessarily stigmatise users affected.

Cyberbullying and aggressive online behaviour: It was observed that cyberbullying has long been a concern for BIK+. Yet, as noted in several workshops, research suggests the problem is worsening. Peer pressure was identified as a critical factor influencing children’s and young people’s online behaviours, including the pressure to own devices at younger ages and participate in potentially harmful online activities. Moreover, cyberbullying often occurs through private messaging platforms rather than openly on social media, making it more challenging to detect and address. Participants suggested strengthening the role of Safer Internet Centres in combating cyberbullying and peer pressure through awareness campaigns and community involvement. There were also calls for more centralised monitoring and greater consistency in definitions of and responses to cyberbullying. In addition, further research and data collection is needed to inform evidence-based approaches to these issues.

VI. Recommendations from experts

Throughout the wide-ranging discussions, experts provided varying types of feedback and offered recommendations, both in relation to specific points of emphasis for consideration when developing BIK-related programmes and campaigns, and more general observations intended to strengthen its profile and influence.

The following are some of the most prominent overall recommendations regarding the BIK+ strategy derived from the workshop discussions:

1. Make the strategy more actionable

While there was much positive support for BIK+ and feedback that its framework has stood up well, there is a need for more systematic implementation with appropriate accountability mechanisms. BIK+ should integrate clearer benchmarks and evidence-based methods to monitor the strategy’s impact and progress. Initiatives such as the BIK Policy monitor can be used to provide greater insights into progress made by Member States. Many stakeholders, however, would also like to see BIK+ evolving from a strategy to a directive to give it greater enforceability in Member States.

2. Enhance engagement with key stakeholder groups, including industry

Over the course of the consultation process, many examples were provided of where stakeholder involvement could be improved. The lack of sufficient opportunities for dialogue with industry was commented on. Additionally, with many new regulatory bodies entering the field, cross-regulatory collaboration, especially in areas like age assurance and data protection, was recommended. This would help address the complex challenges that span across multiple regulatory domains.

3. Increase funding and resources

It was mentioned across workshops that funding and resources for Safer Internet Centres and related initiatives need to be increased to ensure continuity and effectiveness of programmes, given the increasing complexity of BIK+ matters. SICs were regarded as one of the most significant achievements of BIK+ and central to its implementation across Member States. However, their ability to deliver on BIK+ objectives remains uneven due to uncertain funding.

4. Address emerging challenges

Addressing emerging challenges like AI, addictive design, and mental health impacts of digital technologies more comprehensively was recommended across workshop groups. It was noted throughout that the pace of change, particularly in relation to AI, posed challenges for policymakers and that it was vital that BIK+ maintain a close focus on emerging challenges and threats of new technologies. This includes addressing cybercrime and cybersecurity more prominently, educating children and young people about online risks, and protection measures as new technologies come onstream.

5. Improve digital literacy programmes

Improving digital literacy programmes, especially for younger children, and integrating them more effectively into formal education systems across Member States was considered essential. Consideration should also be given to the coordination of digital education across the EU to streamline efforts across Member States, perhaps in the form of a centralised agency. Children and young people with special educational needs require particular attention in developing digital literacy programmes.

6. Maintain the emphasis on positive content

The importance of positive content in the digital environment for children and young people was recognised in several of the workshops. Participants emphasised the need to balance protection with opportunities and positive experiences for minors online. It was argued that rather than restricting their access, the focus of policy should be the positive aspects of online connections, especially in light of lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. The concept of positive content is also relevant to the DSA Article 28 guidelines and can inform perspectives on what constitutes good online content.

7. Increase focus on parental involvement and capacity building

Increasing parents' involvement and education to bridge the gap between children's and young people's online experiences and parental understanding is considered critical. The challenge of reaching parents was acknowledged during many of the sessions. However, engaging effectively with parents was also recognised as a vital issue in meeting the challenges young people face. Parental involvement, it was argued, should be a headline theme in order to make progress on this issue.

8. More action is needed in addressing the digital divide

Underpinning BIK+ is the commitment to ensure that all children and young people are supported equally, with their rights protected in the digital environment. Yet, it was regarded that not enough is being done to support marginalised children, including those affected by economic and other forms of exclusion, and that this should be prioritised in future consideration of BIK+.

9. Enhance child and youth participation

Child and youth participation should be enhanced, particularly in policymaking and product design processes related to online safety. Child and youth participation was singled out as one of the key achievements of BIK+. Expert stakeholders recommended that this area of focus be highlighted and deepened, ensuring that good practices are shared widely and that child and youth involvement in decision-making is mainstreamed across all relevant digital policy processes.

10. Maintain a balance between protection and empowerment pillars

This was recommended to ensure that efforts to protect children and young people do not overshadow their right to participate in the digital world and decision-making processes in developing policy affecting them directly. The balance between different pillars and recognising that rights are interdependent and indivisible was a constant theme throughout the workshops. Building on the foundation that

BIK+ has achieved in recognising children’s rights as a foundation for their participation in the digital environment, it was put forward that maintaining this balance was vital, particularly in contexts where protection-oriented policies appear to take priority.

These general recommendations were provided to make the BIK+ strategy more effective, comprehensive, and responsive to the rapidly evolving digital landscape while maintaining its core vision of protecting, empowering, and respecting children and young people online.



Chapter 4: Conclusion

The first evaluation of the **BIK+ strategy** has provided invaluable insights into its progress and successes, as well as areas for improvement since its adoption in May 2022. Grounded in the perspectives of 759 children and young people⁸, alongside input from 59 expert stakeholders across Europe, this report paints a detailed picture of the strategy's achievements and sheds light on evolving needs. The voices of children and young people, including those from vulnerable backgrounds, were instrumental in shaping the findings, ensuring a child/youth-focused and inclusive approach.

Progress and success

Children and young people recognised the strides made under the BIK+ strategy, especially in fostering safer and more inclusive digital spaces. They highlighted tools like enhanced privacy settings and reporting mechanisms, which have improved their ability to manage online risks. For example, children and young people noted the increasing availability of online educational resources, which were considered particularly relevant for children and young people in more rural areas.

Expert stakeholders acknowledged the significant advancements achieved through cross-sector collaborations, particularly emphasising the critical importance of the Insafe network of European Safer Internet Centres. Policymakers praised initiatives such as public-private partnerships, which have bolstered digital literacy and safety awareness campaigns. Industry representatives cited their increased efforts to integrate age-appropriate design principles, such as filtering harmful content and offering robust parental controls.

The evaluation process itself demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusivity as it engaged children and young people from vulnerable and marginalised backgrounds, such as those with disabilities, migrant backgrounds, or limited internet access. This emphasis on reaching underrepresented voices highlights the importance that the BIK+ strategy itself places on inclusivity, ensuring that no child in Europe is left behind.

Persistent and emergent challenges

Despite these successes, children, young people and expert stakeholders identified several challenges that must be addressed to fully realise the BIK+ vision. Many young participants shared their struggles with harmful online behaviour, including cyberbullying, scams, and exposure to inappropriate content. For example, teenagers frequently described the emotional toll of persistent online harassment, while others noted the difficulty of identifying credible sources amidst a sea of misinformation. This suggests more needs to be done to help children and young people cope with inappropriate online behaviour. More so, the strong persistence of bullying and harassment stresses the need to intensify efforts concerning social and emotional learning to ultimately strengthen civility and respect, offline as well as online.

From the expert perspective, regulatory inconsistencies across EU Member States remain a significant challenge. Industry stakeholders emphasised how fragmented rules complicate the implementation of uniform safety measures. Civil society representatives and representatives from the academic

⁸ Generally, when referring to “children”, we refer to children under the age of 12 years. When referring to “young people”, we typically mean children over the age of 12.

community called for greater investment in longitudinal research to understand the long-term effects of digital technologies on children’s development.

Looking ahead: actions and aspirations

To address these challenges, the evaluation outlined several actionable steps:

1. Empowering children and young people through co-design: Children’s suggestions included creating more intuitive reporting systems, designing privacy tools tailored to their needs and, overall, establishing child and youth participation as a default practice in developing policies and technologies that directly affect their lives.

2. Closing the digital divide: Expert stakeholders emphasised the need for targeted investments to bridge the gap for rural and underserved communities, ensuring equitable access to high-speed internet and digital literacy programmes.

3. Harmonising regulation: To overcome regulatory fragmentation, the European Union must establish a unified framework for online safety standards, benefiting both children and young people as well as industry.

4. Promoting cross-sector collaboration: Continued partnerships between governments, civil society, and industry are essential to innovate and implement effective interventions. Securing sustained funding and resourcing of the Insafe network of Safer Internet Centres are critical to ensuring continuity and effectiveness.

A shared vision for the future of BIK+

The BIK+ strategy is not just a policy framework—it is a blueprint for empowering Europe’s youngest digital citizens. By centring the voices of children and young people, and leveraging the expertise of the entire ecosystem of BIK+ stakeholders, the strategy can continue to evolve in response to emerging challenges and opportunities.

A better and safer internet can be envisioned as one where children and young people feel safe, have opportunities to learn, and are empowered to express their voices. This sentiment encapsulates the aspirations of children and young people across Europe and should serve as a guiding light for the strategy’s next phase.

Moving forward, the European Union has a unique opportunity to lead the way in creating a digital future that prioritises inclusivity, creativity, and safety. With sustained commitment and collaboration, the BIK+ strategy can fulfil its promise to ensure that every child is protected, empowered, and respected online. Together with the stakeholders across the entire BIK+ ecosystem, we can build a digital world where children and young people not only thrive but actively shape their futures with confidence and inspiration.

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