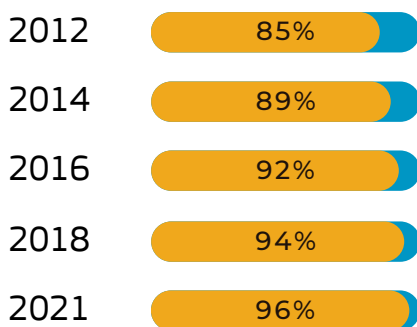


# Well-being in the Digital Age

Before the pandemic, children across the EU spent more and more time online. Owning a smartphone has become common and most teenagers have access to a laptop. A study on children's online habits in the EU (Smahel et al., 2020) found that going online is now an integral part of the lives of most children. While the use of technology and internet can bring many benefits to children's everyday life and education, extensive and irresponsible use of technologies and internet may negatively affect children's well-being. With the use of the internet increasing to unseen levels during the pandemic, it has become urgent to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks of children's use of internet. In January 2023, there were 5.18 billion internet users worldwide, and 4.8 billion social media (Statista, 2023).

## % of youth aged 16-19 using internet daily

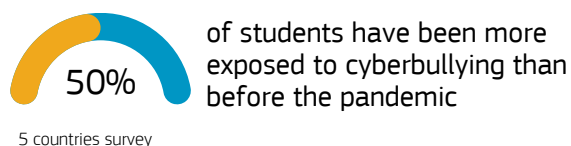
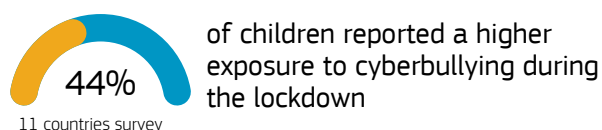
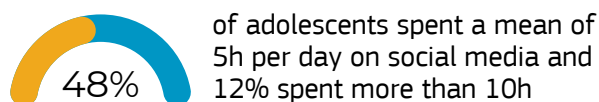


## Research shows different impact of internet use on well-being of children

Some studies noted higher well-being among "active" social media users (posting status updates, sending messages) compared to "passive" users (looking at profiles, scrolling) although the results are not fully conclusive.



## During the pandemic:



## Some studies found links between:



1 out of 3 young people report that they neglect work, family, school regularly due to social media consumption

*O'Neill, 2023*

## Potential benefits for children from using internet



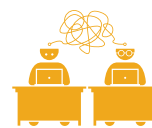
exposure to new ideas and information



opportunities for the promotion of community and civic engagement



different learning opportunities



facilitated communication and enhanced access to support networks

## Tension between the need for internet and technologies and their risks



A study on children's online habits in the EU in 2017-2019 found that up to one third of the children in analysed countries experienced at least one of the criteria of excessive internet use (including salience, when children consider using internet more important than other activities, for example miss a meal, or withdrawal symptoms, when children unsuccessfully try to spend less time on the internet).



A study 'EU kids Online' shows that opportunities and risks online are often interconnected. Efforts to increase opportunities for children when using internet may also increase risks for them and efforts to reduce the risks may also limit the opportunities and potential benefits.



A recent study (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2020) found that the link between digital-screen time and mental well-being of adolescents can be described by a quadratic function, meaning that the well-being firstly increases when the internet use increases and, after a certain point, the well-being starts decreasing when the internet use increases. This suggests that there is an optimal moderate level of engagement with digital activities that is not harmful to adolescents.

## Actions to ensure the benefits of internet use and reduce the potential risks

Provision of regular training for children and adolescents on safe use of internet and social media

Informing young people about the risks of internet use and the actions to be taken when those risks materialise. Please refer to the EU network of Safer Internet Centres, which strive to keep children and young people safe online.

LEARN MORE 

Provision of regular training and appropriate support for children and adolescents facing different problems stemming from internet use, such as cyberbullying

Active engagement of parents in their children's internet use to promote safe behaviours online

### REFERENCES

- Ellis, W. E., Dumas, T. M., & Forbes, L. M. (2020). Physically isolated but socially connected: Psychological adjustment and stress among adolescents during the initial COVID-19 crisis. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue canadienne des sciences du comportement*, 52(3), 177.
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2021) Education and training monitor 2021: education and well-being.
- Koehler, C., Psacharopoulos, G. and van der Graaf, L. (2022). The impact of COVID-19 on the education of disadvantaged children and socio-economic consequences thereof. ESET-EENEE report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. doi: 10.2766/929570.
- Lobe, B., Velicu, A., Staksrud, E., Chaudron, S., & Rosanna, D. G. (2021). How children (10-18) experienced online risks during the Covid-19 lockdown-Spring 2020: Key findings from surveying families in 11 European countries.
- OECD (2018). *Children & Young People's Mental Health in the Digital Age. Shaping the Future.*
- O'Neill, B 2023, Research for CULT Committee – The influence of social media on the development of children and young people, European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels.
- Przybylski, Andrew K, and Netta Weinstein. "A large-scale test of the goldilocks hypothesis: quantifying the relations between digital-screen use and the mental well-being of adolescents." *Psychological science* 28.2 (2017): 204-215.
- Smahel, D., Machackova, H., Mascheroni, G., Dedkova, L., Staksrud, E., Ólafsson, K., ... & Hasebrink, U. (2020). EU Kids Online 2020: Survey results from 19 countries.
- Statista (2023). Figure "Number of internet and social media users worldwide as of April 2023" (consulted on June 2023 at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/>)
- World Health Organisation (2020). Spotlight on adolescent health and well-being.

Factsheet prepared by a group of NESET experts:

Loes van der Graaf – PPMI; Cosmin Nada – University of Porto; Carmel Cefai – University of Malta; and Helen Cowie – University of Surrey.

building the  
**#EUROPEAN**  
EDUCATION AREA



Publications Office  
of the European Union

© European Union, 2023  
All images: © European Union, 2023 (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) — image sources: Canva.com  
Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023

NC-07-23-199-EN-N  
ISBN: 978-92-68-03309-8  
doi: 10.2766/03746