



# From playgrounds to platforms - Childhood in the digital age

May 2025

Today's children are growing up in a rapidly evolving world, where digital media play an important role in their daily lives. In 2022, almost all 15-year-olds had access to digital devices at home (96%) and had a smartphone (98%). Children are getting a smartphone young, with around 70% of ten-years-olds owning one, though this rate varies widely – from 29% in Türkiye and 40% in France to over 90% in Latvia, Poland, and Nordic countries.

Digital services provide children with opportunities for learning, entertainment, accessing information, discovering new things, and connecting with peers and online communities. However, they also pose risks, such as problematic or excessive use of digital media, exposure to inappropriate content and false information, harmful conducts (e.g. cyberbullying, grooming), and other online safety and privacy concerns.

OECD countries are increasingly developing policies to safeguard children online, advance digital education, help children navigate digital spaces safely and reap the benefits of the digital transformation. To support these efforts, the report *How's Life for Children in the Digital Age?* (2025) provides a cross-national overview of children's digital experiences across OECD countries. The report highlights adolescents' use of and experiences with digital services, including the following findings:

- Children are spending a significant portion of their lives online. In 2022, around one in four 15-year-olds used digital devices for no more than 20 hours per week, with significant country-to-country variation. However, in most countries, at least half of 15-year-olds spent 30 hours or more per week on digital devices. A notable minority are very intensive users who spent 60 hours or more online, ranging from one in ten in Japan to almost one in two (43%) in Latvia.
- Spending long hours playing video games is commonplace for a significant minority of adolescents, especially boys and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In 2022, on average across the OECD, about 8% of boys, compared to 3% of girls, reported gaming for at least seven hours on weekdays, with this proportion rising to 12% on weekends.
- Across the OECD, about one in eight of girls and one in thirteen of boys aged 11, 13, and 15 are affected by problematic social media use, which include issues like difficulty managing time online, disruptions to daily activities, conflicts with parents or friends, and dissatisfaction with their digital media habits.

Building on the existing [OECD Recommendation on Children in the Digital Environment](#), the report explores the challenges of creating an institutional framework to promote safety and well-being of children in the digital age. It stresses the need for:

- A better understanding of the **interplay between children's lives online and offline, and a number of well-being outcomes**. This includes identifying factors in children's life circumstances and offline environment that actively contribute to their knowledge of healthy digital practices and confidence in navigating digital services safely. At the same time, it also involves recognising factors that contribute to risks, lead to problematic digital behaviours, or result in excessive time spent online.
- **Evidence-based regulations and cross-sectoral government action** in response to the widespread use of digital media by children and to advancements in technology, including artificial intelligence and immersive experiences. Effective "safety by design" measures in digital services are essential to protect children online, ensuring that the responsibility for safety and promoting healthy digital practices is not unduly placed on parents and children themselves.
- **Clear guidance and support to assist educators, parents, and caregivers** in helping children positively manage their engagement with digital technologies, develop digital skills, establish appropriate limits, and fulfil their expressed desire for protection and support without being excluded from key areas of the digital environment, such as social media.
- **Integrating children's views and perspectives into digital policies and strategies** to uphold their rights and ensure that their needs, behaviours and the risks they face in the digital environment and – how it relates to their offline lives – are understood in a full and accurate way. Engaging children in decisions affecting their rights and empowerment in the digital environment helps create support systems and regulations that are age-appropriate, aligned with their level of maturity, and include supports and restrictions that are more likely to be accepted and respected.
- **Solid evidence and data on the impact of children's digital behaviours** on well-being – which take into account the purpose and motivation of digital use, level of active or passive engagement, and time spent online – are essential for guiding effective policies. The evidence base should be informed by research and draw on the expertise of health professionals, teachers and caregivers to better identify vulnerabilities, prevent problems from escalating, and develop effective coping strategies for children at risk of harm.

## How much time are children spending on digital devices and what for?

In 2022, children's **access to the digital environment was almost universal** in the OECD. On average, 96% of 15-year-olds had access to the Internet via desktop computer, laptop, or tablet at home while 98% had a smartphone. Children are getting a smartphone young. Approximately 70% of ten-years-olds have their own smartphone, however this number varies hugely across countries, from only 29% in Türkiye and 40% in France to more than 90% in Latvia, Poland, and the Nordic countries.

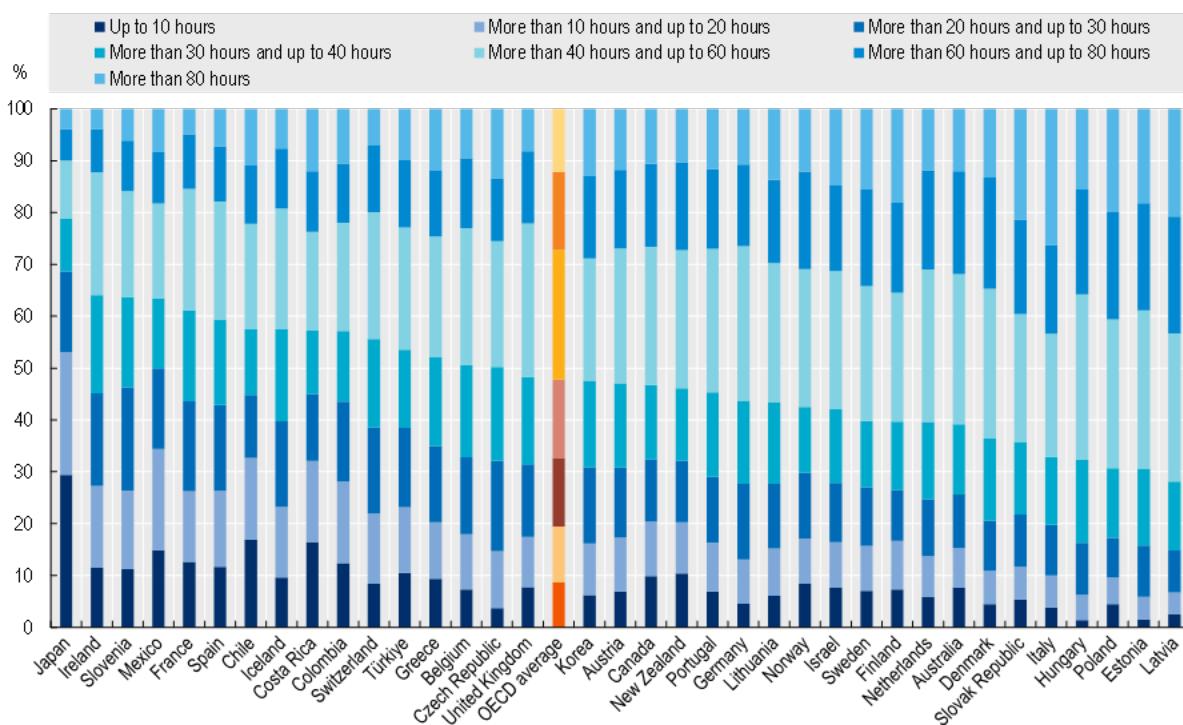
Children are spending a significant portion of their lives online. Within each OECD country, the number of hours spent online varies widely among 15-year-olds. The information collected in PISA surveys suggests that, in 2022, around one in four 15-year-olds spent no more than 20 hours per week using digital devices, though there were large variations across countries. Across almost all countries, at least **half of 15-year-olds spent 30 hours or more per week** using digital devices. A significant minority of these teenagers, ranging from 10% in Japan to 43% in Latvia, are very intensive users who spent 60 hours or more on digital devices, or in other words more than a third of the week. Japan stands out with a significantly lower proportion (31%) of 15-year-olds spending at least 30 hours per week, and a much higher proportion spending as little as 10 hours per week.

The time 15-year-olds spent using digital devices just for leisure **often exceeded the two-hour per day screen time limit** recommended by public health agencies or professional associations in a few OECD countries, including Australia, Germany, and the United States. On average, 60% of 15-year-olds in the OECD spent two hours or more per weekday on digital devices for leisure activities, in addition to time spent for learning. Again, significant variations exist between countries, from 18% in Japan to 81% in Estonia.

Across the OECD, 95% of 15-year-olds browsed the Internet and social networks for fun. Most used digital devices for **communication and sharing content** (88%), **seeking practical information** (84%), and **playing video games** (83%). A smaller but still high percentage (69%) **created or edited their own digital content**, with notable variations between countries.

### Figure 1. Most adolescents spend more than 30 hours per week on digital devices

Distribution of total time spent per week on digital devices for learning and leisure among 15-year-olds



Note: Time spent on digital resources for learning or leisure during a typical week, as reported by students. 15-year-old students were asked "This school year, about how many hours a day do you usually use digital resources, respectively for learning activities at school, learning activities before and after school, learning activities on weekends, leisure at school, leisure before and after school, and for leisure on weekends. This figure accounts for the total time spent with digital resources, whether at school or outside."

Source: Adapted from OECD (2023), *PISA 2022 Results (Volume II): Learning During – and From – Disruption*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/a97db61c-en>. Data are available at <https://stat.link/pyhr6e>.

Children and adolescents use digital technologies and services for a wide range of educational and recreational purposes. Data from the 2022 PISA survey suggest that 84% of 15-year-olds across the OECD spent at least two hours per week in 2022 using digital devices to learn something outside of school, such as consulting tutorials or using educational applications. Additionally, 66% of 15-year-old girls and 61% of boys reported spending three or more hours on social media on a weekday, while around 27% of 15-year-olds across the OECD play video games for at least three hours on a weekday.

## How do digital activities relate to child well-being?

Promoting children's well-being in the digital environment and addressing related challenges requires recognition of the various ways in which the digital world can directly and indirectly impact children's lives. This necessitates a **global approach to child well-being in the digital world**, looking at multiple aspects such as physical and mental health, cognitive development and learning outcomes, and socio-emotional well-being. Additionally, it is essential to consider the **individual, family, and school circumstances, as well as peers' behaviours** that influence children's online practices and outcomes, as well as the role of **institutional and policy contexts** in shaping their digital experience (Box 1).

Digital technologies and media offer children **numerous opportunities to learn, play, connect with friends, and access information or support that may not be available in their offline lives**. At the same time, **excessive or problematic use** of digital technologies raises concerns for child well-being. In the **early years**, the active engagement of children with digital devices, when directly and proactively supported by parents and caregivers, can promote their literacy, verbal skills, and language development. But without such support and coupled with excessive and passive screen exposure, the neurocognitive development of children and their language skill acquisition and development can be affected.

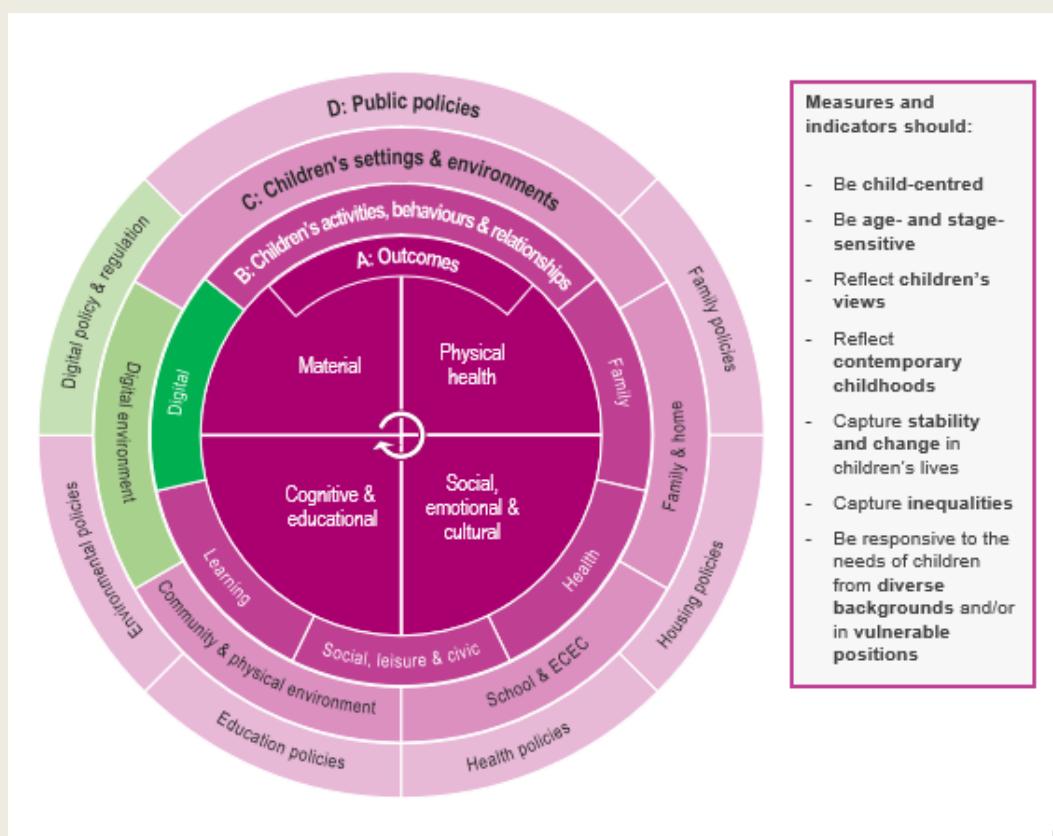
During middle childhood and the **teenager years**, digital resources offer opportunities to create and learn outside of schools. **Online friendships and social media** give adolescents opportunities for enjoyment, peer support, access to information, and social interactions with peers. They can allow adolescents to create new connections through peer support, community building, and identity exploration, especially for isolated teens, and can benefit socio-emotional well-being, particularly if used moderately. At the same time, digital media can pose risks to mental health, both directly, for example if adolescents experience online abuse or bullying, and indirectly, by contributing to lower sleep quality, reduced physical exercise, and a lack of in-person social connections. **Evidence linking digital technology use directly to mental health problems is mounting but still remains preliminary**, in part due to the reliance on limited, or partially complete sources of information.

### Box 1. Children's digital experiences are shaped by their offline environments

The *OECD Child Well-Being Measurement Framework* integrates the different dimensions of child well-being – material well-being, physical health, social, emotional and cultural well-being, and cognitive development and educational well-being – recognising them as largely interdependent. The Framework's multi-level structure further incorporates the drivers shaping child well-being, including the activities, behaviours and relationships children in their different daily environments. The digital environment is one of these environments, embedded within a broader institutional context, including the laws and policies that regulate digital spaces.

Children's engagement with the digital world is shaped by many factors, including the purpose and motivation, access, and how they navigate online spaces – whether independently or with others. Their digital and “real-life” activities can complement (e.g., social media strengthening real-world friendships) or compete (e.g., screen time replacing physical play). Their broader environment, including the digital environment itself, as well as their family, school, and friends (Figure 2, outer ring C), provide protection and support which is shaped by regulations, legal obligations, restrictions, standards, and legislations set by governments and relevant authorities to guide the development of digital services for children. It is further supported by policies designed to educate and inform a diverse group of stakeholders, including children, parents, and education and health professionals (Figure 2, outer ring D). Understanding the interplay between these elements is key to assessing their impact on child well-being, including physical health, cognitive development, socio-emotional skills, and mental health.

**Figure 2. Understanding child digital well-being and its drivers**



Source: OECD (2021), *Measuring what Matters for Child Well-Being and Policies*, OECD Publishing, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e82fdd1-en>.

## How can we identify problematic digital uses, digital risk factors, and the children who are the most vulnerable?

Intense debate surrounds the potential negative impact of excessive video gaming and social media use on child and adolescent well-being and mental health. Concerns rest on the fact that children are not yet equipped with the skills to fully understand risks, regulate their behaviour, or prioritise other activities that are crucial for their development and overall well-being. A key concern is that extended periods of time spent online may crowd out other valuable and enriching activities – such as reading, physical exercise, or in-person socialising with friends – which are widely recognised as essential for children's cognitive and socio-emotional development. For instance, in 2021/22, approximately 16% of 11-years-old and 20% of 15 years-old adolescents using social media across the OECD reported that they regularly neglected other activities (e.g. hobbies, sport) because they wanted to use social media. Additionally, research indicates that using digital devices before bedtime can disrupt sleep quality, which plays a vital role in children's ability to concentrate and maintain healthy growth. Another concern is that, although video games and social media are sources of fun – and in the case of video games help foster a perseverance in problem-solving –, they are often designed to encourage prolonged use, potentially leading to problematic or addiction-like behaviours.

Spending **long hours playing video games** is commonplace for a significant minority of adolescents, particularly boys and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Across the OECD, around 8% of boys (compared to 3% of girls) reported spending at least seven hours on a typical weekday playing video games in 2022, with this figure rising to 12% on weekend days. Adolescents from low socio-economic families are more than twice as likely as their most affluent peers to spend seven hours or more gaming on a typical day i.e., at least one quarter of the day.

**Problematic use of social media** occurs when children struggle to manage their time online, perceive their digital media use as disruptive to their daily activities, experience conflict with parents or friends due to time spent online, or feel bad or dissatisfied about their digital media habits. Across the OECD, approximately 12% of girls and 8% of boys aged 11, 13, and 15 report problematic social media use (Figure 3). Furthermore, some studies suggest that spending more than two hours a day on social media poses risks to child and adolescent mental health and is associated with depression, anxiety, loneliness, strained relationships, and reduced academic performance, though the causal relationship has not been fully clarified. Additionally, factors such as social comparison, exposure to idealised images, and cyberbullying increase the likelihood of a negative association between social media use and subjective well-being.

**Cyberbullying** is increasing in all OECD countries. On average, one in six 11 to 15-year-olds reported being cyberbullied in 2021-22, with significant variation across countries. A significant minority of younger children (around 5% of 10-year-olds) also reported being victims of cyberbullying, with children from low socio-economic status families more likely to be cyberbullied (7%) compared to those from high socio-economic status families.

In addition to cyberbullying, adolescents often face other **negative experiences** online. For example, over a third of 15-year-olds (36%) report encountering age-inappropriate content online that upset them, and nearly 40% of adolescents have had information about them shared without their consent.

There is also a **gender dimension** to children's digital experiences. For example, boys are more prone to gaming disorders while girls are more vulnerable to problematic social media and mobile phone use. Girls are significantly more likely to be cyberbullied and to report negative experiences online, such as encountering age-inappropriate content, receiving offending messages, and discriminatory content, or having personal information shared without their consent.

Several **offline factors** are known to predispose children to excessive and/or problematic social media use, including a lack of physical activity, behavioural problems, weak social connections, family adversity, and low psychological well-being. Problematic digital media use and poor well-being are mutually reinforcing, further exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities. For example, although adolescents may use social media to alleviate feelings of loneliness, the initial positive impact is likely to fade, leading to a stronger sense of loneliness that drives increased use of digital devices the following day, creating a vicious cycle of growing dependence on social media. Social media use can also contribute to addictive behaviours and stress, especially among vulnerable adolescents, such as those with minority identities or those who turn to social media as a refuge from the challenges they face in the offline world.

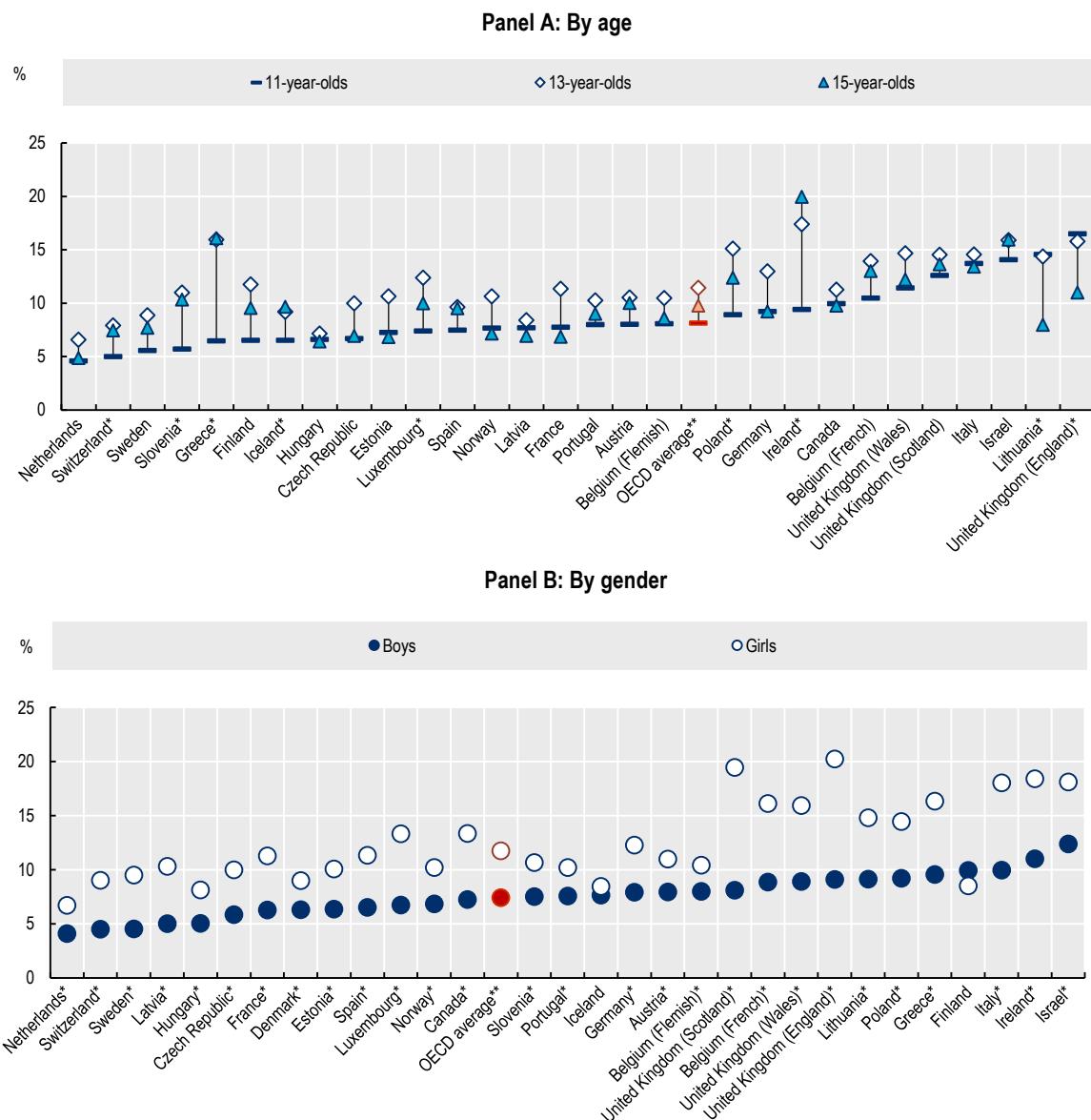
The extent to which the use of digital technologies and media influences children's mental health and overall subjective well-being remains a subject of ongoing debate in the academic research and thus warrants further investigation. Although the link between the use of digital services, mental health and subjective well-being outcomes appears relatively weak in the general child population, certain factors can increase vulnerability. Problematic internet use,<sup>1</sup> in particular, appears to be associated with negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, strained relationships, and lower academic performance. However, research suggests this relationship may be bidirectional, with poor mental health and negative emotions also increasing the risk of problematic online behaviours. In the context of social media use, approximately 46% of adolescents aged 11, 13, and 15 across the OECD who use social media reported in 2022 that they often used it to escape from negative feelings. Research also shows that various factors – such as the reasons children use digital platforms (e.g., social comparison, connecting with others, coping with negative emotions, or simply browsing), the nature of their engagement (active vs. passive) play a key role in shaping their online experiences.

Many aspects of children's offline environment also influence their vulnerability or preparedness to cope with negative online experiences, such as the support they receive or the challenges they face at home, in school, or within their social circles. These adversities can increase children's susceptibility to problematic use of digital services. On the other hand, strong support from their environment can help build protective factors that enhance their resilience to negative online experiences. It is therefore important to identify the aspects of children's individual well-being and needs, as well as the adversities they face at home, in school, or in their social environments, that increase their vulnerability to problematic use of digital services – and to determine which "protective" factors help prevent issues from escalating and develop effective coping strategies for children at risk of harm.

<sup>1</sup> In the literature, problematic internet use is defined as excessive or poorly regulated internet activity – such as social media use or gaming – that disrupts daily life, responsibilities, or and can lead to uncomfortable feelings.

## Figure 3. Problematic social media use varies across age groups but is a bigger issue for girls

11-, 13- and 15-year-old school children who report having problematic social media use



Note: \*The difference between 11- and 15-year-olds and boys and girls is statistically significant at the 5% level.

\*\*The OECD average includes all countries depicted in the figure except Belgium and the United Kingdom.

Children were asked a series of nine questions about whether, over the past year, social media use has had a negative impact on various aspects of their lives, including: whether they (i) can't think of anything else but the moment that they will be able to use social media again, (ii) regularly felt dissatisfied because they wanted to spend more time on social media, (iii) often felt bad when they could not use social media, (iv) tried to spend less time on social media, but failed, (v) regularly neglected other activities (e.g. hobbies, sport) because you wanted to use social media, (vi) regularly had arguments with others because of their social media use, (vii) regularly lied to their parents or friends about the amount of time they spend on social media, (viii) often used social media to escape from negative feelings, (ix) had serious conflict with their parents, brother(s) or sister(s) because of their social media use. Response options for each question were "No" or "Yes". Data refer to the percent of children who respond "Yes" to at least six of the nine questions. "Social media", in this instance, is defined as referring to social network sites and instant messengers.

Source: OECD Secretariat calculations based on WHO, *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC)* World Health Organization Collaborative Cross-National Survey 2021-22, <https://hbsc.org/about/>.

## Children's offline environment creates protective influences and vulnerabilities online

As children's offline environment significantly shapes their online experiences, policy makers need to consider the **protective factors in children's offline environments** when elaborating digital policies to help mitigate the negative effects of adverse online experiences. While the impact of digital activities on child well-being primarily depends on the activities, practices, and connections children develop in the digital environment, as well as on the design and delivery of the digital services, these activities **interact with** the resources and protective factors children get from their **family, school, trusted peers and adults in their social network** (Box 1).

**Parents and the home environment** play a significant role in shaping children's digital use. Parents are generally anxious about the amount of time children spend on digital resources, and children's digital practices can be an important source of parent-child conflict. Family dynamics, including neglectful, authoritarian, permissive parenting styles, are associated with higher levels of problematic use of social media or gaming disorders. To be more effective in reducing problematic digital use, parental mediation needs to be supportive and educational rather than solely prohibiting access to digital services. For instance, family media plans that involve the entire family in establishing rules about when to use digital devices, which content is accessible or advisable, and avoid restricting measures to children alone, are found to be more effective in regulating digital use among children. However, the responsibility for online protection should not be unduly placed on parents and children. Teachers and specialised educators play a key role in fostering digital literacy in children, guiding them on healthy behaviours, and raising awareness about the risks of the digital environment. Most importantly, the digital services sector holds a fundamental responsibility to ensure children's safety online.

## How to enhance child well-being in the digital age?

To enhance child well-being in the digital age, it is essential to have a **broad understanding** of the benefits and risks associated with the digital environment, along with a **strong legal and policy framework** that ensures comprehensive protection and support for all children.

Firstly, policy makers, parents, and educators should be aware that digital technologies **affect children and adolescents in different ways**. These influences can vary by **gender** (for example, girls are more likely to use social media while boys are more prone to spending excessive time on video games) and by **socio-economic background** (for example, children from low socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to use digital resources for learning outside of school). Additionally, **children's offline factors and life circumstances** can either serve as protective influences or create vulnerabilities. Understanding the interplay between offline life and digital behaviours is essential for better preventing potentially harmful practices and mitigating their effects on well-being.

The responsibility to safeguard and support children's healthy use of digital media **cannot – nor should it – rest solely on the shoulders of adolescents and caregivers**. Achieving safe and healthy use of digital media involves a **coordinated, multisectoral and whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach**. This requires developing a **shared understanding of the benefits and risks of the digital environment** to base policies on solid evidence, and by leveraging the expertise of various groups, including digital device developers, digital world stakeholders, health professionals, educators, child development experts, and parents, and aligning with children's views and expectations.

Strengthening policies around digital media **does not require evidence saying that it is the sole or primary cause of child and adolescent mental health issues, nor do the policies need to directly improve mental health** to justify intervention. Even as one of the many contributing factors to mental child

and adolescent health, regulating digital media use may be warranted, especially as the impact of digital media varies and is challenging to measure with current tools.

**Helping children develop healthy digital practices** (such as balanced screen time, safe and positive online interactions, participation in offline activities like play and exercise, and protection from harmful or inappropriate content) is essential for their well-being and rights during childhood, while also preparing them for life online as adults and equipping them with the digital skills needed for adulthood. This **involves promoting offline well-being and addressing real-life vulnerabilities** that may lead to the development of problematic digital habits and ensuing possible anti-social behaviours off-line.

**Artificial intelligence (AI) and Virtual Reality (VR)** both have **potential to advance well-being** (such as supporting the analysis of medical data with AI or enhanced learning with VR), but also come with **significant risks**. For example, AI-generated deepfakes can produce highly realistic yet fake images or videos, which may be used to harm children, while VR can involve physiological issues like motion sickness and eye strain, as well as exposure to harmful content. **Adult supervision and limits** are essential to reduce these risks and further research is required to confirm and assess the extent of these risks.

## ***Developing a whole-of-society policy approach***

To respond to these challenges, the [\*\*OECD Recommendation on Children in the Digital Environment\*\*](#) provides useful guidance on creating frameworks that safeguard children, empower participation, and mitigate risks. It advocates for a **whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach**, leveraging diverse expertise and aligning policies with children's needs and expectations, while also aiming to ensure coordinated efforts among key stakeholders like governments, service providers, educators, and families.

Going forward, country efforts should advance along four key directions:

1. **Implementing effective regulatory frameworks and developing technologies and services that prioritise child safety.** **Digital service providers** play a critical role in ensuring children's safety online with obligations to respect privacy, combat the diffusion of inappropriate content, and provide clear, accessible reporting mechanisms for children facing issues, along with well-defined enforcement mechanisms. **Governments** are responsible for **establishing regulations and standards** for digital service providers to promote "safety by design" – that is, the integration of safety features (such as default privacy settings, age assurance systems or content filters) into digital products and services from the earliest stages of design and development – to safeguard children and to foster a culture of child safety across the board, while encouraging children's digital autonomy. For example, Australia's Online Safety Act mandates safeguards against harmful content, such as child sexual abuse material, requiring compliance from tech companies, with penalties for violations. However, legislation alone may be insufficient without rapid enhancements in **design, filters, and moderation** by digital providers. **Cross-sectoral collaboration** is essential for addressing the complex challenges of the digital environment for children, requiring **integrated "whole-of-government" policy frameworks**. In 2023, nearly one in three European countries had a national action plan for children in the digital environment. To be effective, these action plans require **clear leadership, institutional procedures, timelines, monitoring tools, and data-driven reporting**.
2. **Promoting digital literacy and skills among children, with schools and teachers playing a crucial role in empowering children in the digital world.** Teachers, schools, and education systems play a crucial role in helping children develop digital literacy and citizenship skills and manage problematic situations online, as well as in informing parents about digital risks. Schools also face the challenge of **preventing mobile phones from disrupting learning**. Banning mobile phones in class can reduce distractions and improve focus, but enforcing these bans outside the classroom is difficult, and the evidence on their impact on academic performance and well-being

remains inconclusive. Allowing local adjustments to manage mobile phone bans can make them more effective.

3. **Providing guidance to parents and caregivers to help them understand and manage the benefits and risks of children's digital device use.** Parents play an essential role in guiding children towards safe and enriching practices in the digital environment, by setting rules for using digital technologies and media (both time spent on screens and content accessed) and by helping children develop the skills to navigate the digital environment. Parenting strategies should adapt as children grow, with younger children requiring stricter rules and supervision than adolescents, who may benefit from greater autonomy. At all stages, it is important for parents to engage in conversations about digital media use and model healthy habits. However, not all parents are at ease using digital devices, have a good knowledge of the opportunities the digital world offers and the risks involved, nor can give the (large amounts of) time needed to guide children. Imparting information and providing guidance on healthy behaviours (for instance, screen-free time before bed, and keeping smartphones outside of children's bedrooms at night) is crucial for fostering healthier screen habits in children. Although parental control functions in digital tools are helpful, they shift responsibility onto parents and their use can generate risks, such as a false sense of security, overly controlling behaviour, and children avoiding responsibility for their own learning and growth. Critics argue that digital service providers should focus on designing safer services rather than relying on parental controls. Parents' active involvement in children's digital activities is also crucial and can be promoted, such as co-viewing to promote digital literacy, prioritising educational and interactive content, and creating a family media plan to encourage healthy digital practices. Such plans are particularly helpful when they involve the whole family.
4. **Ensuring that children's views and experiences are reflected in the design of digital policies.** Incorporating the views and experiences of children and adolescents into the definition of digital policies is essential to ensure decisions address the risks they experience, respect their expectations – including their desire for autonomy – and can be effectively implemented. This requires participatory processes to be in place for children to be consulted and have their views represented when policy options are debated and adopted. It is also important to represent children from disadvantaged backgrounds, to remove obstacles such as time constraints and geographic access, and to provide language support for non-native speakers. An example at the European level is the *Better Internet for Kids' Youth Programme* which provides a platform for young people to share their views on making the Internet safer for children. Consultations with adolescents highlight some trends, such as their desire to be protected but not excluded from the digital environment, and to get truthful, clear, and child-friendly information about how digital services work and data privacy.

## Expanding the evidence base on children's digital activities and its association with well-being

Enhancing data and statistics on the impact of digital transformation on people's well-being is central to the digital policies of countries and to the roadmap suggested by the OECD to guide this transformation. Children are a priority group for further statistical efforts on this topic.

Better data on how children engage with digital technologies and media would allow us to understand how and why children engage with digital media – and how it integrates into their lives – and to gain deeper insight into its impact on their well-being. These include data on the time spent on screens and digital activities, the content of those activities, and on the impact of screen exposure and use on children of all ages. For instance, longitudinal data would allow connecting screen time, digital media use, and content with well-being and mental health outcomes and to explore further the determinants and lasting effects of

the time spent on and type of engagement with various digital technologies and media. Further data can also help assess whether the presence of digital technologies in children's lives is displacing other activities, especially those more firmly linked to aspects of children's well-being. Data on the **quality of engagement** beyond metrics counting screen-time can also help ensure that digital technologies are understood and leveraged to promote well-being, and to move beyond simplistic narratives that label digital technologies and media as either "good" or "bad".

Recent waves of the PISA, PIRLS, and HBSC surveys have helped document adolescents' digital skills and practices, but data gaps remain. Filling these gaps can help improve countries' capacity to monitor children's digital well-being, including with:

- **Data on young children's screen exposure and use** to assess their impact on early motor and cognitive development, as well as how parents engage with children during their use of digital devices.
- **Information on how digital devices are used**, such as screen time in the evening or just before nap time (which may have a potentially greater impact on sleep patterns and quality), and the time spent by type of applications and platforms (which would help better portray the risks they face online).
- **Data on positive experiences and benefits of children's digital engagement**, such as whether children's digital engagement contributes to their community and civic participation, strengthens their personal, cultural, or community identity, or helps them access information, networks, or services.
- **Information on children's perceptions of major risks** related to their physical or mental health arising from digital technology use, misinformation on the Internet or social networks, and the dissemination of inappropriate or commercial content, etc. could help measure the need for information and media education.
- **Data on the support children can get from their families, at school or from their social networks** is crucial to identify where needs primarily lie as well as to learn about good practices.
- **Data of children's views and priorities** on digital use is crucial to aligning protection and support measures with their actual needs and practices.

**Monitoring children's digital practices and experiences** is essential for creating effective policies that ensure their safe and beneficial use of digital resources. Gathering comprehensive data to monitor children's digital practices and their impact on well-being necessitates using a **variety of data collection methods**, such as integrating new modules into established surveys like PISA and HBSC, creating dedicated surveys on child digital well-being, including information on parents' and children's digital practices in longitudinal studies, data collected from digital devices, and observational data from field-based experiments, such as digital play interventions. While leveraging global data can reveal usage patterns and identify risks, significant evidence gaps remain. To address these gaps, countries should strengthen their monitoring efforts by selecting or combining various data collection methods to better guide policy decisions.

**Integrating the knowledge and advice of health and educational professionals** into digital policies is essential for understanding the impact of digital practices on the well-being of children. Through their direct engagement with children and families, these professionals can help detect the ways in which digital practices are integrated into daily routines, affect sleep quality, and classroom behaviour, while also uncovering environmental dysfunctions. Additionally, they play a key role in documenting how to best prevent harm and develop effective coping strategies for children.

Policy makers, practitioners, teachers, parents, and young people themselves require a **clear and simplified understanding** of the growing body of evidence on child digital well-being as it emerges. The process of collating, filtering, and evaluating new research findings should be guided by well-defined criteria for assessing quality, causal relationships, generalisability, and relevance to policy, education, healthcare, and social care. An explicit hierarchy of evidence could be used to inform policy decisions and

practitioners, based on an assessment of the robustness, reliability, and accessibility of research evidence for practical use in decision-making or policy implementation.

## Further reading

OECD (2025), *How is Life for Children in the Digital Age?*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/0854b900-en>.

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## Resources

OECD Child Well-being Data Portal: <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/oecd-child-well-being-data-portal.html>

OECD Child Well-being Dashboard <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/dashboards/oecd-child-well-being-dashboard.html>

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## OECD Centre on Well-being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE)

[www.oecd.org/wise](http://www.oecd.org/wise)

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