Child & Adolescent Mental Health Initiative

Πρωτοβουλία για την Ψυχική Υγεία Παιδιών & Εφήβων

Growing Up Digital: An Evidence-to-Policy Synthesis

Διεθνής Πρωτοβουλία για την Υγεία
Global Health Initiative

ΙΣΝ / SNF ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΣΤΑΥΡΟΣ ΝΙΑΡΧΟΣ
STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION
επίκεντρο ο άνθρωπος
humanity at the core

Child Mind Institute

Credits and Contributions

Title	**Growing Up Digital: An Evidence-to-Policy Synthesis**
Institutional Support	This report was developed as part of the Child & Adolescent Mental Health Initiative (CAMHI), an initiative implemented in partnership with the Child Mind Institute and a Greece-wide Network of child and adolescent mental health institutions, with exclusive support from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) as part of the SNF Global Health Initiative (GHI).
Report Contributors	The following individuals authored the report, either by drafting sections of the document or by contributing with revisions: Arthur Caye, Eduardo Vasconcelos, Christina Konialis, Elianna Konialis, Panos Papoulias, Dimitra Moustaka, Nadia Maglara, Konstantinos Kotsis, Maria Basta, and Giovanni Salum.
Suggested citation	Caye, A.*, Vasconcelos, E.*, Konialis, C.*, Konialis, E., Papoulias, P., Moustaka, D., Maglara, N., Kotsis, K., Basta, M., & Salum, G. (2026). Growing Up Digital: An Evidence-to-Policy Synthesis. Child & Adolescent Mental Health Initiative, Greece. ** Equal contribution*
Research Team	The research team conducted or supervised the evidence and document searches, supported the transcription of the Youth Engagement Scheme dialogue sessions, contributed to qualitative content analysis, and supported other research procedures that informed the report. Arthur Caye, Eduardo Vasconcelos, Christina Konialis, Konstantinos Kotsis, Zeina Mneimneh, Julie de Jong, Michael Milham, Arno Klein, and Giovanni Salum.
Reference Checking	The reference-checking team reviewed citations, source documentation, and reference accuracy for the report. Adriana Schütz, Beatriz Scazufca, Camila Rossi, Danyella Richter, Gabriel Angelo F. F. de Souza, Julye Zambrano, Laura Grandini, Letícia de Oliveira Melo, and Matheus Oliveira.
Youth Engagement Scheme Team	The Youth Engagement Scheme (YES) team of CAMHI organized and conducted the youth dialogue sessions in Greece.
Youth Engagement Scheme (YES), Greece	George Moschos, Savvas Metaxas, and Katerina Pronoiti.
Facilitators of dialogue sessions	Nelly Serntari, Vasiliki Vatali, Thanasis Sourlis, Dimitris Konetas, Danai Kontaxi, Georgia Sarra Mavridou, Dimitra Maniadi, Yannis Chionis, and Ioanna Karamanidou.
Dialogue sessions were conducted in Athens, Thessaloniki, Alexandroupolis, Ioannina, and Heraklion.	
Adolescent Artwork	Drawings included in the report were created by adolescent contributors participating in the youth engagement process. Yannis Iskenderidis, Ioanna Palaiologou, Eirini Mpakopoulou, Vasileia Liouskou, and Isabella Moretti Siombola.
Scientific Steering Committee	The Scientific Steering Committee of CAMHI reviewed and approved the scientific content of the report.
Child & Adolescent Mental Health Initiative (CAMHI)	Aspasia Serdari, Katerina Papanikolaou, Konstantinos Kotsis, Maria Basta, Nikolaos Zilikis, Lilian Athanasopoulou, Vaios Dafoulis, and Giovanni A. Salum.
Participating institutions	Democritus University of Thrace; University of Crete; Aristotle University of Thessaloniki; Children's Hospital of Athens "Paidon Agia Sophia"; University General Hospital of Alexandroupolis; University General Hospital of Ioannina; University General Hospital of Heraklion; General Hospital of Thessaloniki "Papanikolaou"; and General Hospital of Thessaloniki "Ippokrateio."
Translations	Christina Konialis
Communications, Design, and Outreach	The communications, design, and outreach team supported the adaptation of the report for public communication, visual identity, layout, dissemination materials, and outreach in Greece. Melina Spathari, Sophia Parousi, Fani Vasilopoulou, and Daphne Bei.

Table of Contents

Abstract: Growing Up Digital: An Evidence-to-Policy Synthesis 8

Chapter 1: Introduction 11

Chapter 2: Methods 19

2.1. Evidence synthesis 19

2.2. Review of Greek data sources 26

2.3. Youth dialogue component 26

Chapter 3: What the Evidence Shows 29

3.1. Where the evidence is most consistent regarding harms and risks 30

3.1.1. Digital engagement and the displacement of protective activities 30

3.1.2. Experience-based exposures produce clearer signals 32

3.1.3. Sleep is a clear and actionable pathway 35

3.1.4. Concentrated risk behind modest averages 36

3.2. What the evidence cannot yet settle regarding causality, pathways, and trade-offs .. 38

3.2.1. Cause, consequence, or amplifier? 40

3.2.2. Knowing the problem is easier than knowing what helps 41

3.2.3. Experts agree more on the risks than on the tools 41

3.3. What the evidence suggests regarding benefits, protective factors, and preserving opportunities 42

3.4. How to reason from this evidence 43

3.5. From evidence to accountable public judgment 44

Chapter 4: The International Regulatory Landscape 49

4.1. The direction of regulatory travel 49

4.2. What countries are doing: the main regulatory tools 50

4.2.1. School phone restrictions and school-day controls 50

4.2.2. Age and design-related interventions moving ahead of the evidence ... 55
4.2.2.1 Minimum age rules for social media access ... 56
4.2.2.2. Age assurance and age verification ... 59
4.2.3. Platform governance: duties, design, data, and accountability ... 60
4.3.1. Interventions with stronger evidence alignment ... 64
4.3.2. Trade-offs that cannot be designed away ... 64

Chapter 5: Greece: From Legal Framework to Functioning System ... 67
5.1. The regulatory baseline ... 67
5.2. The institutional landscape ... 68
5.3. Policy initiatives beyond binding law ... 69
5.4. Enforcement, Coordination, and Implementation Challenges ... 71
5.5. The central challenge ... 72

Chapter 6: What the YES discussions revealed: a thematic overview ... 75
6.1. Social media as a complex adolescent experience ... 75
6.2. Social life, belonging, and emotional regulation ... 76
6.3. Time, content and compulsive use ... 77
6.4. Night-time use, sleep, and concentration ... 78
6.5. Self-image, comparison, and social acceptance ... 78
6.6. Negative experiences and cyberbullying ... 79
6.7. Limits, restrictions, and the role of adults ... 80

Chapter 7: Conclusions ... 83
7.1. What this report establishes ... 83
7.2. A policy agenda by actor ... 85
7.3. The research agenda this synthesis points toward ... 87
7.4. Youth engagement as policy infrastructure ... 89
7.5. Closing argument ... 90

References ... 94

Activity in the YES programme, Alexandroupolis.

Abstract

Growing Up Digital: An Evidence-to-Policy Synthesis

Governments are making decisions about adolescents' digital lives at pace. Although research on both the effectiveness of these decisions and on the relationship between digital engagement and adolescent mental health has been growing, the evidence base remains uneven. Against this background, this report provides a structured synthesis of what the international evidence base actually supports, where its limits lie, and what those limits mean for policymaking, with sustained attention to the Greek context.

The report synthesizes 32 major international evidence-to-policy documents published between 2017 and 2026, produced by organizations including the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the European Commission, and national governments. From these documents, 1,099 individual claims and 635 policy recommendations were extracted, coded, and systematically compared. The analysis also incorporates Greek data sources from the Greek Safer Internet Centre, the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study, the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD), and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Initiative (CAMHI), to establish baseline conditions and assess how international findings relate to the Greek context. A complementary qualitative component draws on structured dialogue sessions conducted through the Youth Engagement Scheme (YES) of CAMHI, involving approximately 85 adolescents aged 13 to 17 across five Greek cities.

Public debate, parental guidance, and parts of the research literature have often approached adolescent digital risk primarily through the lens of screen time and overall duration of use. The evidence reviewed in this report suggests a more complex picture. Associations between time online and adolescent mental health are generally small, inconsistent, and context-dependent. Heavy or prolonged use can still function as an important signal, particularly when it displaces sleep, reduces physical activity, or becomes difficult to regulate. At the same time, the evidence increasingly points toward the parallel importance of understanding the quality, context, and mechanisms of digital experience, rather than relying on duration alone as a proxy for harm.

The most consistent risk signals in the literature concern online bullying and harassment, exposure to harmful or age-inappropriate content, appearance-based social comparison on image-heavy platforms, and sleep disruption driven by late-night use, notification systems, and autoplay. These risks concentrate among older adolescents, particularly girls, and among those with pre-existing vulnerabilities. Many are generated upstream through platform design and recommendation systems in ways that individuals and families cannot easily control. A defensible policy approach must therefore ask not only what risk is being addressed, but which actors have the authority, capacity, and responsibility to intervene effectively. The regulatory landscape reflects this shift, with at least 114 education systems introducing school-day

phone controls, minimum-age rules moving from marginal to mainstream, and a growing number of jurisdictions developing risk-based platform governance frameworks.

Greece participates in this evolving architecture through the Digital Services Act (DSA), the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), national school-device rules, and policy initiatives around age assurance and online protection for minors. A central challenge for Greece is ensuring that this extensive legal and institutional architecture functions as a coordinated system in practice across the different authorities and institutional settings involved in adolescent digital governance.

The report concludes that the evidence is sufficient to guide action across several domains, while also pointing to important limitations and uncertainties within the current evidence base. Approaches with stronger grounding in the literature include platform accountability measures targeting harmful exposures, protections around sleep and school-day attention, stronger privacy and child-rights safeguards, and institutional coordination capable of translating formal legal obligations into consistent practice. More broadly, the report argues that policy should remain explicit about uncertainty, assign responsibility to actors with meaningful leverage over digital environments, and treat implementation as something to be continuously evaluated rather than assumed to work.

Drawing by Eirini Mpakopoulou and Vasileia Liouskou, members of the YES team in Athens.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The broader context

Governments worldwide are making decisions about adolescents' digital lives at an increasing pace. Schools are restricting or banning phones during the school day, legislatures are debating minimum ages for social media access, and regulators are expanding what they require from platforms, including risk assessments, safer design standards, and greater transparency around how content reaches young users. In Greece, these pressures are reflected in school policy, in pending legislation on social media age limits, and in the everyday experiences of adolescents, parents, caregivers, and educators.

These decisions are driven by growing global concern about youth mental health and well-being as a public health priority. Large-scale reviews describe child and adolescent mental health as an increasingly urgent challenge requiring prevention, early intervention, and cross-sector responses. Cross-national evidence further suggests that psychological and somatic complaints among adolescents worsened following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with important differences across age, gender, and social context.

These broader trends are also reflected in Greece. Recent evidence from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Greece 2022 study indicate that a substantial proportion of adolescents report recurring psychological or somatic complaints, with nervousness, low mood, irritability, and sleep difficulties among the most commonly reported symptoms. These patterns are not evenly distributed. Girls consistently report substantially higher levels of anxiety-related symptoms and loneliness compared to boys, while broader trends also point to a growing intersection between emotional distress, digital engagement, and disruptions to everyday routines and recovery.

It is within this broader psychosocial context that changing patterns of digital engagement are unfolding. Greek evidence points to rising levels of problematic social media use among adolescents, particularly among girls, alongside increasing difficulties disengaging from platforms and regulating patterns of use, as reflected in findings from HBSC Greece (2022) and the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) Greece 2024 study. In this report, problematic social media use refers not simply to time spent online, but to broader patterns of compulsive checking, unsuccessful attempts to reduce use, neglect of other activities, and interference with everyday functioning and relationships. These patterns suggest a landscape shaped less by uniform effects than by increasingly concentrated forms of vulnerability among specific groups of young people.

Adolescents do not encounter the internet as a single thing. They grow up within digital

ecosystems: systems that include not only devices and connectivity but also platform design, recommendation systems, content flows, commercial incentives, and privacy practices. These ecosystems also extend to the offline conditions that shape how digital experiences are navigated and managed, including family relationships, school environments, peer dynamics, and access to care. A teenager with a stable home environment, strong peer relationships, and a school that talks openly about digital life is using the same platforms as a teenager who has none of those things. Their experiences will not be the same.

The Greek findings also point to forms of protective capacity already present within adolescents' everyday environments. A large majority of adolescents report being able to communicate openly with their parents, particularly their mothers, while those who feel supported by teachers tend to report significantly higher levels of life satisfaction (HBSC Greece, 2022). These patterns suggest that family communication and supportive school relationships remain important protective conditions within adolescents' everyday lives.

Within this broader setting, research finds that digital environments can increase adolescents' exposure to established mental-health risk factors, and consistently identifies associations between heavy or problematic digital use and poorer mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, sleep problems, and loneliness. However, much of this evidence is correlational rather than causal. That is, when two things change together — for example, when higher levels of social media use coincide with higher levels of anxiety — this does not by itself tell us that one caused the other. Several explanations may be possible: digital use may contribute to distress, distress may drive certain patterns of digital use, or both may be shaped by other factors such as family stress, peer relationships, school climate, or lack of offline support. Longitudinal studies increasingly suggest that the relationship runs in both directions: young people experiencing psychological distress may be more likely to engage in compulsive or poorly regulated digital behaviors, while certain forms of engagement — particularly cyberbullying exposure, harmful content, compulsive use, and sleep disruption — may intensify existing vulnerabilities.

This complexity matters for policy. The evidence does not support either blanket reassurance or alarm, and causal pathways remain difficult to establish with certainty. What research does show is that the relationship between digital use and youth mental health is significant, bidirectional, and shaped by context. Understanding what the evidence can and cannot tell us — and how digital experiences interact with other known risk and protective factors — is essential for building policy that is proportionate, protective, and responsive to young people's actual lives.

The main problem this report addresses

The decisions being made are consequential, yet the evidence base informing them remains fragmented, uneven in quality, and frequently misunderstood. Prominent findings are often invoked without their full context, while individual reports are sometimes interpreted in ways that overstate what they actually demonstrate. As a result, policy can move quickly on the basis of evidence that is incomplete or selectively read, sometimes in directions the research supports less strongly than proponents suggest, and sometimes away from areas where the evidence is more consistent and robust.

Public debate and much of the guidance directed at families still revolve around hours: how much is too much, and when does use cross a line. Duration is relevant, especially when it signals heavy, late-night, or difficult-to-control use. But it is not a sufficient account of risk. Total screen time compresses radically different experiences into a single number. The evidence becomes considerably firmer when the question broadens beyond duration to include experience, focusing on

what adolescents encounter online, how those encounters are structured by platform design, and how the surrounding context shapes whether any given exposure becomes harmful. Policy that reaches for a single lever, whether an age limit, a device ban, or a time threshold, risks missing the problem it is trying to solve.

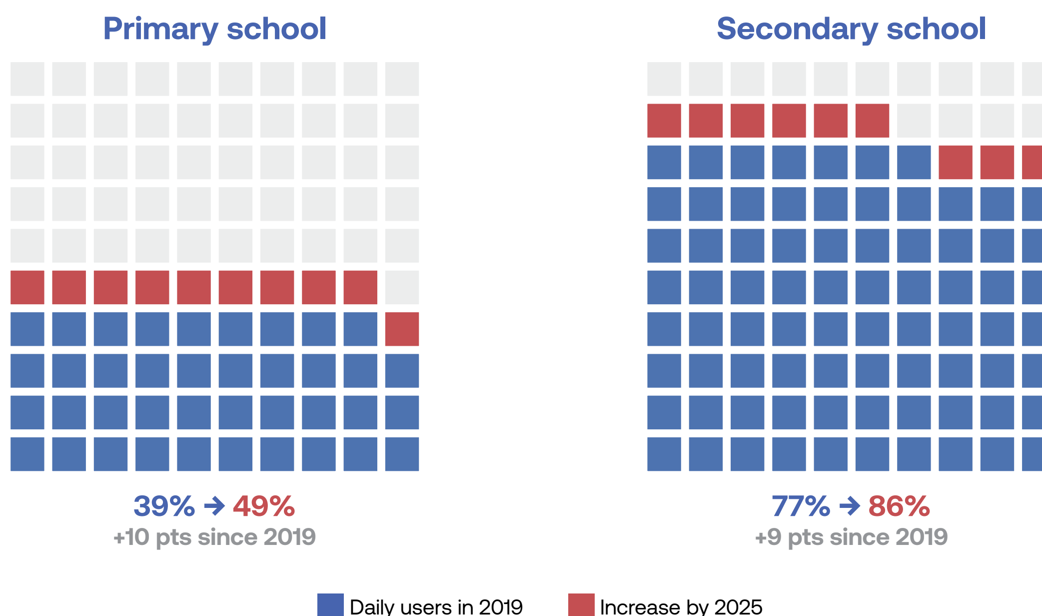
In the Greek context, adolescents' digital participation begins early and is increasingly embedded in everyday life. Recent nationwide evidence suggests that daily internet use has become routine across age groups, particularly among secondary school students (Figure 1), while access to social media frequently begins before formal platform age thresholds are reached. Around half of students report first engaging with social media between the ages of 10 and 12, and roughly two-thirds to three-quarters acknowledge registering with a false age in order to gain access (Greek Safer Internet Centre, 2025). These patterns reveal a persistent gap between formal age-based rules and the realities of adolescents' everyday digital lives.

At the same time, patterns of digital engagement are not uniform. Around four in ten secondary school students report spending more than three hours online on weekdays, with usage increasing further on weekends, suggesting that higher-intensity engagement concentrates within specific groups and time periods rather than being evenly distributed across adolescents. Alongside concentrated heavy use, a substantial proportion of students report encountering harmful or inappropriate content, often unintentionally, while many also report limited or no parental monitoring. Collectively, these conditions define the broader landscape within which Greek policy responses are taking shape: early access, routine circumvention of age rules, concentrated heavy use among specific groups, uneven supervision, and significant exposure to harmful content.

Activity in the YES programme, Athens.

Figure 1
Daily internet use is becoming the default among Greek youth

Each card shows 100 students; colored squares represent those who report using the internet every day. Daily use increased in both groups: primary school 39%→ 49% and secondary school 77% → 86%.



Source: Greek Safer Internet Center 2019 and 2025 nationwide surveys.

Adolescents' digital participation in Greece spans a diverse and rapidly evolving range of platforms, activities, and forms of engagement rather than a single, uniform pattern of screen use. Recent evidence from the 2025 Greek Safer Internet Centre survey indicates that most children under 13 are already active on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, despite formal age restrictions. Earlier national data from 2018–2019 provide a useful baseline: among students aged 10–17, Instagram (33%) and YouTube (27%) were the most frequently used platforms, followed by Messenger, Viber, Facebook, Skype, and Snapchat. Given the rapid evolution of digital environments, these figures are best understood not as stable patterns of use, but as indicators of how quickly adolescents' online ecosystems shift over time.

More recent evidence moves the focus away from individual platforms and toward broader patterns of engagement. Data from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Initiative (CAMHI) distinguish between different types of screen activity, showing that streaming and video consumption, along with gaming, account for the largest shares of extended use. Similarly, a 2024 survey conducted by the Social Action and Innovation Centre (KMOP) among children aged 9–12 indicates that daily social media use is widespread, while engagement with online gaming environments is also common. Rather than pointing to a single dominant form of digital participation, these findings describe a digital environment shaped by overlapping and constantly shifting forms of engagement.

How countries are responding

The international response to these concerns is already substantial and continues to accelerate. At least 114 education systems have introduced national restrictions or bans on phones in schools, ranging from France's 2018 legislation to Greece's own binding school-device rules introduced in 2024. Minimum-age rules for social media access have also moved from the margins into the policy mainstream. Australia has implemented an under-16 rule, Indonesia and Malaysia have adopted similar measures, and active debates are now unfolding across Europe, North America, and beyond. In Greece, the government presented draft legislation in April 2026 proposing to prohibit social media access for under-15s, alongside age-verification requirements expected to take effect from January 2027.

The broadest and arguably most consequential shift, however, has been toward platform governance: requiring platforms to assess and mitigate the risks generated by their systems rather than focusing solely on the removal of illegal content after harm has already occurred. The European Union's (EU) Digital Services Act (DSA), in force since 2024, represents the most developed example of this approach, requiring large platforms accessible to minors to adopt appropriate and proportionate measures relating to privacy, safety, and security. Comparable regulatory logics are also visible in the United Kingdom's Online Safety Act, Brazil's Digital Statute for Children and Adolescents, and emerging frameworks in Australia and Singapore.

Yet the evidence base informing these responses is not evolving at the same pace as the policy decisions being made. Much of what is currently known about the relationship between digital environments and adolescent mental health still rests primarily on observational data and cross-sectional surveys. As a result, the gap between understanding how harm may be produced and knowing which interventions effectively reduce it remains substantial. Contemporary policy responses are increasingly being designed within that gap.

How this report is structured

The report is organized into seven chapters that move from context and evidence to regulation, governance, and policy implications.

Following the introduction, Chapter 2 presents the methodological framework of the report, including the evidence-synthesis approach, the review of major Greek data sources, and the youth engagement component incorporating insights from dialogue sessions. Together, these elements establish the evidentiary and analytical basis for the chapters that follow.

Chapter 3 examines what the evidence most clearly supports in regard to the risks and benefits of digital engagement and their relationship with adolescent mental health, while also addressing the important uncertainties that remain. It then considers how policy should reason under conditions of incomplete knowledge. Rather than treating all forms of digital engagement as equivalent, the chapter distinguishes between different types of exposure, mechanisms, and risk pathways, while also identifying the limits of the current evidence base.

Chapter 4 maps the contemporary regulatory landscape, examining how governments and institutions are responding across different policy domains, including school-device restrictions, age-based access rules, platform governance, privacy protections, and digital-literacy interventions. Particular attention is given to the broader international shift toward upstream forms of platform regulation.

Chapter 5 turns to the Greek context. It examines the country's existing legal and institutional framework, the distribution of responsibilities across regulatory authorities, and the practical challenges involved in translating formal obligations into a functioning governance system. Particular attention is given to questions

Activity in the YES programme, Athens.

of enforcement, institutional coordination, school-level implementation, and the relationship between EU-level regulation and national policy initiatives.

Chapter 6 brings together a fuller account of perspectives emerging from the adolescent discussion sessions conducted through CAMHI's Youth Engagement Scheme (YES), examining how young people themselves describe digital environments, social media use, online risk, restrictive measures, and the role of schools, families, and peers in everyday digital life. Positioned as a complementary qualitative component alongside the broader evidence synthesis, the chapter situates these discussions within the wider policy and regulatory questions explored throughout the report.

The report concludes in Chapter 7 by synthesizing the main findings of the analysis and outlining the ingredients of a broader evidence-informed policy agenda. It also identifies key limitations in the current research landscape and highlights areas where further empirical and policy development remain necessary.

What this report offers

The evidence on adolescents and digital environments is real, uneven, and frequently misread. Prominent findings are often invoked without their full context, while individual studies are sometimes interpreted in ways that overstate what they actually demonstrate. At the same time, the field itself evolves more quickly than research cycles can easily accommodate, meaning that policymakers are increasingly called to act on knowledge that is incomplete, contested, or already partially outdated. This report responds to that challenge through a systematic examination of the available international guidance base, identifying what the evidence most clearly supports, where its limits lie, and what those limits mean for how policy should be designed, interpreted, and justified.

That analysis rests on two features that distinguish the report from most existing reviews. The first is comparative rather than document-by-document: it examines where international evidence and policy guidance converge, where disagreement persists, and how strongly policy directions are supported by the evidence on which they rely. The second is contextual: it places those international debates within the Greek setting, using national evidence and adolescent perspectives to ground broader policy questions in the actual conditions of digital life in Greece.

Drawing by Isabella Moretti Siombola, member of the YES team in Ioannina.

Chapter 2
Methods

This report combines several complementary methodological components: a structured synthesis of international policy and guidance documents, a review of major Greek and Greece-specific data sources, and a youth engagement component incorporating dialogue sessions conducted across Greece. Each serves a distinct purpose within the broader analysis. The international synthesis identifies what the evidence and policy guidance base most clearly supports, where important limits remain, and how different sources converge or diverge in their conclusions. The Greek data provide national context on patterns of digital engagement, exposure, and adolescent wellbeing, helping to situate these broader debates within the realities of contemporary digital life in Greece. The youth engagement component, in turn, grounds the analysis in adolescents' lived experiences, offering insight into how digital environments, social pressures, and policy proposals are understood and navigated in everyday life. Together, these components are intended to complement one another rather than function as stand-alone forms of evidence.

2.1. Evidence synthesis

The corpus comprises 32 evidence-to-policy documents published between 2017 and 2026 (Table 1). These include intergovernmental reports from organizations such as WHO, UNICEF, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); professional and clinical guidance from bodies including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and the American Psychological Association; governmental strategies and advisories, as well as parliamentary or expert committee reviews. Documents were included if they met three criteria: they focused on children or adolescents in digital environments; they synthesized evidence and/or policy recommendations rather than presenting isolated commentary; and they were produced by institutions with a clear public role and identifiable authorship. Primary empirical studies, technical reports without an explicit policy orientation, industry-produced material, and media commentary were excluded. The purpose was not to evaluate individual studies directly, but to examine how influential policy and guidance documents interpret the evidence base, where their conclusions converge, where important limits are acknowledged, and where meaningful disagreement remains.

Table 1
Overview of the documents covered by the Meta-Synthesis

Document	Issuer	Year	What it is
Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory	Office of the U.S. Surgeon General (HHS)	**2023**	Advisory/statement. Government (United States). Primary audience: Policymakers.
Digital Ecosystems, Children, and Adolescents: Policy Statement	American Academy of Pediatrics	**2026**	Position/consensus statement. Professional body (United States). Primary audience: Clinicians/ health systems.
Children & Young People's Mental Health in the Digital Age: Shaping the Future	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)	**2018**	Evidence-to-policy report. Intergovernmental (OECD countries). Primary audience: Multi-audience.
Childhood in a Digital World: Screen time, skills and mental health	UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight	**2025**	Evidence-to-policy report. Intergovernmental (Global). Primary audience: Multi-audience.
A Digital Decade for children and youth: the new European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+)	European Commission	**2022**	Policy framework. Intergovernmental (European Union). Primary audience: Policymakers.
Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence	American Psychological Association	**2023**	Advisory/statement. Professional body (United States). Primary audience: Multi-audience.
Digital media: Promoting healthy screen use in school-aged children and adolescents	Canadian Paediatric Society (Digital Health Task Force)	**2019**	Position statement. Professional body (Canada). Primary audience: Clinicians/health systems.
Indian Academy of Pediatrics Guidelines on Screen Time and Digital Wellness in Infants, Children and Adolescents	Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP) – Guideline Committee on Digital Wellness and Screen Time	**2022**	Clinical guideline. Professional body (India). Primary audience: Multi-audience (families, pediatricians, schools).
College Report CR225: Technology use and the mental health of children and young people	Royal College of Psychiatrists	**2020**	Evidence-to-policy report. Professional body (United Kingdom). Primary audience: Multi-audience.
Social Media: Children/tamariki and Young people/rangatahi (Position statement)	Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP)	**2025**	Position statement. Professional body (Australia & Aotearoa New Zealand). Primary audience: Multi-audience.
Addressing the digital determinants of youth mental health and well-being: policy brief	WHO Regional Office for Europe	**2025**	Policy brief. Intergovernmental (WHO European Region). Primary audience: Health ministries/public health agencies.
Social media and adolescent health	National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine	**2024**	Consensus study report. Other (United States). Primary audience: Multi-audience.

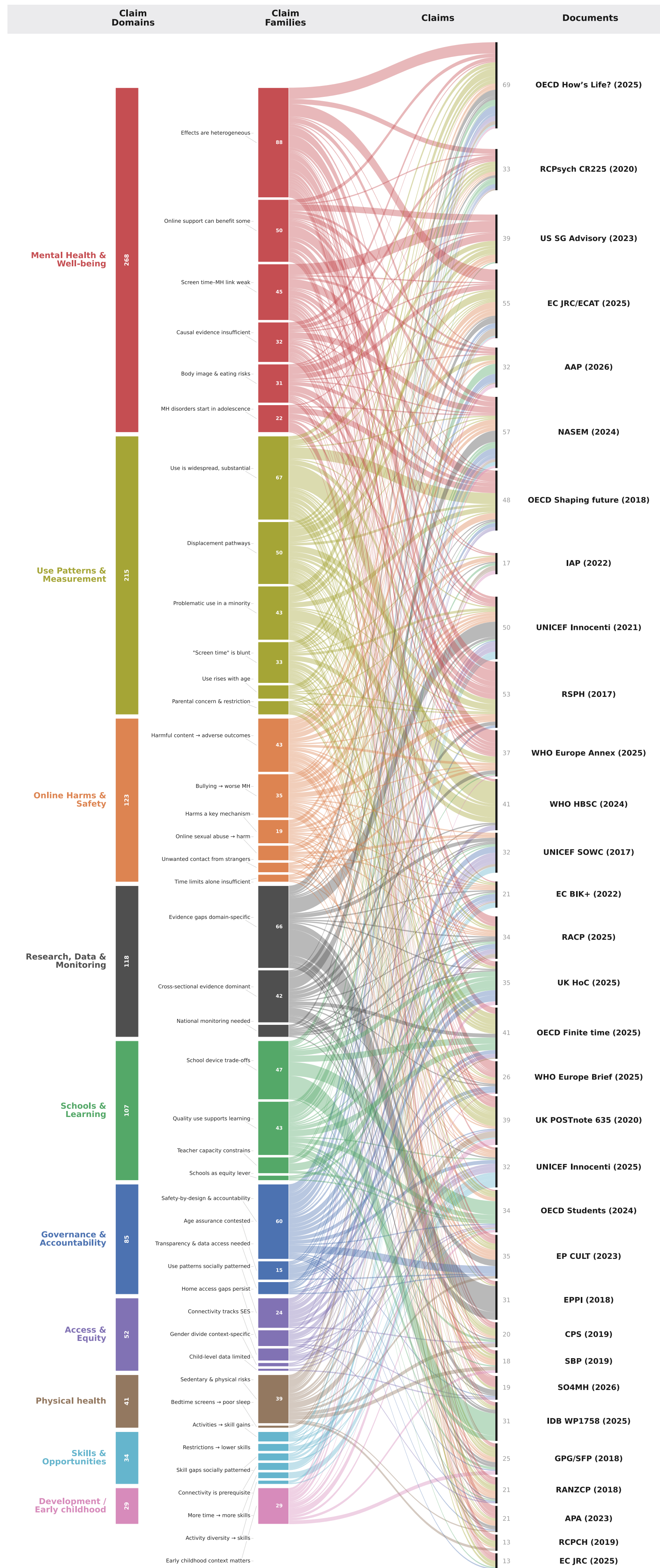
Document	Issuer	Year	What it is
Child & Adolescent Mental Health and Digital Technology: Ecosystem Landscape (Landscape & Recommendations Report)	Prospira Global (commissioned by Safe Online for Mental Health / Safe Online; with support from Weave Wellbeing)	**2026**	Other (commissioned landscape report). Global, including focus on Global South / LMIC contexts. Primary audience: Multi-audience.
A focus on adolescent social media use and gaming in Europe, central Asia and Canada: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children international report from the 2021/2022 survey (Vol. 6)	WHO Regional Office for Europe (HBSC international network)	**2024**	Evidence-to-policy report. Intergovernmental (Europe, central Asia and Canada; 44 countries/ regions). Primary audience: Multi-audience.
Investigating Risks and Opportunities for Children in a Digital World: A rapid review of the evidence on children's internet use and outcomes	UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti	**2021**	Rapid evidence review. Intergovernmental (Global). Primary audience: Multi-audience.
How's Life for Children in the Digital Age?	OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)	**2025**	Evidence-to-policy report. Intergovernmental (OECD countries). Primary audience: Multi-audience.
The State of the World's Children 2017: Children in a Digital World	United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	**2017**	Evidence-to-policy report. Intergovernmental (Global). Primary audience: Multi-audience.
The health impacts of screen time: a guide for clinicians and parents	Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH)	**2019**	Clinical/parent guide. Professional body (United Kingdom). Primary audience: Clinicians; parents/ caregivers.
#StatusOfMind: Social media and young people's mental health and wellbeing	Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) and Youth Health Movement (YHM)	**2017**	Evidence-to-policy report. Professional body / NGO (United Kingdom). Primary audience: Multi-audience.
Screen-based activities and children and young people's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing: a systematic map of reviews	Department of Health Reviews Facility (EPPI-Centre, UCL; London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine) — commissioned by NIHR/ DHSC	**2018**	Evidence-to-policy report. Government-commissioned (United Kingdom). Primary audience: Policymakers.
Children and screens: Groupe de Pédiatrie Générale (Société française de pédiatrie) guidelines for pediatricians and families	Groupe de Pédiatrie Générale (GPG), Société Française de Pédiatrie (SFP)	**2018**	Public health guideline. Professional society (France). Primary audience: Pediatricians; parents/caregivers.
Students, digital devices and success	OECD – Directorate for Education and Skills	**2024**	Evidence-to-policy report. Intergovernmental (OECD countries, PISA 2022). Primary audience: Multi-audience.

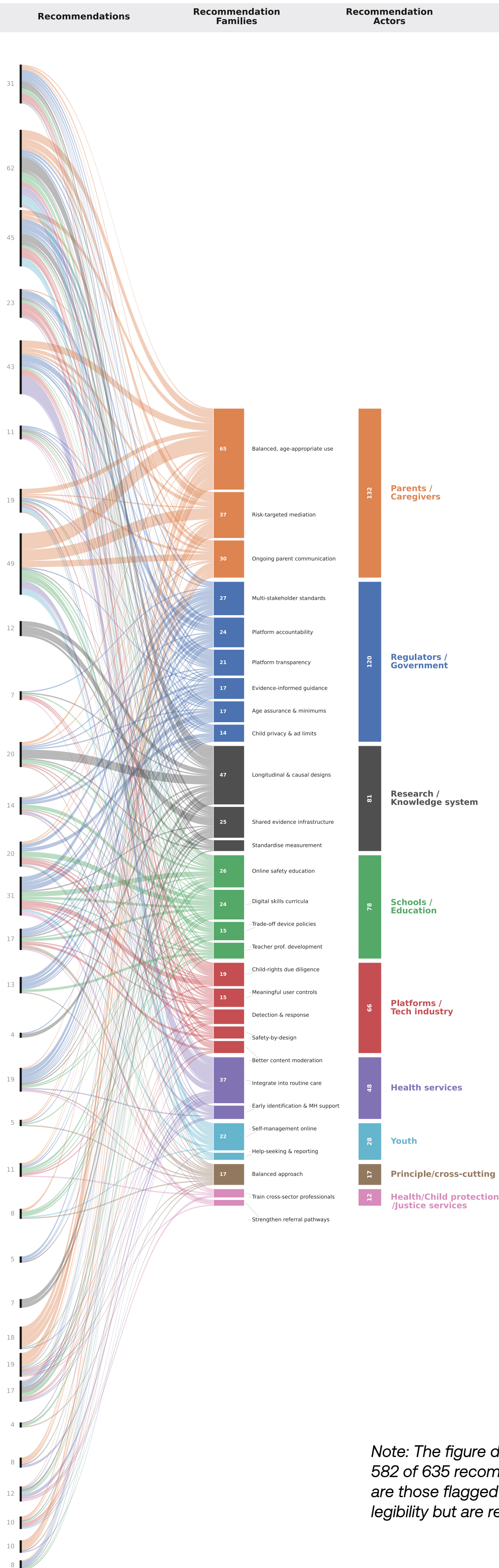
Document	Issuer	Year	What it is
Finite time to learn and play: Whole student development and students' digital leisure outside of school	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)	**2025**	Policy paper (OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 130). Intergovernmental (OECD/PISA 2022 countries). Primary audience: Education policymakers; school system leaders.
Menos Telas, Mais Saúde (#Less Screens #More Health): Guidance Manual	Sociedade Brasileira de Pediatria (SBP) – Working Group on Health in the Digital Era	**2019**	Guidance manual. Professional society (Brazil). Primary audience: Parents/caregivers; clinicians (pediatricians).
Social media usage and adolescents' mental health in the EU	European Commission – Joint Research Centre (JRC)	**2025**	Policy brief (evidence-to-policy). Intergovernmental (European Union). Primary audience: Policymakers/regulators.
The impact of media and digital technology on children and adolescents	The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP)	**2018**	Position/consensus statement. Professional society (Australia & Aotearoa New Zealand). Primary audience: Clinicians/health systems.
European Centre for Algorithmic Transparency roundtables: Minors' health and social media – an interdisciplinary scientific perspective	European Commission – Joint Research Centre (European Centre for Algorithmic Transparency, ECAT)	**2025**	Scientific report (expert roundtable synthesis). Intergovernmental (European Union). Primary audience: Multi-audience.
The influence of social media on the development of children and young people	European Parliament – Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies (requested by CULT Committee)	**2023**	Commissioned study / evidence review. Intergovernmental (European Union). Primary audience: Policymakers/regulators (EU).
Screen use and health in young people (POSTnote 635)	The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), UK Parliament	**2020**	Policy brief (parliamentary evidence briefing). Government (United Kingdom). Primary audience: Policymakers/ parliamentarians.
Screen time: Impacts on education and wellbeing: Government Response	House of Commons Education Committee	**2025**	Government response (Select Committee special report). Government (United Kingdom). Primary audience: Policymakers/ parliamentarians.
Mobile Devices and Children's Development: The Case for School Restrictions	Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Department of Research and Chief Economist	**2025**	Working paper (IDB Working Paper Series). Intergovernmental (81 countries, PISA 2022). Primary audience: Policymakers.
Addressing the digital determinants of youth mental health and well-being: policy brief – Web annex: Findings from an evidence review and policy mapping	WHO Regional Office for Europe	**2025**	Web annex to policy brief. Intergovernmental (WHO European Region). Primary audience: Policymakers/public health agencies.

The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, claims and recommendations were extracted from each document into a shared registry. In total, 1,099 claims and 635 recommendations were identified. For the purposes of this analysis, a claim is defined as a discrete proposition advanced by a source document about the evidence. For example, an assertion about prevalence or trends, a statement regarding an association or mechanism, a causal claim, or an acknowledgment of uncertainty or limitation. A recommendation refers to a proposed action directed toward a specific actor, such as governments, platforms, schools, families, clinicians, or researchers. Both claims and recommendations were extracted at the level of individual propositions rather than document-level summaries, allowing the same source to support, qualify, or complicate different arguments across different thematic areas. The extraction process combined structured prompts with human review: documents were processed individually, entries were manually checked, and an additional layer of cross-review verification was applied to maintain consistency across the dataset.

Second, the extracted material was organized in a way that allowed systematic comparison across documents. Individual claims were grouped into 52 broader claim families, each capturing a recurring substantive theme within the literature, such as the relationship between sleep disruption and digital engagement or the association between online harassment and mental health outcomes (Figure 2). Each claim was then coded according to how it related to the core proposition of its respective group, including whether it supported, qualified, nuanced, or contradicted it. Additional information was also recorded regarding the type of evidence cited, the clarity of the underlying references, and whether uncertainty, limitations, or evidentiary gaps were explicitly acknowledged within the document.

Figure 2. From knowledge to guidance: how the evidence and recommendations of 32 international policy documents are distributed across thematic domains and target actors.





Note: The figure displays 1,072 of 1,099 claims grouped into 42 families (of 52 coded) and 582 of 635 recommendations grouped into 28 families (of 35 coded). The families shown are those flagged for inclusion in the main figure; less frequent families were omitted for legibility but are retained in the full dataset.

Across the corpus, 96.9% of claims were cod ed as demonstrating good or moderate levels of evidence transparency, while 71.7% included some explicit or implicit acknowledgement of limitations or uncertainty. Policy recommendations were subsequently organized into 35 broader groups, each representing a distinct type of policy action. Individual recommendations were coded according to their target actor, policy instrument type, and the extent to which they were explicitly linked to evidence within the source document. Where such linkages were clearly established, recommendations were also connected back to the underlying claims on which they relied.

This structure makes it possible to identify where different documents converge, where important disagreements remain, and how strongly particular recommendations are supported by the evidence they reference. It also preserves the qualifications and cautions attached to individual conclusions, which are often lost when findings are summarized without reference to their original context or evidentiary basis.

The synthesis approaches these documents as policy-facing interpretations of the evidence rather than as primary research studies in themselves. It does not re-analyze the underlying empirical literature. Instead, its findings describe where the broader guidance base converges, where disagreement or uncertainty remains, and how different institutions interpret the available evidence. The strength and limitations of the underlying primary research are examined separately in Chapter 3.

2.2. Review of Greek data sources

Alongside the international evidence synthesis, the report draws on major Greek and Greece-specific data sources relating to adolescents' digital lives, mental health, and online experiences. These include nationwide survey evidence from the Greek Safer Internet Centre, coordinated by the Foundation for Research and Technology – Hellas (FORTH), the Greek findings of the HBSC study and ESPAD, as well as survey material produced through CAMHI and other relevant Greek organizations and research initiatives.

These sources are used descriptively throughout the report to establish baseline conditions, patterns of digital engagement and exposure, emerging trends, and broader contextual features of adolescent digital life in Greece. The purpose is not to generate stand-alone causal claims, but to situate the international evidence base within the contemporary Greek context and to assess whether broader international patterns are also reflected nationally.

The Greek datasets reviewed differ substantially in methodology, sampling strategy, age coverage, and substantive focus. Some concentrate primarily on internet use and online safety, others on adolescent wellbeing and psychosocial symptoms, while others examine more specific dimensions of digital engagement, including gaming, social media practices, or screen-based activities. Throughout the report, findings from these sources are interpreted in light of their respective methodological limitations and are not treated as interchangeable forms of evidence.

2.3. Youth dialogue component

The report includes a qualitative component based on structured discussion sessions conducted with adolescents across Greece through the Youth Engagement Scheme (YES), a youth participation programme operating within CAMHI. Launched in 2022, YES operates through five Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs) linked to CAMHI regional centres in Athens, Thessaloniki, Alexandroupolis, Ioannina, and Heraklion. Participants are adolescents aged 13 to 17 who are selected through an open application process conducted in public schools across the country in coordination with the Hellenic Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports. The groups operate on an annual

cycle aligned with the school year. Since its launch, the YES programme has conducted 133 YAG sessions, with the systematic participation of approximately 360 adolescents over four years.

The YAGs involve adolescents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and school settings, including teens with a wide range of individual characteristics and experiences. The large majority of participants are girls, reflecting broader gendered patterns in structured youth civic engagement initiatives. An important criterion for participation is a willingness to commit to consistent participation throughout the school year, which inevitably introduces a degree of self-selection.

The groups meet regularly with the support of experienced coordinators and facilitators, while participants are also connected to educators or trusted adults within their school or community setting. Alongside the core YAG meetings, the YES programme supports additional participatory and peer-to-peer dialogue activities in schools and community spaces, extending discussion around adolescent mental health and wellbeing to a wider network of young people. Since 2022, approximately 5,600 adolescents have participated in these YES activities across Greece.

During the 2025–2026 school year, discussions focused on “Adolescent Communication”, including digital communication and social media use. Within this framework, targeted discussions on digital environments were conducted across all five cities during March 2026 for the purposes of this report, involving approximately 85 adolescents aged 13 to 17 participating in that year’s YES groups. Participation was voluntary, and attendance varied across sessions due to school schedules and other practical factors.

Discussion sessions were guided by a shared set of open-ended questions covering social media and platform use, perceived benefits and harms, online participation, sleep, school life, harassment, peer dynamics, proposed restrictions, and the role of parents and schools. Facilitators adapted the pace and emphasis of discussion to each group, and not all topics received equal attention across sessions. Some discussions also included smaller-group activities and peer voice recordings. The resulting material consists of coordinator and facilitator notes, city-level summaries, translated meeting notes, partial transcriptions, and follow-up reflections. Recording practices were not fully standardized, as the natural flow of discussion was often prioritized over the production of verbatim transcripts. Facilitators consistently described participants as reflective and comfortable engaging in dialogue around broader social and public questions. While this contributed to material of considerable depth, participants’ perspectives cannot be treated as representative of adolescents in Greece more broadly. Alongside the discussion sessions, smaller groups of adolescents also contributed to podcast recordings developed around themes of digital life, social media, and communication.

Within the report, youth perspectives generated from the aforementioned process are used selectively and for clearly bounded analytical purposes. These perspectives are synthesized primarily in Chapter 6, while quotations and observations are used more sparingly throughout relevant thematic sections of the report. In the latter instances, the YES material helps ground broader policy discussions in adolescents’ lived experiences in Greece and clarify dynamics often described more abstractly in policy documents. It is presented in terms of recurring thematic patterns across discussions rather than as representative or systematically comparable findings, and is not used to estimate prevalence, establish causal claims, or generalize to the wider adolescent population.

Drawing by Yannis Iskenderidis, member of the YES team in Thessaloniki.

Chapter 3

What the Evidence Shows

Evidence matters in this field because policy is being asked to act on questions that are urgent, consequential, with answers that are easy to oversimplify. Decisions about school phone restrictions, social media access, platform duties, and adolescent protections affect everyday life for young people. Yet the evidence informing those decisions is not all of the same kind, nor does it answer every question equally well. Some forms of evidence are better suited to identifying scale and pattern; others are more useful for examining associations and plausible pathways. Stronger claims about causality or intervention effectiveness require different forms of evidence altogether. A serious reading of the field therefore begins by distinguishing between the kinds of claims the evidence can support and those it cannot yet settle.

The documents synthesized in this report sit at the evidence-to-policy interface: they are not primary studies, but interpretive documents that translate research into guidance for policymakers, clinicians, educators, and families. Across the 1,099 extracted claims, the most common forms of evidence cited were:

- **Surveillance/descriptive evidence (20.4%)**
- **Rapid/scoping/narrative syntheses (17.6%)**
- **Expert consensus (12.8%)**
- **Systematic reviews/meta-analyses (9.7%)**

Evidence capable of evaluating causality or the effectiveness of interventions appeared much less frequently in the reviewed literature. Longitudinal designs accounted for 2.3% of cited studies, and experimental or quasi-experimental evidence for 0.7%. This distribution matters for how findings should be interpreted. The evidence base is generally stronger in identifying patterns, trends, and recurring associations than in establishing direct causal effects or determining how effective particular interventions are likely to be in practice. Large-scale monitoring and survey data can help identify prevalence patterns and emerging concerns, while stronger claims about impact and effectiveness require a substantially higher evidentiary threshold, one that the field has not yet widely met.

Chapter 3 reads the evidence on those terms. It first identifies what the evidence most clearly supports regarding the harms and risks associated with digital engagement, then turns to what the evidence cannot yet settle in relation to causality, pathways, and trade-offs, before examining what the evidence suggests about the potential benefits of digital use and the protective factors that shape outcomes.

Against this backdrop, the chapter finally considers how policy should reason under conditions where convergence in the evidence is real, but certainty remains incomplete.

3.1. Where the evidence is most consistent regarding harms and risks

3.1.1. Digital engagement and the displacement of protective activities

Duration remains clinically and policy relevant, but its meaning depends on what it represents. Large-scale evidence illustrates the limitation of treating total time online as a standalone measure: in a specification-curve analysis across three datasets totaling 355,358 adolescents, digital technology use explained at most 0.4% of the variation in well-being, far too little to justify treating total time online as a stand-alone proxy for mental-health risk (Orben & Przybylski, 2019). Longitudinal diary-style research points in the same direction, finding little indication of stable longitudinal or day-to-day associations between young adolescents' digital technology use and mental-health symptoms (Jensen et al., 2019). Associations between time online and adolescent wellbeing are typically small, inconsistent, or strongly shaped by context. This cuts against one of the most common policy instincts: the search for a universal hourly threshold.

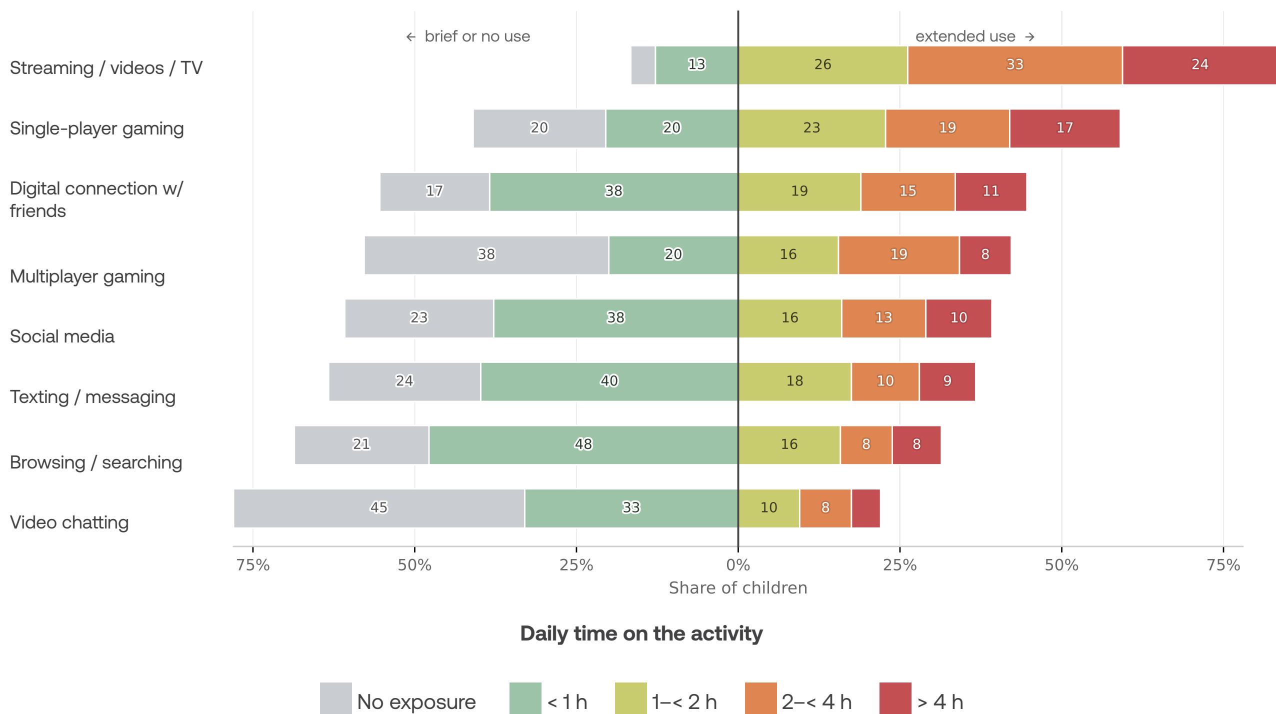
Time compresses radically different experiences into a single number. Data from Greek youth reveal heterogeneous exposure by type of activity (Figure 3). Reviews stressing these distinctions, for instance, between "active" use, involving reciprocal interaction, and "passive" use, involving scrolling and browsing, further weaken the case for total time as the primary metric. Passive browsing is more consistently associated with poorer well-being outcomes, while active use shows a more mixed profile, including potential benefits (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Verduyn et al., 2022). An hour online might involve sustained homework support, a distressing harassment incident, passive entertainment, or an anxiety-driven check of social notifications late at night. These are not equivalent forms of exposure and are unlikely to have equivalent implications for adolescent mental health.

Self-reported time estimates are also unreliable, often diverging substantially from logged behavior. A meta-analysis found only moderate agreement between self-reported and logged digital media use, suggesting that many time-based estimates are considerably less precise than they appear (Parry et al., 2021). The concept itself emerged in the era of television and does not translate cleanly to contemporary multi-device environments, where schoolwork, social life, entertainment, and conflict may all occur on the same screen within the same hour.

Findings from the 2025 Greek Safer Internet Centre survey point in a similar direction. High levels of digital engagement are widespread. A substantial share of secondary-school students in Greece report spending more than three hours online per day on weekdays, with even higher levels observed on weekends. Yet only a subset of adolescents explicitly describe their use as excessive or difficult to manage. Approximately one in four secondary-school students report that they use social media excessively and would like support in reducing their use. This gap between widespread engagement and self-identified difficulty suggests that intensity alone is insufficient to capture risk. What appears to matter more is the subjective experience of control and the extent to which use interferes with everyday functioning.

Figure 3
How Greek children actually spend their digital time

Most children spend less than two hours per day on most digital activities, but streaming/video and gaming account for the largest shares of extended use. Activities such as streaming/video viewing and gaming account for the highest shares of extended daily use, while others, like video chatting or browsing, are typically brief or occasional. These patterns support policy responses that distinguish between types of digital activity, rather than treating all digital use as the same exposure.



Source: CAMHI survey, 2023.

Time becomes informative when it signals something specific. The two most consistent signals are sleep disruption and the displacement of developmentally protective activities, including physical activity, in-person social connection, and unstructured rest. Time starts to matter when late-night use shortens sleep, when digital engagement crowds out physical activity or face-to-face interaction, when it replaces opportunities for recovery, or when phone use intrudes into in-person encounters. What matters is not raw duration alone, but what digital engagement displaces, interrupts, or intensifies.

Research on mobile-device presence suggests that even when smartphones are not actively used, their visible availability during face-to-face interaction can reduce perceived conversation quality, closeness, and empathy. Related work on phubbing, defined as snubbing a co-present person by attending to one's phone, similarly suggests that phone-mediated interruptions can undermine belonging and evoke feelings of exclusion (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013; Misra et al., 2016; Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018; Hales et al., 2018).

Emerging Greek evidence reflects a similar distinction between different forms of engagement. A cross-sectional study of young adults in Greece found that more passive forms of social media use were associated with lower self-esteem and higher depressive symptoms, whereas more active and interactive forms of

engagement showed a more positive profile (Leimonis & Koutra, 2022). The findings further suggest that passive browsing and consumption-based patterns of use may be experienced differently from more reciprocal or participatory forms of online interaction.

As discussed in a later section, insights from the YES group discussions add important qualitative depth to these findings. Participants often described time spent online as significant, yet their accounts also suggest that digital engagement is experienced in ways that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measures alone. Even relatively brief periods of use may be sufficient to encounter distressing or harmful content, while the meaning and impact of time online often depended on context, purpose, and emotional experience.

> ***"You see war one moment and something ridiculous the next. Many times, there is a feeling that we get lost in there, and when we come out, it feels as if we have lost all our time."***

3.1.2. Experience-based exposures produce clearer signals

Evidence is clearest where it concerns specific experiences adolescents encounter online. The most policy-relevant and recurrent findings concern well-established youth mental-health risks, particularly bullying and harassment, harmful or age-inappropriate content, and, with greater qualification, social comparison pressures.

Across the evidence base, online bullying and harassment constitutes one of the most consistent and stable risk patterns. A scoping review of social-media studies found cyberbullying to be consistently associated with depression among children and adolescents, making this one of the most robust findings in the literature (Hamm et al., 2015). Associations with anxiety, depressive symptoms, loneliness, and lower wellbeing remain broadly stable across the corpus. The qualifications are important: definitions vary, most evidence is self-reported, and online and offline peer dynamics are often difficult to disentangle. Yet the broader pattern remains consistent, and the underlying mechanism is familiar. Humiliation, exclusion, and chronic social threat are well-established exposures linked to distress during adolescence.

Longitudinal work further suggests that cyberbullying is not simply co-occurring with heavy social media use, but may form part of the pathway through which it relates to poorer mental health, alongside sleep disruption and reduced physical activity (Viner et al., 2019). Digital environments alter the scale, persistence, and visibility of these experiences. A hostile message that might once have circulated among a small group of classmates can now reach hundreds of peers, remain visible over time, and follow adolescents beyond the school day.

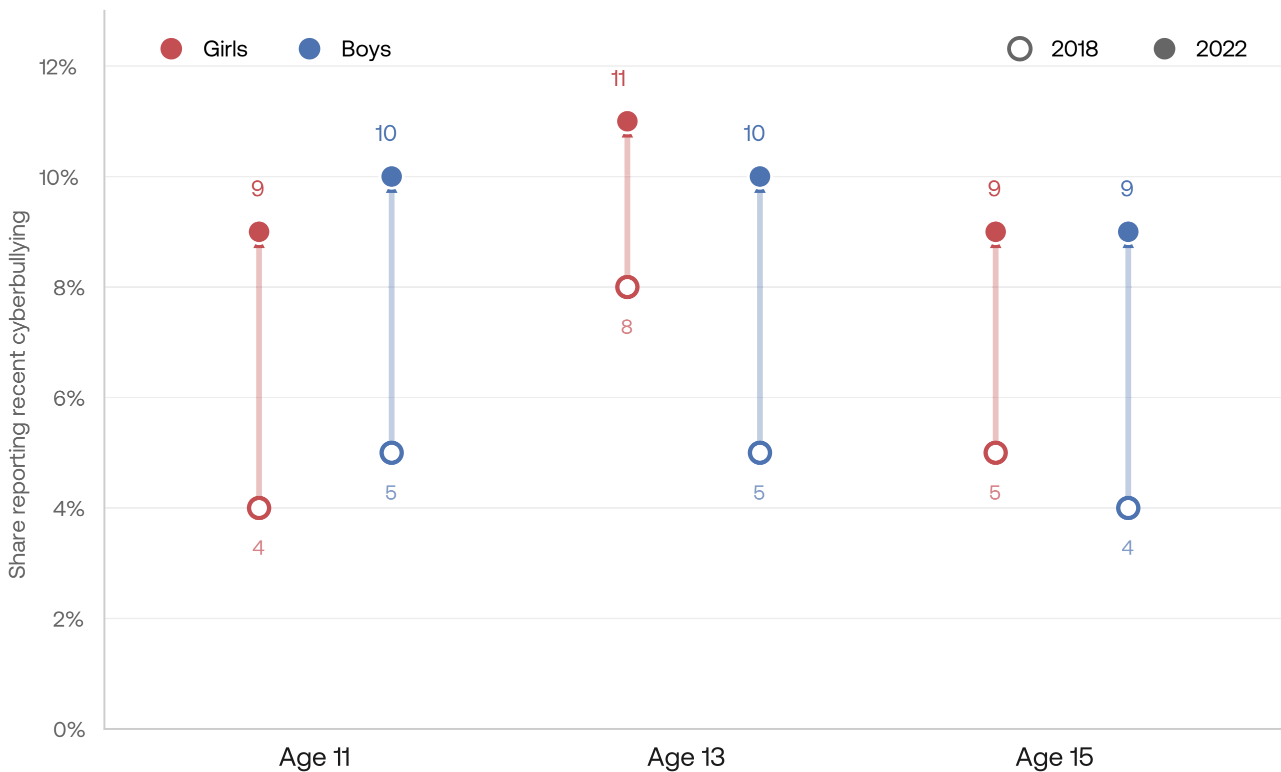
A similar pattern appears in relation to broader exposure to online risks, where Greek data further illustrate how harms are unevenly distributed and often begin early. Survey data from the HBSC 2022 wave show that 9.5% of adolescents experienced cyberbullying in the previous two months, with both victimization and perpetration increasing compared to earlier waves. Reports of digital bullying are already present at younger ages, with similar proportions of boys and girls aged 11 reporting such experiences (Figure 4).

Findings from the 2025 Greek Safer Internet Centre survey point in a similar direction, documenting both direct and indirect exposure to online harm. While a notable proportion of students report personally experiencing cyberbullying, even larger shares report witnessing it, particularly among older students. Across these findings, online risk appears less as an isolated incident than as part of a broader digital environment in which exposure, whether direct or indirect, has become relatively common.

Figure 4

Recent cyberbullying among adolescents in Greece, HBSC 2018 and 2022

Reported cyberbullying rose for both girls and boys at every age between 2018 and 2022.



Source: HBSC Greece (2018 and 2022). Cyberbullied at least once or twice in the past couple of months.

These patterns are also reflected in the YES group discussions discussed later in the report, where participants describe experiences involving deception, identity manipulation, targeted harassment, the non-consensual use of personal photos, and fake-profile creation.

> ***"I had a friend who, at one point, someone created a hate account about him on TikTok and posted things encouraging him to commit suicide."***

Exposure to harmful and age-inappropriate content is another recurrent concern. Here, the literature is less settled than in the case of cyberbullying. An earlier systematic review identified both harmful and potentially supportive functions of self-harm-related online content, whereas more recent review evidence expresses greater concern about repeated image-based exposure and forms of social reinforcement (Dyson et al., 2016; Susi et al., 2023). Across the evidence base, such content is treated as a plausible risk pathway, particularly when exposure is repeated, developmentally inappropriate, or amplified by recommendation systems that continue serving similar material. The qualifications are also familiar: definitions remain broad, what counts as harmful varies across age and context, and exposure itself is difficult to measure.

The nationwide survey, conducted by the Greek Safer Internet Centre between November 2023 and March 2024 with a sample of 4,800 adolescents aged 12–18, provides a detailed picture of adolescents' exposure to online risks in Greece. The findings suggest that such expo-

sure is both widespread and varied. Nearly half of adolescents report encountering online violence as bystanders, while around one in eight report experiencing it directly. Different forms of harmful interaction also appear embedded within everyday digital practices: almost one in four adolescents report that personal images or videos have been shared without their consent, while more than one in ten report having felt pressure or coercion to share personal content online (Box 1). A separate 2025 Panhellenic survey by the same Centre, focused on online habits among 2,500 students aged 10–18, complements this picture by showing that harmful or inappropriate content exposure is common across school stages, often accidental, and sometimes reinforced by recommender systems that extend time online (Box 1).

Beyond direct victimization, the survey highlights the broader digital environment in which these experiences occur. Significant proportions of adolescents report exposure to gender-based harassment and other forms of online abuse, including incidents targeting gender expression and identity, while many also report limited familiarity with concepts such as hate speech or with available reporting and response mechanisms. Online risk therefore appears less as a series of isolated incidents than as part of broader everyday patterns of interaction, visibility, and content-sharing.

Box 1

Online violence, coercion, and safety perceptions among Greek adolescents

A nationwide Greek survey suggests that exposure to online violence, coercive interactions, and gender-based abuse is widespread among adolescents, both as direct experience and as part of the broader digital environment.

- **49%** of adolescents reported having witnessed online violence as bystanders.
- **13%** reported having personally experienced online violence.
- **44%** witnessed incidents of gender-based harassment or abuse online.
- **11%** reported having personally experienced gender-based harassment or abuse.
- **24%** reported non-consensual sharing of personal images or videos.
- **11%** reported feeling pressure or coercion to share personal photos or videos online.
- **46%** reported not feeling safe online.
- **39% r**eported not knowing how to report incidents of online violence.
- **34%** of primary-school children and **61%** of secondary-school students reported encountering harmful or inappropriate content.
- In the majority of cases **(over 60%)**, this exposure was reported as accidental.
- Among secondary-school students, **49%** recognized a potential risk when platforms repeatedly showed them content similar to what they were already watching.
- Among those who saw this as risky, **39%** said that this practice led them to spend more time online than they had intended.

Sources: Greek Safer Internet Centre (FORTH), Nationwide Survey on Adolescents' Online Experiences, conducted November 2023–March 2024, N=4,800 adolescents aged 12–18; 2025 Panhellenic survey of 2,500 students aged 10–18

A more conditional but recurring concern is social comparison, particularly in image-heavy environments organized around appearance and feedback. Review-level evidence supports this mechanism. Social networking site use has been associated with body-image concerns and disordered-eating outcomes, particularly in appearance-focused contexts (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). At the same time, selection effects complicate interpretation, as adolescents already concerned about appearance may be more likely to seek out or remain in comparison-heavy environments, making it difficult to separate cause from reinforcement. The more specific pattern is therefore not simply social media use itself, but appearance-based comparison and feedback-seeking. In adolescent samples, these behaviors are associated with higher depressive symptoms, with stronger associations observed among some subgroups of girls and more socially invested adolescents (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). Experimental studies suggest that exposure to beauty ideals on social networking sites can negatively affect body image, while longitudinal work indicates that appearance-related social media consciousness predicts later depressive symptoms (Fioravanti et al., 2022; Maheux et al., 2022).

Insights from the YES dialogue sessions echo these dynamics, capturing how adolescents themselves describe the pressures of comparison and the blurring of appearance and reality in social media environments, as will be explored in more detail in a later section.

> ***"The beauty standards promoted on social media are harmful. You can't really tell the difference between appearances and what is actually real."***

3.1.3. Sleep is a clear and actionable pathway

Sleep is among the better-supported and more directly policy-relevant pathways. A major systematic review linked social media use with poorer sleep quality, shorter sleep duration, and worse mental-health outcomes among young people, particularly depression, anxiety, and psychological distress (Alonzo et al., 2021). More broadly, adolescent sleep disturbance has also been associated with more severe outcomes, including suicidal ideation and behavior (Gowin et al., 2024; Baldini et al., 2024). When the literature moves beyond broad associations toward identifiable mechanisms, sleep disruption emerges as a recurrent and well-supported link between digital habits and adolescent wellbeing. It connects late-night engagement, notification-driven interruption, and the displacement of recovery routines with changes in mood, attention, stress tolerance, and daily functioning.

Sleep is developmentally central during adolescence and is also among the few mechanisms that are both visible and modifiable. Changes in sleep timing and quality are relatively observable and responsive to conditions that policy can plausibly influence, including notification systems, autoplay features, and household or school routines. This makes sleep both a reliable indicator and a practical target for intervention. Importantly, it is also one of the few pathways supported by some intervention evidence: reducing evening device use or stopping phone use before bedtime has been associated with longer sleep duration and improved next-day vigilance among adolescents (Perrault et al., 2019; Bartel et al., 2019).

Greek HBSC trend data provide important local context (Box 2). Between 2014 and 2022, the proportion of adolescents reporting difficulties falling asleep more than once a week increased markedly across all age groups and for both sexes (Box 2). The increase is particularly pronounced among girls, for whom sleep difficulties become increasingly common with age, while among boys the rise is more moderate but still clearly evident across all age groups.

Box 2
Greek HBSC sleep trends (2014–2022)

Proportion of adolescents reporting difficulties getting to sleep more than once a week

	Girls	Boys
Age 11	12% → 29%	8% → 22%
Age 13	18% → 39%	11% → 23%
Age 15	21% → 38%	13% → 23%

Source: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Greece (HBSC Greece), 2022

The relationship between digital use and sleep is likely bidirectional, and this matters for interpretation. Adolescents who are already distressed may turn to their phones at night for distraction, reassurance, or escape from unwanted thoughts. Late-night phone use can then delay sleep, fragment rest, and intensify the fatigue and mood instability that contributed to the behavior in the first place. Recognizing this reinforcing dynamic does not diminish its policy relevance; rather, it highlights sleep as a point where individual behavior, platform design, and household and school environments converge.

3.1.4. Concentrated risk behind modest averages

One of the most important findings is that modest average effects do not imply modest harm. This concentration is not random: longitudinal evidence suggests possible developmental "windows of sensitivity," with poorer later life satisfaction concentrated mainly among girls aged 11–13 and boys aged 14–15 rather than distributed evenly across adolescence (Orben et al., 2022).

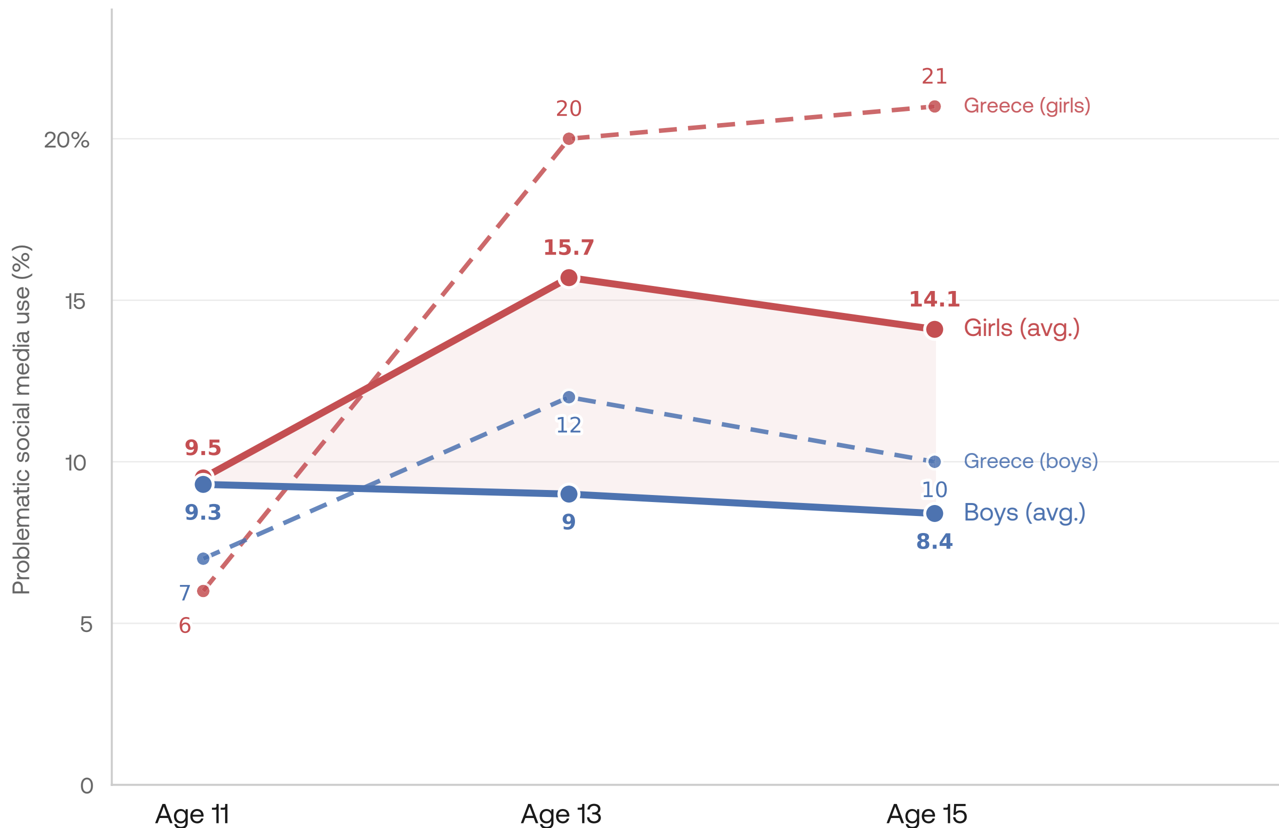
Digital environments do not operate as a single exposure with uniform effects. Risk varies across developmental stage, prior vulnerability, peer context, household resources, and platform design. This helps explain why population-level associations may appear small even when harms are substantial for particular adolescents or patterns of exposure. Reviews further suggest that adolescents with pre-existing anxiety, depression, eating difficulties, or nonsuicidal self-injury may be more vulnerable to negative digital experiences and their consequences than peers without these vulnerabilities (Kostyrka-Allchorne et al., 2023). Similarly, children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) appear more likely to engage in problematic digital media use (Werling et al., 2022).

Greek data also point to important gendered patterns in adolescents' digital experiences and emotional wellbeing (Box 3; Figure 5). While problematic social media use appears at relatively similar levels in early adolescence, differences become substantially more pronounced with age, particularly among girls. Indicators of emotional distress follow a similar pattern, with girls consistently reporting higher levels of anxiety-related symptoms and loneliness.

Figure 5

The gender gap in problematic social media use emerges in early adolescence

Girls and boys report similar levels at 11; from 13 onward girls rise sharply while boys stay flat.



Source: HBSC Survey, 2022. Note: Problematic social media use is defined as answering "yes" to 6 or more of the 9 items on the Social Media Disorder Scale.

Box 3

Gender differences in emotional distress among Greek adolescents

HBSC Greece 2022 findings emotional distress are unevenly distributed across adolescence, with differences becoming increasingly pronounced among girls as age increases.

- Anxiety-related symptoms: 28.6% (boys), 55.3% (girls)
- Loneliness: 10.7% (boys), 22.8% (girls)

Source: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Greece (HBSC Greece), Adolescents' Psychosocial Health in Greece: 2022 Findings and Trends (2023).

The same pattern of differential vulnerability extends to clinical depression, self-harm, and suicidality. CAMHI 2022 data show that approximately one in ten Greek children and adolescents score above the clinical threshold for major depressive disorder, while rates of non-suicidal self-injury increase sharply during later adolescence, reaching more than one in four among 17-year-olds. Earlier nationwide research also identified high levels of probable depression among older adolescents, alongside notable rates of suicidal ideation (Basta et al., 2022; CAMHI 2022). Both intensive use and indicators of problematic engagement appear substantially higher among older adolescents. These findings point to a broader mental health context within which adolescents' digital experiences are unfolding. More generally, the evidence is strongest in identifying recurring patterns of concern and plausible risk pathways, while remaining more limited in supporting simple or universal causal explanations.

Broader mental health indicators in Greece reinforce this picture. HBSC Greece 2022 data show that 59.6% of adolescents report at least two psychological or somatic symptoms occurring at least twice a week, with nervousness, low mood, irritability, and sleep difficulties among the most commonly reported. Greek data also indicate rising levels of depressive symptoms and sleep disturbance across survey waves, particularly among girls. Adolescent sleep disturbance has more broadly been associated with severe outcomes, including suicidal ideation and behavior, making the sleep pathway particularly important not only as a quality-of-life concern but also as a possible route to more serious harm. These patterns describe a population already carrying a substantial psychosocial burden, within which digital environments operate as one contributing and amplifying factor rather than the sole source of distress.

At the same time, the evidence points to a more differentiated picture than one of uniform harm. The same platforms can be beneficial for one adolescent and harmful for another. Digital spaces can provide connection and belonging that is unavailable offline, particularly for adolescents who are isolated, experience stigma, or are navigating identity questions that feel unsafe to raise in their immediate social environment. Most documents, as well as the YES dialogue discussions, acknowledge such instances directly. Concentrated harm among vulnerable subgroups justifies targeted attention and response, while the real benefits digital participation provides for some adolescents place constraints on blanket restriction approaches. A more detailed analysis of the positive aspects of adolescent's social media use, against which any curb on their autonomous use should be evaluated, takes place in Section 3.3.

3.2. What the evidence cannot yet settle regarding causality, pathways, and trade-offs

The evidence reviewed in this report points in a broadly consistent direction, while revealing specific limitations to what current research can confidently establish. Much of the existing knowledge is based on large-scale surveys, descriptive evidence, research syntheses, and expert assessments that help identify recurring patterns in adolescents' digital lives and wellbeing. However, the kinds of studies better suited to determining whether digital use directly precedes changes in mental health, particularly longitudinal and experimental research, remain comparatively limited within the broader evidence base. In a significant number of cases, the evidentiary basis for specific claims is also not clearly specified.

Importantly, the documents themselves are generally cautious in how they present their conclusions. Most findings are framed in terms of associations, tendencies, or possible links rather than direct causal effects, while many explicitly acknowledge uncertainty, complexity,

or methodological limitations. The evidence is therefore more effective at identifying recurring patterns of concern and plausible risk pathways than at supporting simple or universal causal explanations.

One core interpretive challenge is that digital use and mental health influence each other in ways that are difficult to disentangle. As discussed in section 3.1, adolescents who are already struggling may turn to digital environments for reassurance, distraction, or connection, increasing their exposure to potentially harmful content or interactions. Those same environments may then worsen distress through harassment, comparison pressure, or disrupted sleep. Both processes can operate simultaneously.

This bidirectional logic is not limited to sleep. Longitudinal and review evidence on social media use more broadly suggests that direction often remains difficult to isolate: adolescents experiencing distress may be drawn toward particular forms of digital engagement, while those same forms of engagement may reinforce distress through comparison, feedback-seeking, peer exclusion, harmful exposure, or difficulty disengaging (Course-Choi & Hammond, 2021; Keles et al., 2020; Orben et al., 2024). Studies that distinguish types of social media use are especially relevant here. For example, longitudinal work on Instagram has described reciprocal relationships between different forms of use and adolescents' depressed mood, while other longitudinal evidence links appearance-related social media consciousness with later depressive symptoms (Frison & Eggermont, 2017; Maheux et al., 2022). This supports the report's framing of digital engagement as potential cause, consequence, or amplifier, depending on the adolescent, the platform context, and the pathway involved.

Several reviews converge on the same limitation: the field is much better at identifying associations than estimating causal magnitude, largely because most studies remain observational and exposure measures are inconsistent (Course-Choi & Hammond, 2021; Keles et al., 2020). Platform design features such as recommendation systems, notification structures, and visibility mechanics are widely treated as plausible amplifiers of exposure, yet independent access to platform data remains limited and systems evolve faster than research cycles. Some of this uncertainty is structural rather than reassuring: platform-specific mechanisms are likely to remain difficult to test cleanly without access to actual usage and recommender-system data (Orben et al., 2024). Content effects are also difficult to estimate consistently, while intervention evidence remains limited across most domains. The evidence base is therefore considerably stronger in identifying associations and plausible mechanisms than in determining which policy responses reduce harm without generating unintended consequences elsewhere, such as social connection and autonomy.

Drawing by Yannis Iskenderidis, member of the YES team in Thessaloniki.

Digital ecosystems also evolve faster than most evidence cycles. Platforms continuously update features, while adolescent norms around specific apps shift rapidly. By the time a synthesis reaches policymakers, some of what it describes may already have changed. This is one reason the documents repeatedly emphasize transparency and accountability as prerequisites for effective policy.

3.2.1. Cause, consequence, or amplifier?

A central question the evidence cannot answer cleanly is not whether digital use and poor mental health are linked —they often are— but what kind of link this represents. An association means two things tend to appear together. A causal effect means one helps produce the other. The two are not the same. If adolescents who spend more time in comparison-heavy online spaces also report higher levels of distress, that may mean those spaces are contributing to distress. But it might also mean that adolescents who are already distressed are more likely to seek out those spaces, or that another factor, such as family stress, peer conflict, or offline adversity, is shaping both simultaneously.

A third possibility is that digital environments may function as amplifiers. That means they do not create a problem from nothing, but can intensify existing difficulties. An adolescent who is already anxious, lonely, or low in mood may turn to their phone at night for distraction, reassurance, or connection. This can increase exposure to harmful content, comparison pressure, conflict, or disrupted sleep, which may then deepen the original distress. In this kind of reinforcing loop, cause and consequence operate in both directions.

This is also how the report interprets problematic social media use. Some measures used in surveillance research are explicitly addiction-like in structure, emphasizing impaired control, withdrawal-like feelings, salience, relapse, or negative consequences. But the same observed pattern may also reflect maladaptive coping, emotional regulation under distress, loneliness, anxiety, peer exclusion, or another underlying difficulty. The report therefore treats problematic social media use as a meaningful indicator of burden and functional interference, not as evidence that all such cases represent a discrete addiction disorder.

A small but important experimental literature points in the same direction. In one randomized study, limiting Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat use to approximately 30 minutes per day over three weeks reduced loneliness and depressive symptoms among undergraduates compared with usual use (Hunt et al., 2018). Another study found that several days of abstinence from online social networking sites reduced perceived stress, with stronger effects among excessive users (Turel, Cavagnaro, & Meshi, 2018). More recent randomized evidence involving young people with anxiety or depressive symptoms found that voluntarily reducing social media use to one hour per day over three weeks reduced loneliness compared with unrestricted use (Goldfield et al., 2026).

These studies do not resolve the broader causal question. Samples remain limited, interventions are short, and the findings do not directly test statutory age restrictions or platform regulation. They do, however, suggest that reducing difficult-to-control or intensive social media use can produce measurable short-term improvements in some outcomes, particularly loneliness, depressive symptoms, and stress. This strengthens the case for treating such patterns of use as clinically and policy relevant when they are linked to distress, displacement, or loss of recovery time. Also, these studies' more direct relevance is to policies targeting problematic, intensive, or difficult-to-control platform use.

Surveillance and descriptive evidence, which accounts for the largest share of evidence types across the synthesized documents (20.4%), consistently shows heavy or diffi-

cult-to-control use co-occurring with experiences and disruptions linked to poorer wellbeing, making it a practical signal worth tracking even where the causal role of duration itself remains uncertain.

This is why the evidence is firmer on pathways than on precise causal estimates. A pathway refers to the route through which digital experiences may affect wellbeing, for example through sleep disruption, chronic peer threat, comparison pressure, or the displacement of routines that support recovery. These mechanisms were not invented by digital-media research itself. They build on a much broader body of evidence showing that poor sleep affects mood and attention, that humiliation and exclusion contribute to distress, and that the erosion of restorative routines undermines functioning.

3.2.2. Knowing the problem is easier than knowing what helps

Science does not answer all questions in the same way. It is often good at showing that a problem exists, or that two things tend to appear together. It becomes much less certain when the question shifts to whether a rule, safeguard, or design change will actually improve adolescents' wellbeing. That is a more difficult kind of question. Answering it well requires comparing what happens with an intervention to what would likely have happened without it, while separating the effects of the intervention from everything else changing around it.

This is especially difficult in digital environments. Platforms continuously update features, adolescents adapt quickly, and policies are implemented differently across schools, services, and platforms. A school phone restriction may reduce distraction in one setting but work less effectively in another because enforcement, substitution, and school culture differ. An age-assurance system may reduce one risk while creating privacy concerns, exclusion errors, or new ways of circumventing the rule. A platform change may reduce one form of exposure while shifting attention elsewhere.

This is why the documents are generally firmer in identifying problems than in ranking solutions. The evidence is more consistent in showing that bullying, harmful content, sleep disruption, and late-night use matter than in determining which interventions work best, for whom, and at what cost. The uncertainty therefore lies less in whether harms exist than in questions of effectiveness, feasibility, rights implications, equity, and unintended consequences. The practical implication is not that policy should wait for perfect proof, but that interventions should be treated as proposals to evaluate rather than as self-validating answers.

3.2.3. Experts agree more on the risks than on the tools

Science can show that a problem is real before it can show which solution works best. The documents are more aligned on the main risks than on the best response. This is because policy choices depend not only on likely benefit, but also on feasibility, enforcement, privacy, equity, autonomy, and what might be lost along the way.

Age assurance is a clear example. Most documents accept the principle of age-appropriate protection. But age-assurance systems, designed to estimate or verify whether a user is old enough, raise difficult practical questions. Can age be checked reliably without collecting excessive personal data? What happens when adolescents are wrongly excluded or misclassified? And will stronger age gates genuinely reduce harm, or simply shift use into less regulated spaces?

School device policies reflect a similar pattern. There is broad agreement that distraction and attentional fragmentation are real problems in schools. What remains less settled is whether strict bans work better than more proportion-

ate restrictions once real-world conditions are taken into account. More fundamentally, some policy choices require balancing competing goods that evidence alone cannot rank. Safety may conflict with privacy. Protection may limit autonomy. Reducing one risk may also remove opportunities or support structures for some adolescents.

3.3. What the evidence suggests regarding benefits, protective factors, and preserving opportunities

A credible reading of the evidence cannot be built only on harms. The risks associated with digital environments are real and concerning, but they coexist with genuine benefits embedded in contemporary adolescent life. Digital ecosystems are now part of the social, educational, and developmental infrastructure of adolescence. Treating online life as primarily dangerous risks both misrepresenting young people's lived experience and encouraging blunt responses that reduce some harms while also removing sources of connection, support, and opportunity.

This creates a difficult short-term policy dilemma: governments may be tempted to ask whether social media, as currently designed, are more beneficial than harmful overall. The evidence reviewed here is not well suited to that kind of single net verdict. Benefits and harms are distributed unevenly across adolescents, platforms, contexts, and forms of use. The more useful policy question is which conditions of digital participation should be preserved because they support connection, learning, self-expression, or help-seeking; which conditions should be constrained because they expose adolescents to foreseeable harm; and what safeguards are needed while evidence and implementation continue to develop. These questions will also take time to answer fully. Policy should therefore proceed in a timely but proportionate way: acting on plausible and developmentally significant pathways of harm, preserving demonstrable benefits where possible, and building in monitoring and revision as implementation generates new evidence. Adolescents themselves often describe social media as a source of connection, self-expression, and support, particularly when use is reciprocal and identity-affirming rather than appearance-driven or conflict-heavy (O'Reilly et al., 2023).

The strongest benefits identified across the evidence base concern social connection, support, and belonging. Online spaces can help adolescents maintain friendships, feel less isolated, and access forms of recognition or companionship that may be unavailable offline. These benefits appear especially important for adolescents who are geographically isolated, socially marginalized, living with disability or chronic illness, or navigating stigma or identity questions in unsupportive offline environments. For some minority groups, online social support has been shown to buffer the effects of online and offline victimization, including among LGBT youth (Ybarra et al., 2015). At the same time, the environments that provide support can also intensify comparison, exclusion, and pressure; benefit is therefore conditional rather than universal.

This understanding of social media was also strongly reflected in the YES discussions. Participants frequently described social media not simply as an additional form of communication, but as a primary infrastructure of contemporary social life: a space through which friendships are maintained, communication across distance is sustained, and new connections are formed around shared interests and experiences. A fuller account of these discussions appears in Chapter 6.

A second group of benefits concerns learning, constructive engagement, and skill development. High-quality, goal-directed digital use can support learning, creativity, self-expression, and broader participation. Some documents also frame digital engagement as a

route to competencies that matter beyond adolescence, including digital literacy, communication skills, and future opportunity. At the same time, these benefits remain highly dependent on quality and context. Distracted, fragmented, or primarily comparison-driven forms of engagement can undermine the same domains that more purposeful use may strengthen.

Benefits are most likely to emerge when certain protective factors are present, including supportive adult scaffolding, stronger digital and media literacy, purposeful and developmentally appropriate use, and digital ecosystem conditions designed to reduce frictionless harm. Digital literacy and online resilience may function as protective moderators, helping young people recognize, interpret, and manage online risk more effectively (Vissenberg et al., 2022). This is an important translation point for policy: preserving opportunity does not mean leaving adolescents alone to manage risk, but creating conditions in which supportive interaction, learning, and help-seeking become easier than harmful exposure.

3.4. How to reason from this evidence

A synthesis that is honest about uncertainty while remaining specific about mechanisms produces a pathway model rather than a simple causal story. Digital ecosystems can expose adolescents to harassment, harmful or age-inappropriate content, comparison pressure, compulsive checking, and sleep disruption; they can also support connection, belonging, learning, self-expression, and help-seeking. The evidence does not place these possibilities in a single causal sequence. Prior vulnerability, peer dynamics, household resources, school context, platform affordances, and moment of use interact: digital engagement may precede distress, follow it, or amplify it. The value of a pathway model is therefore practical rather than deterministic. It helps identify where policy can intervene at different time horizons, through immediately available measures such as school-day rules, sleep-protective routines, reporting and redress systems, and privacy safeguards, while also building longer-term pressure for safer platform design and more accountable digital environments.

The same ecosystems can therefore generate both risk and support, sometimes through closely related features. A group chat can sustain belonging or amplify harassment; a recommendation system can support discovery or intensify harmful exposure; a notification can maintain connection or disrupt sleep. Neither side of this picture cancels the other out. The policy task is to identify which conditions make harmful pathways more likely, which conditions preserve protective uses, and which actors are best placed to change those conditions - recognizing that some

Activity in the YES programme, Alexandroupolis.

levers, such as school rules, reporting tools, or sleep-protective routines, can operate sooner, while deeper changes to platform design and governance require longer-term regulatory pressure and enforcement.

Platform design and governance conditions are one central upstream layer in this pathway model. They shape what adolescents are likely to encounter, how persistent harmful interactions become, and what forms of friction or support exist around risky pathways and harmful exposures. These conditions influence exposure profiles, which vary substantially across adolescents depending on developmental stage, peer context, household resources, and pre-existing vulnerability. Exposures then affect daily functioning, particularly sleep and attention, which in turn connect to mental-health outcomes. At every stage, the broader context shapes the result.

Interventions that target mechanisms and exposures are better aligned with the evidence than interventions that target proxies. Screen time limits function as a proxy: they may sometimes reduce harm indirectly, but they do not directly engage with the processes that generate it. Harassment reduction, sleep protection, platform accountability, and design governance address those mechanisms more directly. The evidence is also considerably clearer on the pathways through which harm may arise than on which interventions reduce it. That gap, between what is known about risk factors and what is known about the effects of responses/interventions, is where policy judgment must operate.

A crucial distinction follows. Absence of evidence is not the same as evidence of absence. On many of the hardest questions, including how much distress is caused by digital exposure itself, how much specific design features contribute, and which interventions work best, the field still lacks decisive evidence. But that does not amount to proof that the risks are absent, negligible, or safe to ignore.

Policy is not made against a neutral background: when evidence remains incomplete, policymakers are choosing between acting on structured but imperfect knowledge or allowing existing exposure conditions to continue by default. In fast-moving digital environments, the status quo is not neutral; it already distributes risks and benefits in particular and often uneven ways.

The most mature way to reason from this evidence is to treat interventions as testable hypotheses rather than moral positions. Serious policy should specify the pathway it aims to change, identify the outcomes that ought to shift if it works, and make visible the collateral effects that must also be monitored. It should resist two symmetrical mistakes: treating every plausible concern as if it were already proven, and treating incomplete evidence as if it demonstrated safety. In a field like this, good policy is neither reckless nor passive. It is proportionate, pathway-based, explicit about uncertainty, and designed to learn.

The next subsection makes this decision logic more explicit by outlining how evidence, uncertainty, institutional responsibility, and accountability should be connected before a policy response is treated as defensible.

3.5. From evidence to accountable public judgment

The preceding analysis reaches the point at which evidence review becomes institutional judgment. Evidence can discipline decision-making, but public institutions must still allocate risk, authority, and responsibility. That allocation is unusually difficult in adolescent digital policy because the relevant conditions are distributed across multiple domains at once, including platform architecture, data practices, school environments, household routines, peer relations, health systems, commercial incentives, and child-rights obligations.

The decisive question is therefore not only

what the evidence supports, but where the capacity to change the relevant conditions actually lies. Every intervention carries an implicit theory of responsibility. A school-phone rule assigns responsibility to schools and ministries for maintaining a supervised environment. Age assurance distributes responsibility across governments, platforms, identity infrastructures, regulators, and families. Platform-governance duties assign responsibility to services that control design, defaults, recommender systems, reporting tools, and advertising practices, while also requiring public institutions capable of effective supervision. Family-facing tools place part of that responsibility within households, but their effectiveness depends on resources, literacy, trust, and the surrounding platform environment.

This actor architecture matters because the most visible point of intervention is not always the point of greatest leverage. A measure can be politically intelligible while engaging the underlying mechanism only indirectly. Another may be less visible yet more consequential because it changes defaults, incentives, data access, complaint pathways, or supervisory capacity. The policy question is therefore also institutional: which actor has the knowledge, authority, operational control, democratic legitimacy, and accountability required to address the pathway at issue?

Different actors bring different forms of authority to that judgment. Researchers can clarify mechanisms, uncertainty, and evaluation design. Adolescents, families, teachers, and clinicians reveal how risks and protection are experienced, negotiated, bypassed, or made meaningful in practice. Governments and parliaments authorize trade-offs and allocate resources. Regulators translate public obligations into supervision, information requests, enforcement, and redress. Platforms control many of the technical conditions through which exposure is structured. Civil society and professional bodies provide scrutiny, contestation, and safeguards against both overreach and under-protection.

The standard of justification should vary according to the type of measure being considered. Targeted, reversible, and mechanism-specific interventions can be defended earlier when the concern is plausible, widespread, and developmentally significant. By contrast, measures that restrict access, require verification, collect sensitive data, or create exclusionary effects demand a stronger evidentiary and public-interest justification, alongside more visible safeguards. Delay must also be justified when plausible risks are already distributed at scale and fall unevenly on more vulnerable adolescents.

Table 2 sets out this decision structure. It identifies the chain of reasoning that a defensible policy position should be able to sustain: the pathway of risk or benefit involved, the evidence supporting it, the actor with the greatest leverage, the trade-offs being accepted, the instrument selected, the accountability mechanism in place, and the conditions under which revision should occur.

Activity in the YES programme, Athens.

Table 2
Decision structure for defensible adolescent digital policy

Decision move	Question for policy	What gives the decision discipline	Illustration in adolescent digital policy	Main actors
Specify the route of risk or benefit	What condition is the policy trying to alter?	The policy identifies the route through which harm or benefit is expected to arise.	Harassment, harmful-content exposure, disrupted sleep, privacy and profiling, underage access, school-day distraction, social comparison, safe connection, help-seeking.	Researchers, adolescents, families, schools, clinicians.
Qualify the evidence	How strong, specific, and decision-relevant is the evidence?	The response is scaled to the evidentiary status: established, plausible, mixed, emerging, or insufficient for the proposed measure.	Evidence may strongly support concern about a route of harm while remaining weaker on causal magnitude or intervention effectiveness.	Researchers, evidence reviewers, national data systems, regulators with access to platform information.
Locate leverage	Where in the system can the condition actually be changed?	The policy distinguishes visibility from leverage and directs intervention toward the level with practical control.	Platform design for recommender systems and defaults; school governance for supervised learning environments; family routines for bedtime practices; regulators for oversight and data access.	Platforms, regulators, schools, ministries, families, EU institutions.
Judge proportionality	What burden on rights, autonomy, privacy, access, or equity is justified?	The seriousness of the concern is weighed against intrusiveness, reversibility, feasibility, and distributive effects.	Age assurance may support age-based protection while raising privacy, error, exclusion, and circumvention concerns. School restrictions may protect attention while requiring fair enforcement and exceptions.	Government, parliament, regulators, civil society, youth representatives, professional bodies.
Select the instrument	Which measure best fits the route, evidence, leverage point, and trade-off profile?	The chosen instrument reaches the relevant condition with the least unnecessary burden and with a credible implementation route.	Platform duties for harmful exposure; privacy defaults for profiling; school rules for supervised settings; notification or autoplay safeguards for sleep-related disruption; targeted support where digital use reflects distress.	Government, regulators, platforms, schools, health and education systems, families.

Decision move	Question for policy	What gives the decision discipline	Illustration in adolescent digital policy	Main actors
Build accountability	Who must explain what has been done and with what result?	Duties are paired with information, supervision, complaint routes, and consequences.	DSA risk assessments, transparency reporting, complaint and redress systems, trusted flaggers, EETT–HDPA–NCRTV coordination, school implementation protocols.	Regulators, platforms, ministries, schools, dispute bodies, independent evaluators.
Require revision	What evidence would justify keeping, changing, expanding, or withdrawing the measure?	Evaluation is built into the measure from the start, including intended effects, collateral harms, equity effects, and displacement.	A school-phone rule should be assessed for effects on distraction, school climate, equity, and substitution. Age assurance should be assessed for privacy cost, exclusion, accuracy, circumvention, and actual reduction in exposure.	Researchers, regulators, schools, platforms, adolescents, families.

Note. This matrix is adapted for adolescent digital policy from established approaches to risk governance, evidence-to-decision reasoning, precautionary decision-making, anticipatory governance, and complex-intervention evaluation, including the IRGC Risk Governance Framework; GRADE and WHO-INTEGRATE evidence-to-decision frameworks; the European Commission's guidance on the precautionary principle; the OECD framework on anticipatory governance of emerging technologies; and MRC/NIHR guidance on complex interventions.

Activity in the YES programme, Athens.

Chapter 4

The International Regulatory Landscape

The framework developed above helps explain the direction and underpinnings of regulatory change internationally. In an environment where risks are real and harm is already observed, governments are not waiting for the evidence on adolescents and digital environments to fully settle before acting. Rather than simply deciding whether to restrict adolescents' digital access, they are experimenting with different ways of allocating responsibility across schools, platforms, regulators, families, and age-assurance systems.

Across the EU, the United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore, Brazil, and a growing number of other jurisdictions, new legal and regulatory frameworks have already entered into force or are currently being implemented. Their design reflects a broader analytical shift: responsibility for harm is increasingly being located in platform architecture and system governance rather than in individual behavior and parental management alone.

Understanding where this shift is heading, and where important questions remain unresolved in practice, matters directly for Greek policymakers. Greece already operates within one of the most developed regulatory architectures in the world, shaped primarily by EU law. The central question is therefore how that framework functions in practice, and where meaningful national choices remain open.

Chapter 4 examines how different jurisdictions are translating these concerns into concrete forms of governance. It reviews the principal regulatory tools currently being adopted internationally, including school-device restrictions, minimum-age rules, age assurance systems, and platform-governance obligations, while also considering the practical trade-offs and implementation challenges these approaches introduce. Particular attention is given to the growing emphasis on platform design, institutional accountability, enforcement capacity, and safety-by-design measures as central components of contemporary digital governance. Across these developments, adolescent digital governance increasingly emerges as a systemic and institutional question rather than solely as a matter of individual behavior or parental responsibility.

4.1. The direction of regulatory travel

The most consistent pattern across jurisdictions is the move toward risk-based platform governance. Under this model, platforms are treated as environments requiring ongoing assessment and supervision rather than one-time compliance checks. Providers are expected to identify risks to minors in advance, adapt design and governance choices to mitigate those risks, and demonstrate through report-

ing and audit that appropriate safeguards are functioning effectively.

This approach targets the level where risk is generated. Recommendation systems, default privacy settings, notification structures, engagement mechanics, and content ranking all shape what adolescents encounter. Regulatory frameworks are therefore increasingly directed toward these underlying features rather than focusing only on individual pieces of illegal content after harm has already occurred.

At the EU level, the European Commission has also convened a Special Panel on Child Safety Online, announced by President von der Leyen in her 2025 State of the Union address. The panel brings together specialists from health, neuroscience, psychology, child rights, and digital literacy alongside youth representatives. Following meetings held in March and April 2026, the panel has been tasked with advising the Commission President on child safety online and possible age restrictions for social media across the EU, with its co-chairs expected to report findings by summer 2026 (European Commission, 2026). This initiative represents an additional layer of EU-level coordination on child digital safety, complementing the binding regulatory framework already in place.

The EU's Digital Services Act (DSA), in force since 2024, requires large platforms accessible to minors to adopt appropriate and proportionate measures ensuring a high level of privacy, safety, and security under Article 28. The European Commission's subsequent guidelines translate this obligation into operational expectations, including safer default settings, risk mitigation in recommender systems, limits on harmful commercial practices, and effective reporting and complaint mechanisms. Platforms cannot rely on formal terms of service excluding minors where access by minors remains possible in practice.

The United Kingdom's Online Safety Act follows a broadly comparable structure. Ofcom, the national communications regulator, supervises compliance through a continuous cycle of risk assessment, documentation, mitigation, and oversight. Platforms are required to assess risks to children, implement proportionate mitigation measures, and maintain records allowing the regulator to verify what actions have been taken.

Australia's Online Safety Act and accompanying Social Media Minimum Age framework take a somewhat different approach. The eSafety Commissioner supervises platform safety duties through a combination of statutory obligations and co-regulatory codes. A minimum age of 16 for social media, introduced in 2024, requires platforms to take reasonable steps to prevent under-16s from holding accounts, with regulatory guidance clarifying that self-declaration alone does not satisfy that requirement.

In the United States, governance is developing through a combination of federal proposals and state-level action rather than through a single national platform regime. The proposed Kids Online Safety Act includes protective defaults, disclosure obligations, and annual independent audit requirements. At the state level, Utah's social media regulation amendments illustrate a more prescriptive approach, combining age verification and parental consent with defined protections for minors' accounts.

4.2. What countries are doing: the main regulatory tools

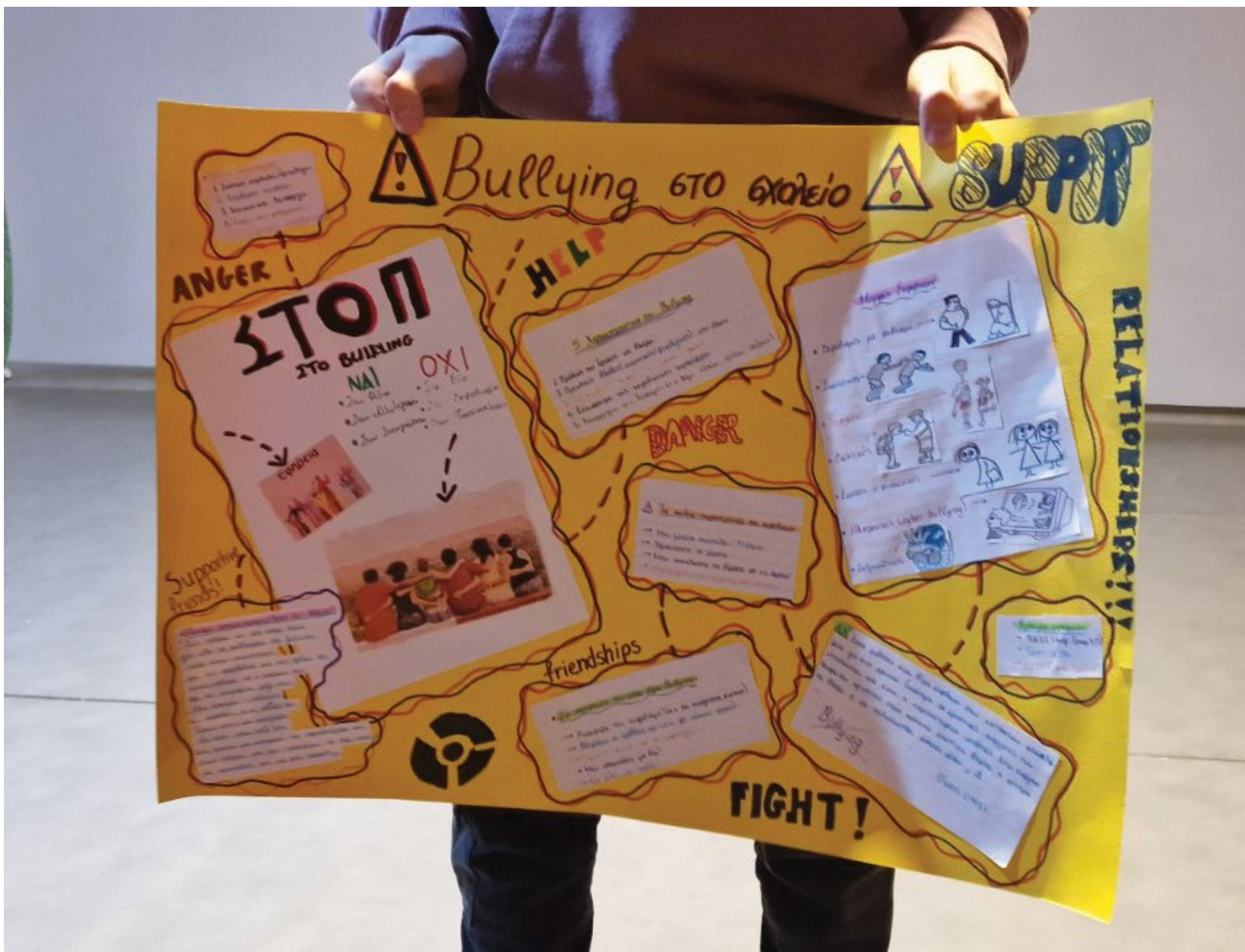
4.2.1. School phone restrictions and school-day controls

School phone restrictions have become one of the most visible and fastest-expanding policy responses to concerns about adolescents' digital environments. The latest global monitoring report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) indicates that 114 education systems now maintain a national ban on mobile phones in

schools, covering approximately 58% of countries worldwide. The expansion has been rapid: fewer than a quarter of countries had such bans in mid-2023, rising to 40% by early 2025 and to well over half by March 2026.

What makes this instrument attractive is its operational practicality. School-day controls operate within one of the few environments where governments can directly shape adolescents' digital exposure: a supervised setting structured around repeated routines, adult authority, and defined educational goals. They respond to problems that schools can observe directly, including classroom distraction, fragmented attention, peer conflict, filming and sharing without consent, and the spillover of online behavior into the school day.

Across jurisdictions, the legal forms differ, but the operational logic is often similar. France's 2018 law is among the most frequently cited early examples, restricting mobile phone use in primary and lower secondary education. Brazil adopted a national law in 2025 prohibiting the use of portable electronic devices during classes, recess, and breaks. Finland uses a model centered on lesson-time prohibitions combined with school-level rules governing the remainder of the day. Greece regulates student phone use through binding school-operation rules rather than through a stand-alone platform law. In more decentralized systems, similar approaches often emerge through subnational action: Australia, Canada, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States all show strong state, provincial, regional, or local patterns of restriction (Figure 6).

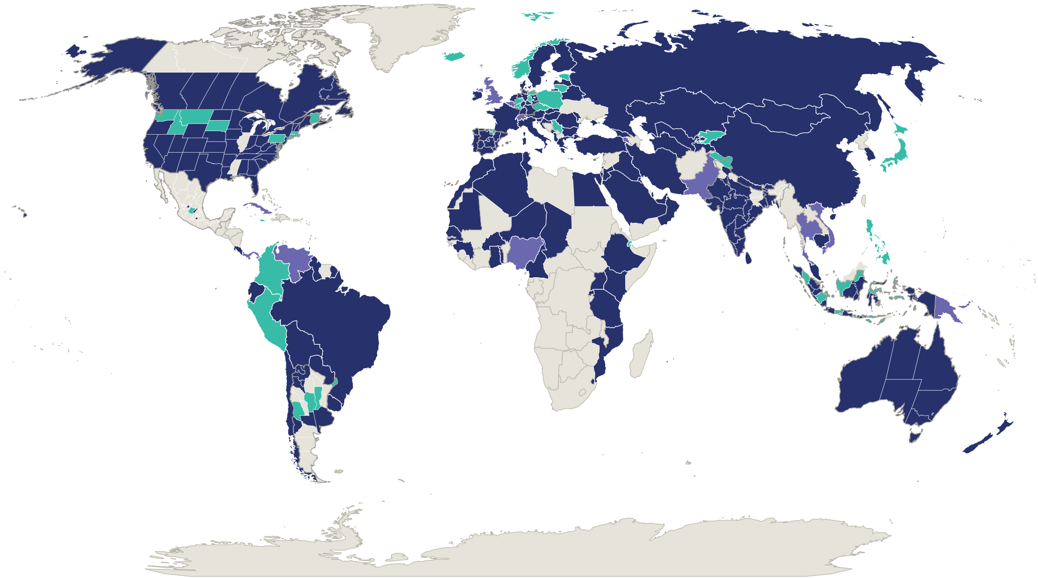


Activity in the YES programme, Ioannina.

Figure 6

School bans and restrictions worldwide

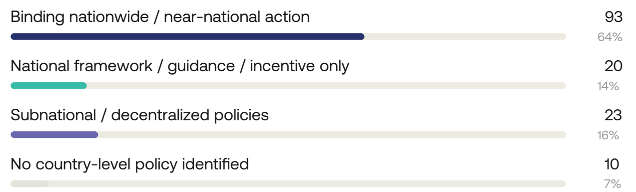
Publicly identified action at country and state/province level, April 2026



LEGEND

- Binding nationwide / near-national action
  A national law, ministerial decree, or near-national restriction in force; or a state-level binding a
- National framework / guidance / incentive only
  National guidance, recommendations, or incentives; or state-level framework without binding
- Subnational / decentralized policies
  No nationwide policy; states or regions act independently. Country layer only.
- No policy identified
  No publicly documented action found.

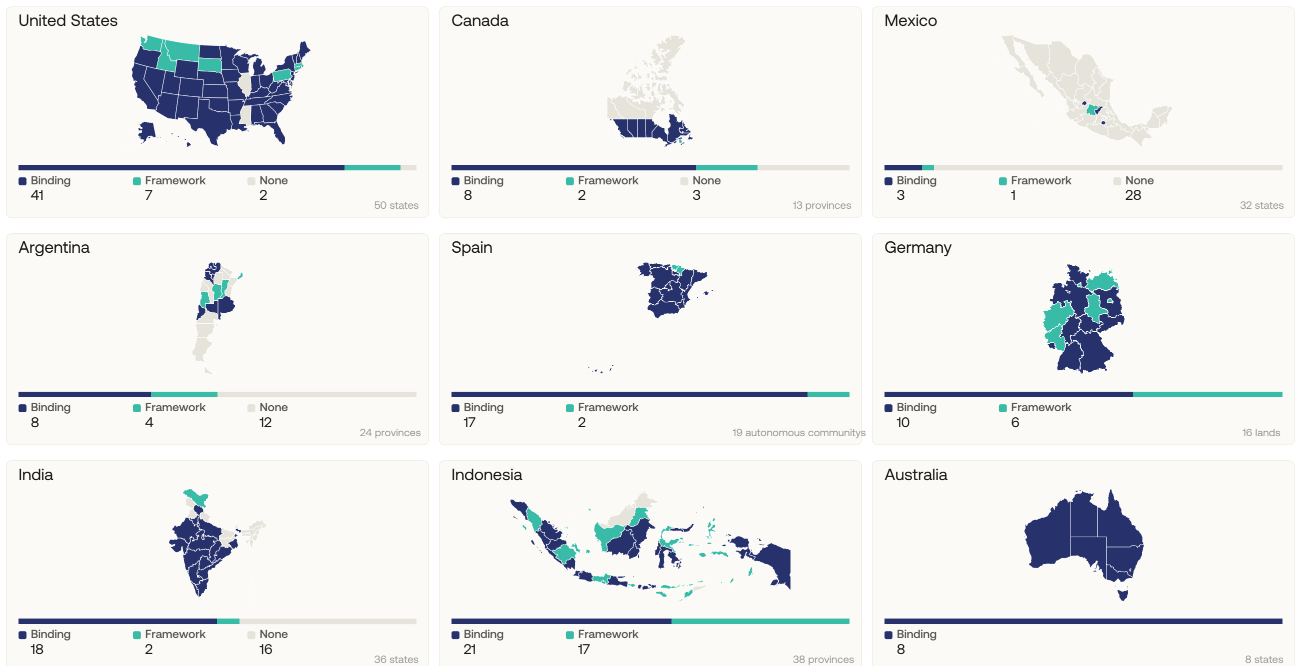
AT A GLANCE



146 countries tracked.

SUBNATIONALDETAIL—FEDERAL & DECENTRALIZED SYSTEMS

State/province-level policy status for the nine federal systems with the most subnational variat



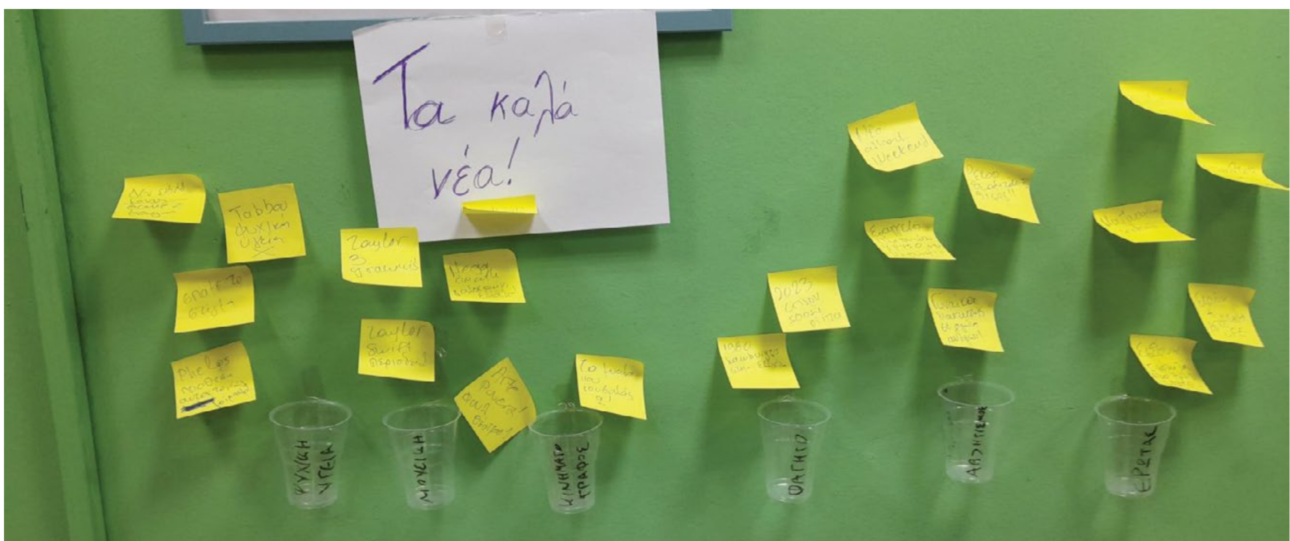
Note: classification reflects publicly identified action as of April 2026. Subnational geometry: amCharts geodata (derived from Natural Earth). Country geometry: Natural Earth 1:50m via world-atlas.

The evidence base supports the restriction of the use of smartphones in schools, with more consistent findings for reductions in classroom distraction than for broader improvements in wellbeing or academic outcomes (Campbell et al., 2024; Rau, 2025). The evidence also indicates that stricter and more consistently enforced restrictions are associated with lower classroom distraction and lower anxiety linked to mobile-device use. In English secondary schools, Beland and Murphy found that banning mobile phones improved exam performance, with the largest gains among lower-achieving students (Beland & Murphy, 2016). In Spain, regional mobile-phone bans were associated with reduced bullying and improved PISA performance (Beneito & Vicente-Chirivella, 2022).

More recent evidence is more cautious: Goodyear et al. found no evidence that restrictive school-phone policies in England were associated with lower overall phone and social-media use or improved adolescent mental wellbeing, while Rau's cross-country PISA analysis suggests that enforcement quality is central to any observed benefit (Goodyear et al., 2025; Rau, 2025).

Implementation details are of key importance. Even in schools that report smartphone bans, many students continue to report frequent phone use during the school day. A formal ban, in other words, is not the same as a meaningful reduction in exposure (OECD, 2024). The most robust models do more than announce a restriction, they specify storage arrangements, communication with parents, sanctions, staff responsibilities, and exemptions relating to disability, health, and accessibility (Box 4).

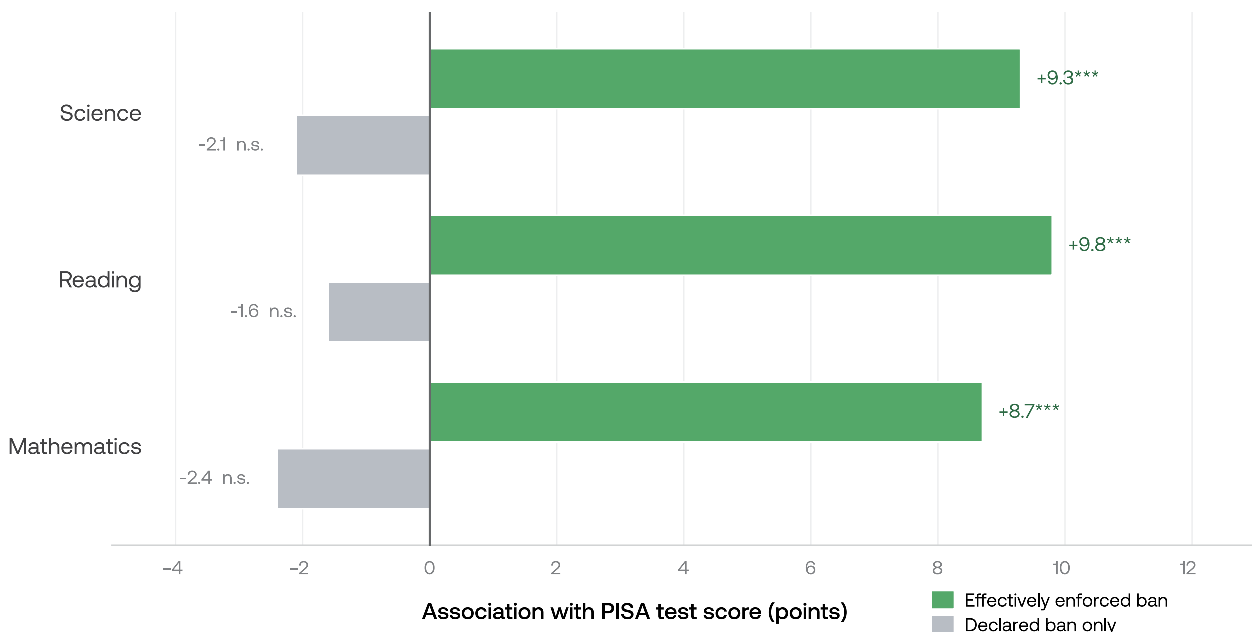
Cross-country evidence further reinforces the importance of governance design, and recent data make the issue particularly visible in Greece. In PISA 2022, 38% of students in Greece reported being distracted by their own digital-device use in most or all mathematics lessons, compared with 30% across the OECD; 33% reported being distracted by other students' device use, compared with 25% across the OECD. Recent empirical work using PISA data across 81 countries also underscore the need for credible enforcement. Effective enforcement is more strongly associated with lower leisure screen use at school, fewer devices open during lessons, less peer-related digital distraction, and lower pressure to remain online during class. The pattern for academic performance points in a similar direction, and the difference between declared bans and effectively enforced ones is illustrated in Figure 7.



Activity in the YES programme, Thessaloniki.

Figure 7

Differences in PISA 2022 test scores in science, reading, and mathematics when cell phone bans are declared versus when they are effectively enforced, merely declaring a ban shows no significant effect; effective enforcement is linked to gains of ~9 points



Note: declared-ban estimates are not statistically significant (n.s.); enforced-ban estimates are significant at p <.001 (***)
Source: Rau et al. (2025); PISA 2022.

School phone restrictions are among the most feasible and politically visible tools currently spreading internationally. They can shape attention, classroom norms, and some peer dynamics during the school day. However, they remain a bounded intervention and are understood as one component of a wider policy approach to preventing digital harms rather than a substitute for platform governance, data protection, age assurance, or broader safety-by-design measures covered by the sections below.

Box 4
Device restrictions in schools: four recurring approaches, implementation conditions and limitations

Across jurisdictions, four recurring approaches to device restrictions in schools can be identified. Full prohibition during the school day, as adopted in France for primary and lower secondary schools, prioritizes clarity and ease of enforcement. Restriction during instructional time only, common in Germany, Spain, and several other European systems, focuses on reducing classroom disruption while allowing limited use outside lessons. Conditional or teacher-directed use, more common in Scandinavia and parts of the United Kingdom, assumes that digital tools can support learning when use is structured and guided. Structured storage models, including sealed pouch systems used in parts of the United States, remove immediate access without requiring continuous monitoring.

> Cross-national analyses drawing on PISA data suggest that reducing smartphone use during class is associated with more focused classroom environments, including higher levels of student attention and fewer disruptions. In some contexts, modest gains in learning outcomes have also been observed, particularly where distraction levels are high. However, enforcement matters. Clarity in the rules and connection to recognizable educational purpose, implementation capacity, school culture, and community buy-in all influence whether restrictions meaningfully alter classroom conditions or remain largely symbolic. Equity considerations also matter, as the same restriction may affect students differently depending on their wider access to digital resources and support outside school.

4.2.2. Age and design-related interventions moving ahead of the evidence

Several policy directions are advancing faster than the evidence base can fully support. Treating them as precautionary choices rather than evidence-settled determinations changes how they should be designed, requiring explicit monitoring and safeguards addressing the trade-offs these measures may entail.

Minimum age rules for social media are among the most politically visible and intuitively appealing interventions. The evidence supports age as a meaningful variable: younger adolescents appear more vulnerable to several of the pathways and exposures identified in the synthesis. The evidence that age-based access restrictions reduce those harms in practice, however, remains considerably weaker. Their effectiveness depends both on whether age can be reliably verified at scale and on whether restrictions reduce risk rather than simply displacing it elsewhere.

As reflected in the YES group discussions, restrictions can be relatively easy to bypass, particularly through false age declarations. Designing age-based protections that function in practice therefore requires enforcement mechanisms that go beyond self-declaration, alongside monitoring systems capable of identifying whether circumvention becomes normalized.

Age assurance and verification requirements are more technically demanding than minimum age rules, but they face the same core tension: more reliable verification generally requires more data collection, which in turn introduces additional privacy risks. Verification systems are also not equally accurate or accessible across all user groups. Recent guidance from both the United Kingdom's Ofcom and Australia's eSafety Commissioner acknowledges these tensions and favors layered approaches rather than single-method solutions. Greece's National Strategy for the Protection of Minors from Internet Addiction identifies stronger age assurance as a priority direction; how this is operationalized will determine whether it provides meaningful protection or primarily expands the burden of data collection.

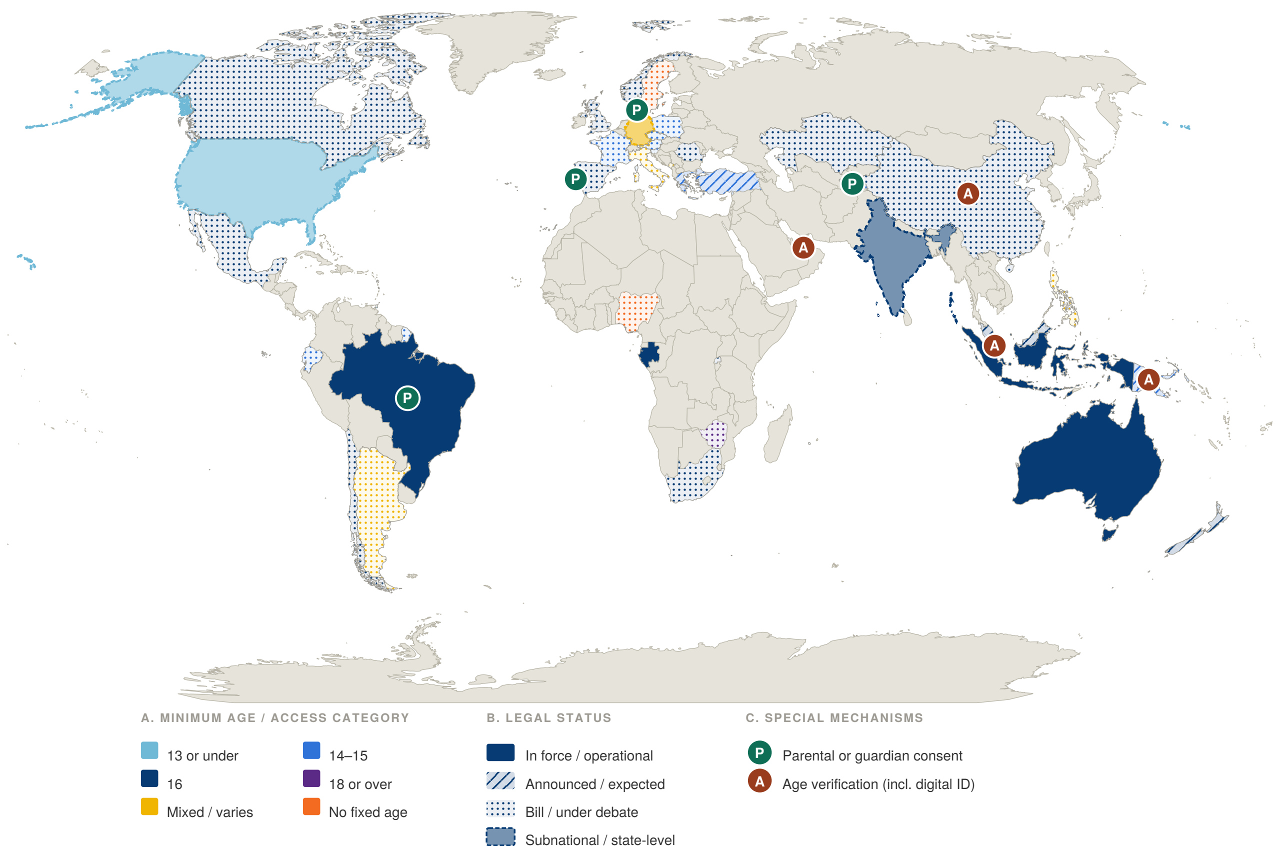
Addictive design and interface constraints represent another area where regulation is moving ahead of settled evidence. There is strong conceptual support for targeting features such as infinite scroll, autoplay, algorithmic recommendation systems, and persistent notifications. These are among the design mechanisms most directly implicated in sleep disruption, compulsive use patterns, and involuntary time extension. The causal evidence isolating the contribution of specific features, however, remains incomplete, largely because independent access to platform data is limited. Even so, the precautionary rationale for acting on these mechanisms is nevertheless coher-

ent, and the broader regulatory direction is reflected both in EU guidance under the DSA and in Australian regulatory discussions

4.2.2.1 Minimum age rules for social media access

Minimum-age rules for social media access have moved from a peripheral idea to a mainstream policy option, although the field remains fluid. OECD notes that many platform age limits still rest on older privacy and data-protection frameworks, with 13 remaining the most common inherited age threshold. Current reform efforts are pushing the debate upward, while a growing number of countries in Europe and beyond are moving toward stronger access restrictions for children and younger teenagers.

Figure 8
Youth social-media age rules worldwide, by minimum age and legal status



Note: the EU maintains an on-binding age-assurance frame work and is not coded as a country. Colour encodes age category; pattern encodes legal status; non-binding badges mark special framework. Boundaries: Natural Earth (1:50m).

Source: Compilation from national legislation, draft bills, ministerial decisions, and case law, current to May 2026. The European Union maintains a non-binding age-assurance framework and is not coded as a country.

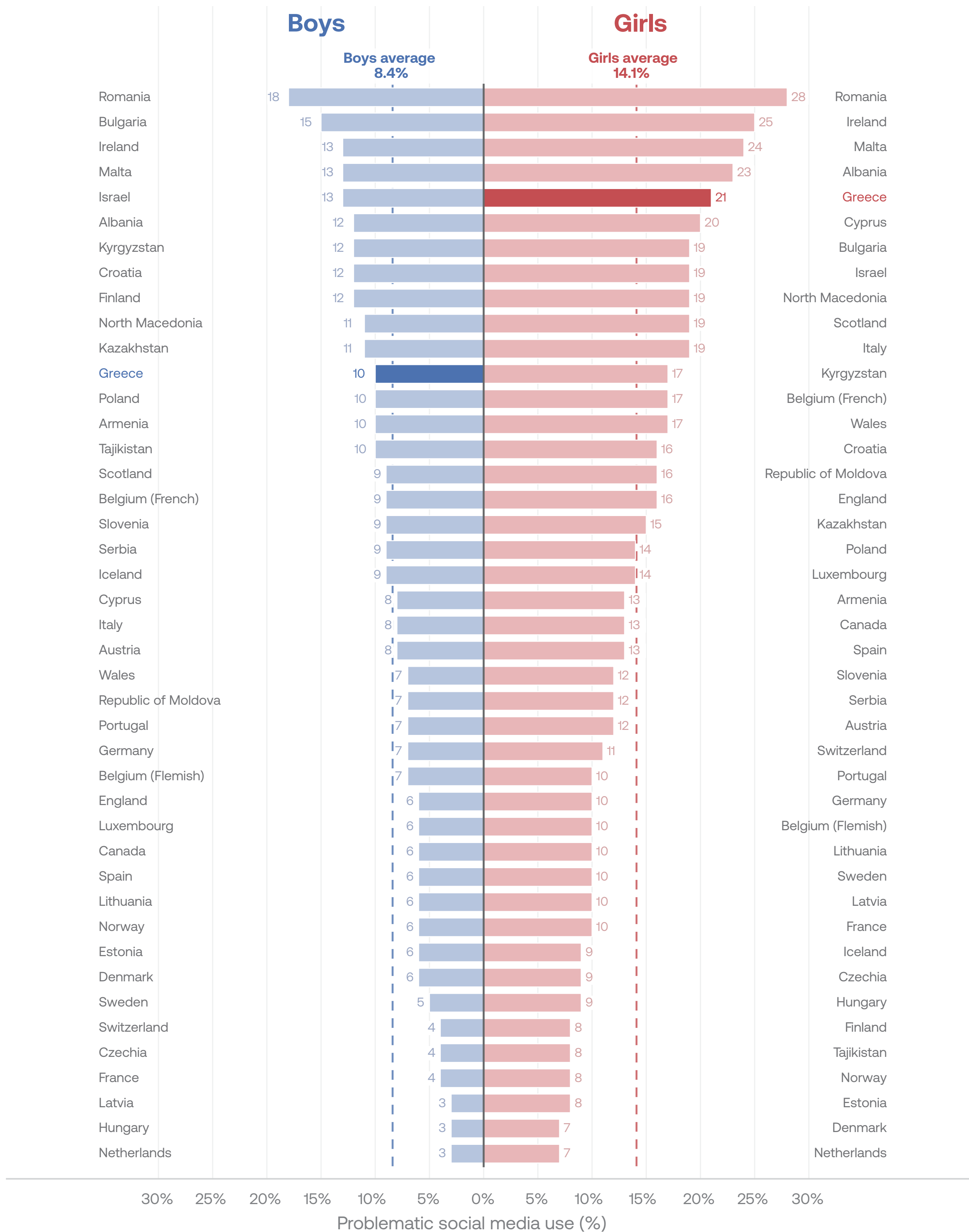
What this emerging landscape shows is summarized in Figure 8: not convergence around a single age threshold, but convergence around a higher age band than the older default of 13. The center of debate now sits much more around ages 15 and 16. Political momentum is also ahead of settled law: as of May 2026, binding national rules were in force in only about six jurisdictions, with additional subnational regimes operating in Germany, India, and the United States, while some thirty-five more countries were still at the stage of proposals, announcements, or public debate.

As discussed earlier in the report, Greek data indicate high levels of self-perceived problematic social media use among adolescents, particularly among 15-year-old girls (Figure 9). For Greece, the lesson is twofold. First, age-based access rules are now part of a broader international regulatory repertoire and can no longer be treated as politically fringe. Second, they do not yet constitute a settled policy template. Across jurisdictions, the same core questions remain unresolved: what age threshold is justified, which services are covered, whether parental consent can override the rule, and how the boundary is enforced in practice.

Activity in the YES programme, Athens.

Figure 9

Prevalence of symptoms of problematic social media use among 15-year-olds across HBSC countries in 2022



Source: HBSC Survey, 2022. Note: Countries/regions are ordered from lower to higher prevalence; Greece is highlighted. The dashed line marks the HBSC average.

Experimental studies examining reductions in social media use are relevant here, but they should be interpreted carefully. Randomized studies have identified short-term improvements in loneliness, depressive symptoms, and perceived stress when participants reduced or temporarily abstained from social media use. This evidence supports the plausibility of benefit from reducing exposure, particularly among excessive users or adolescents already experiencing affective distress. It does not, however, establish that statutory minimum-age rules will reduce harm at population level.

Government age restrictions differ substantially from voluntary reduction experiments: they depend on age assurance, enforcement, adolescent adaptation, parental response, platform coverage, privacy safeguards, and the possibility of displacement toward less regulated services. The experimental evidence therefore strengthens the rationale for taking exposure reduction seriously as a protective mechanism, while also reinforcing the need to evaluate age-based rules as real-world policy interventions rather than assuming their effectiveness in advance.

4.2.2.2. Age assurance and age verification

If minimum-age rules set the boundary, age assurance is the mechanism intended to make that boundary operational. It is best understood as an umbrella term rather than a single technology. Age assurance can include self-declaration, age estimation or inference, parental-consent flows, and age verification against documentary or other trusted evidence. These methods do not offer the same level of certainty. Verification generally provides a higher level of confidence than age estimation because it relies on verifiable data, while age assurance mechanisms can operate at very different layers of the system — device, operating system, browser, app, platform, or third-party provider — each carrying distinct privacy, interoperability, and governance implications.

A 2025 OECD benchmarking exercise covering 50 online services used by children found that just over half used some form of age assurance, but only two systematically assured age at account creation. Most services triggered checks only later — for access to specific features, after suspicious activity, on appeal, or in particular jurisdictions — while some of the riskiest services continued to rely on self-declaration alone. In practice, age assurance therefore often exists in a fragmented and selective form rather than as a consistent front-door control.

The United Kingdom offers one of the clearest regulatory models. Ofcom's approach under the Online Safety Act is performance-based rather than technology-specific. Services must use "highly effective" age assurance where required, and the regulator defines that standard in terms of technical accuracy, robustness, reliability, and fairness. The EU is pursuing a different route, developing an age-verification framework designed to allow users to prove they are over 18 without disclosing additional personal information, with integration into the EU Digital Identity Wallet. Australia illustrates a third model, combining a reasonableness standard with regulatory guidance and technical evaluation.

For Greece, the policy lesson is that age assurance should not be treated as a single technical fix imported from abroad. UNICEF's March 2026 rapid analysis describes it as a critical and still unresolved implementation challenge. The central questions concern standard, scope, privacy, error, appeals, and oversight. Age assurance also raises ethical concerns about privacy, surveillance, exclusion, and unequal impact. Systems that require stronger proof of age may reduce underage access to certain services, but they may also normalize more intensive identity checks, create new stores of sensitive data, or exclude adolescents who cannot easily satisfy verification requirements. These risks are likely to fall unevenly, particularly on young people with

fewer resources, less stable documentation, lower digital literacy, or greater dependence on online spaces for support.

Any age-assurance regime should therefore be judged not only by whether it detects age accurately, but by whether it minimizes data collection, provides accessible routes for appeal, avoids unnecessary exclusion, and is independently supervised. They include which services require assurance, what level of certainty is acceptable, what data may be collected, who performs the check, and how users challenge mistakes. That is why age assurance remains one of the highest-trade-off instruments in the current regulatory toolkit.These questions are discussed further in Chapter 5.3 in relation to current national policy initiatives and their practical limitations.

4.2.3. Platform governance: duties, design, data, and accountability

A broader and increasingly influential cluster of measures concerns the platforms themselves. Unlike school-day controls or minimum-age rules, these tools aim to change the conditions under which risk is generated. Broader online-platform frameworks are already in place in jurisdictions such as Australia, Brazil, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and EU member states, with draft or emerging frameworks in Canada, Costa Rica, Norway, Switzerland, and the United States. The key point is not that countries are adopting a single model. Rather, many are moving away from purely reactive content removal toward risk-based platform governance, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3
Illustrative upstream platform-governance measures emerging across jurisdictions

Measure	Working definition	Illustrative jurisdictions / examples
Risk assessment / human-rights due diligence	Platforms must identify foreseeable risks to children, assess how their systems contribute to those risks, and review mitigation measures over time—especially before major product or policy changes.	**EU:** DSA Article 28 + Commission minors guidelines; **UK:** children's risk assessments under the Online Safety Act; **Australia:** Basic Online Safety Expectations reporting; **Brazil:** Digital ECA framework.
Safer defaults for minors	Child accounts or likely child users are given more protective default settings for privacy, contactability, visibility, and safety unless there is a strong reason not to.	**EU:** Commission minors guidelines recommend safer default settings; **UK:** Children's Code requires high privacy by default and geolocation off by default; **Australia:** eSafety guidance emphasises child-safe defaults.
Recommender-system and content-curation safeguards	Platforms are expected to reduce risks created by ranking, recommendation, autoplay, or other curation systems that amplify harmful or age-inappropriate exposure.	**EU:** minors guidelines address recommender-system risk mitigation; **UK:** Ofcom's child-safety duties include protection against harmful content and service-related risks; **Singapore:** Online Safety Code requires services to minimise exposure to harmful content, especially for children.

Measure	Working definition	Illustrative jurisdictions / examples
Reporting, complaint, and redress tools	Child-usable mechanisms for reporting harmful content or conduct, escalating complaints, and obtaining review or response.	**Singapore:** designated services must provide reporting mechanisms and annual reports; **Australia:** BOSE notices and reporting processes require providers to explain protective steps; UNESCO guidelines frame accessible information, user tools, and redress as core governance elements.
Child-data protection and privacy-by-default	Restrictions on how children's data are collected, retained, shared, or made visible, including high-privacy defaults and limits on geolocation or tracking.	**UK:** Children's Code; **EU:** GDPR/DSA context for minors; **Brazil:** LGPD + Digital ECA direction.
Restrictions on profiling, targeted advertising, and harmful commercial practices	Limits on profiling minors for ads, behavioural targeting, or other commercial practices that exploit children's data or vulnerabilities.	**EU:** DSA ban on showing targeted ads to minors when platforms know with reasonable certainty a user is a minor; **UK:** Children's Code constrains profiling and nudges; **Brazil:** Digital ECA and broader child-protection direction.
Anti-addictive / anti-dark-pattern / safety-by-design measures	Rules or expectations aimed at design features that encourage compulsive use, weaken privacy, or make it harder to disengage or choose protective settings.	**Brazil:** Digital ECA expressly bans manipulative design practices that encourage compulsive use or obstruct privacy/account control; **UK:** Children's Code restricts nudges that push children to weaken privacy; **EU:** child-protection and fairness agendas increasingly connect minors' safety to design.
Transparency reporting	Platforms must publish structured information on safety measures, harmful content handling, or child-protection performance.	**Singapore:** annual online safety reports for designated services; **Australia**: eSafety periodic and non-periodic transparency notices; **EU:** DSA transparency architecture.
Audits, regulator access, and independent scrutiny	Regulators or vetted third parties can require records, inspect risk assessments, or scrutinise platform systems and compliance claims.	**UK:** Ofcom has required children's risk assessment records and taken enforcement action for failures to respond; **Australia:** eSafety can issue periodic and non-periodic notices; **EU:** DSA model builds structured access and oversight into the regulatory architecture.
Specialist regulator or enforcement architecture	A designated public authority (or coordinated set of authorities) supervises compliance, requests information, and applies sanctions or corrective measures.	**UK:** Ofcom; Australia: eSafety Commissioner; Singapore: IMDA; **EU:** Digital Services Coordinators / European Commission for parts of the DSA system.

The EU and the United Kingdom provide two of the clearest examples. In the EU, the Commission's 2025 guidelines on minors under the Digital Services Act apply to all online platforms accessible to minors, with the exception of micro and small enterprises. The guidelines recommend measures such as private accounts by default, adjustments to recommender systems, stronger blocking and reporting tools, and the disabling by default of features such as streaks, autoplay, and push notifications. In the United Kingdom, Ofcom requires in-scope services to conduct children's risk assessments, implement protective measures, maintain records, and review those assessments when services change.

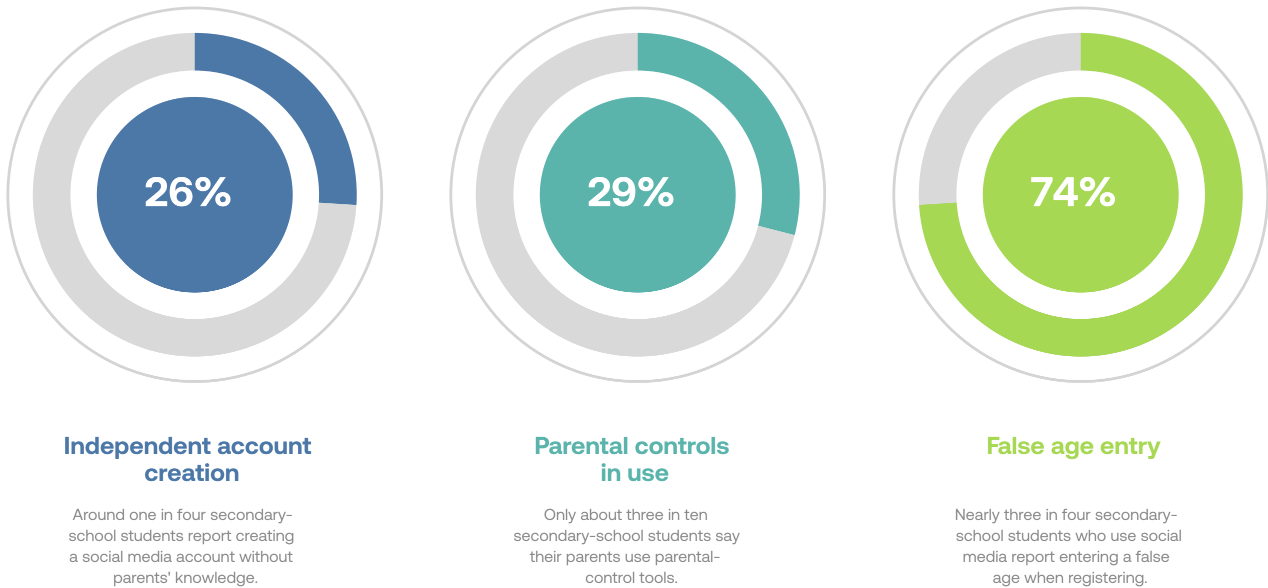
Australia and Singapore illustrate other variants of the same broader regulatory shift. Australia's Basic Online Safety Expectations set out what the government expects from social media, messaging, gaming services, apps, and websites, while the eSafety Commissioner can require providers to report on how they are protecting users from harm. In Singapore, the Code of Practice for Online Safety – Social Media Services requires designated services to minimize users' exposure to harmful content, provide reporting tools, and submit annual online-safety reports.

Brazil's Digital Statute for Children and Adolescents, in force since March 2026, requires more reliable age verification, restricts manipulative design practices associated with compulsive use, mandates reporting and removal obligations relating to sexual exploitation and grooming content, and requires companies operating digital services in Brazil to maintain a legal representative in the country.

For Greece, the comparative lesson is that the center of regulatory gravity is shifting upstream. School rules and age-based measures are important, and they should be complemented by a comprehensive effort to regulate the systems that shape what children encounter online. Greece is already partly operating within that model through the DSA, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and its national supervisory framework. The remaining question is, therefore, not whether platforms should be regulated at all, but how actively existing regulatory tools and enforcement mechanisms are used, coordinated, and supplemented in relation to minors' safety (Figure 10).

Figure 10
Supervision and rule circumvention among secondary-school students in Greece

Three indicators from a nationwide Greek survey illustrate how adolescent digital participation is shaped not only by access, but by supervision, platform safeguards, and routine circumvention of age rules.



Independent account creation

Around one in four secondary-school students report creating a social media account without parents' knowledge.

Parental controls in use

Only about three in ten secondary-school students say their parents use parental-control tools.

False age entry

Nearly three in four secondary-school students who use social media report entering a false age when registering.

Source: Greek Safer Internet Center (2025). Panhellenic Survey of 2,500 Students Aged 10–18: Online Habits of Children and Adolescents. FORTH Safer Internet Centre.

4.3. Policy Design in Practice

As examined above, governments are already taking measures to act on adolescents' digital environments in order to prevent harm. Inevitably, many of these decisions are being taken while the evidence base remains incomplete. The strongest findings concern patterns and mechanisms rather than the precise effects of specific interventions, while harms continue to occur regardless of whether research has fully characterized them.

Acting under these conditions requires a clear governing principle. Waiting for complete evidence carries its own costs: harms continue, risks concentrate among more vulnerable adolescents, and governance structures that take years to build are delayed further. Poorly designed interventions also carry costs, including equity harms, privacy violations, behavioral substitution, and institutional capacity consumed by measures that fail to reach the underlying mechanism.

The practical task is therefore to act proportionately on what the evidence most clearly supports, build safeguards where trade-offs are significant, and design monitoring and evaluation systems capable of detecting whether the intended pathway is actually changing. Policy in this field functions best as an adaptive system, in which interventions are implemented with explicit expectations about what should improve and with a genuine willingness to revise them when outcomes differ.

The principle organizing this section follows directly from that reasoning: doing no harm does not mean doing nothing.

4.3.1. Interventions with stronger evidence alignment

Reducing harmful experiences through platform accountability. A consistent body of evidence links bullying, harassment, and harmful content exposure to adverse mental health outcomes. This supports interventions that reduce adolescents' exposure to these experiences directly: effective reporting and redress tools, responsive moderation, safer defaults, risk assessment, and mitigation duties for platforms.

This does not make duration irrelevant. Time, timing, and cumulative exposure matter when they increase contact with harmful experiences, interrupt sleep, fragment attention, or crowd out developmentally protective routines. School-day restrictions can reduce exposure in bounded contexts by limiting classroom distraction and peer conflict during supervised time. Sleep-protective measures, by contrast, operate through evening routines, notification defaults, autoplay settings, and other conditions that affect late-night interruption and disengagement. Their role is complementary rather than competing. They can reduce exposure in bounded contexts, while platform-governance duties address the upstream systems that shape what young users encounter, how harmful interactions persist, and how easily users can seek help or redress. The DSA framework and the United Kingdom's Online Safety Act represent the most developed operational translations of this approach.

Privacy and data protection represent another area of relatively strong evidence alignment. Across the synthesis, there is consistent agreement on limiting data collection from minors, strengthening consent requirements, introducing age-appropriate default settings, and restricting profiling for advertising purposes. The GDPR provides the binding baseline for Greece, including the national age of digital consent set at 15 under Law 4624/2019, which requires parental or guardian consent for processing personal data of users under 15. The United Kingdom's Age Appropriate Design Code represents one of the most operationally detailed translations of these principles into platform-design requirements.

Protecting sleep and daily routines. Sleep-related pathways appear in 24 of the 32 synthesized documents, making sleep one of the most consistently identified and practically modifiable links between digital habits and adolescent wellbeing. Because timing is central to this pathway, interventions designed to protect sleep and recovery routines have stronger grounding than general limits detached from the context. These include household-level guidance around device-free wind-down periods, school and family routines that reduce late-night disturbance, and platform-design requirements relating to notification defaults, autoplay, and other features that make disengagement harder.

4.3.2. Trade-offs that cannot be designed away

Every intervention in this space involves trade-offs. Policymakers who identify the right direction still face choices about design, sequencing, and safeguards. Making these trade-offs visible in advance is what allows policies to achieve their intended effects without producing avoidable costs elsewhere.

Equity concerns recur across many interventions. School device restrictions may improve classroom conditions for most students while disadvantaging those who rely on digital tools for learning support, accessibility needs, or connectivity unavailable at home. Age-based access rules may reduce exposure to some risks while also limiting access to support communities that adolescents facing stigma, isolation, or mental health challenges depend on.

Similar tensions arise around privacy and enforcement. More reliable age assurance and monitoring systems generally require greater data collection, creating risks that poorly designed systems become forms of surveillance

infrastructure. The balance depends heavily on design choices, including what data is collected, how long it is retained, and whether it can be used beyond its stated purpose. Adolescents also adapt quickly to new rules. Device restrictions during school hours may increase use before and after school, while platform restrictions may shift activity toward less regulated services. Whether a policy succeeds therefore depends not only on introducing a rule, but on identifying the pathway it is expected to change and monitoring whether that pathway actually shifts in practice.

Institutional capacity shapes these outcomes throughout. Platform safety duties, continuous risk-assessment oversight, and meaningful audit all require sustained technical expertise and coordination across agencies. Where that capacity is limited, enforcement risks becoming uneven or symbolic. Sequencing matters as well. Transparency requirements and platform-accountability duties may be less politically visible than age bans or device restrictions, but they build the institutional infrastructure that makes later interventions more effective and more adaptable over time.

Deliberate choices across these dimensions, combined with monitoring after implementation, are what allow policy to function as the adaptive system this evidence base requires. Section 5 applies this reasoning to the specific institutional and governance conditions of Greece.

Activity in the YES programme, Athens.

Chapter 5

Greece: From Legal Framework to Functioning System

Chapter 5 examines how Greece's existing legal and institutional framework for adolescent digital governance functions in practice. It brings together platform regulation, data protection, school-device rules, institutional coordination, and national policy initiatives in order to assess how responsibilities are distributed across authorities, where implementation challenges emerge, and which areas remain subject to national policy choice within the broader EU framework.

5.1. The regulatory baseline

The DSA Regulation (EU) 2022/2065, provides the core platform governance framework and applies directly in Greece without requiring national transposition. Article 28 requires platforms accessible to minors to take appropriate and proportionate measures to ensure a high level of privacy, safety, and security. European Commission guidelines issued under Article 28 translate this into operational terms: safer default settings, risk mitigation in recommender systems, restrictions on targeted advertising where a platform knows with reasonable certainty that a user is a minor, and effective complaint and reporting tools. A platform cannot rely on formal terms of service that exclude minors if access by minors is possible in practice.

Data protection law forms the second pillar. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU) 2016/679, applies across all EU member states. Greece has set the national age of digital consent at 15 through Law 4624/2019, meaning that processing personal data of users under 15 requires parental or guardian consent. The Hellenic Data Protection Authority supervises compliance. Audiovisual and media regulation adds a third layer. Greece transposed the Audiovisual Media Services Directive through Law 4779/2021, introducing obligations for media services and video-sharing platforms that include protections for minors against harmful content and restrictions on commercial communications targeting children. Consumer protection law, principally Law 2251/1994, addresses unfair and misleading commercial practices, including those affecting minors.

School-device regulation forms a fourth regulatory layer focused on the educational environment. Ministerial Decision 102791/GD4/2024 prohibits the visible possession or use of mobile phones and similar recording-capable devices on school premises, with a narrow

exception for medical use. The framework treats unauthorized recording of teachers or students as a potential violation of privacy and personal-data protections, with sanctions beginning at a one-day suspension and escalating depending on severity and repetition.

These obligations operate together. Platform governance, data protection, audiovisual regulation, consumer protection, and school-device regulation all shape what adolescents encounter in digital environments and what institutions are required to do about it. Their interpretation is also increasingly informed by a broader child-rights approach reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and General Comment No. 25, which explicitly extends children's rights into digital environments.

Within this broader framework, the central question for Greece is whether these layers function in practice as a coherent system or as parallel obligations with limited institutional intersection, particularly as the regulatory landscape itself continues to evolve. In April 2026, the Greek government announced plans to introduce legislation prohibiting access to social media platforms for users under the age of 15, with implementation expected from January 2027 together with the development of age-verification mechanisms. Set against wider international developments in this area, these recent policy initiatives are likely to play an important role in reshaping the regulatory and governance framework surrounding adolescent digital environments in Greece.

5.2. The institutional landscape

Adolescent digital governance in Greece operates across multiple levels of governmental coordination, regulation, education, and enforcement. The Ministry of Digital Governance has assumed an increasingly visible coordinating role in recent initiatives concerning age assurance, parental controls, and broader online child safety policy, while the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports plays a central role in the implementation of school-device policies, digital literacy initiatives, and online safety education. The main supervisory responsibilities, however, lie with a set of independent authorities whose mandates increasingly intersect in practice.

The Hellenic Telecommunications and Post Commission (EETT) was designated as Greece's Digital Services Coordinator under Law 5099/2024. EETT supervises compliance for providers established in the country, handles user complaints, requests information from service providers, coordinates with national and EU-level authorities, and imposes sanctions where appropriate. Within the DSA framework, EETT also designates trusted flaggers and certifies out-of-court dispute settlement bodies.

The Hellenic Data Protection Authority (HDPA) is Greece's independent data protection regulator responsible for enforcing the GDPR and national privacy legislation. Its mandate is highly relevant to adolescent digital use, as it oversees issues relating to children's data protection, consent and age-related processing, profiling and advertising practices, platform compliance with privacy obligations, and aspects of age verification systems. The National Council for Radio and Television is the country's independent media regulator responsible for overseeing broadcasting and audiovisual content. While historically focused on television and radio, its role has become increasingly relevant through evolving EU audiovisual and platform regulation frameworks addressing harmful content, minors' exposure to digital media, and online audiovisual services.

The practical challenge these institutions face is that adolescent digital risk does not respect jurisdictional boundaries. A recommendation system that exposes a 13-year-old to harmful content is simultaneously a platform-governance issue under the DSA, a data-protection issue under the GDPR if profiling is involved,

and potentially an audiovisual issue if the service qualifies as a video-sharing platform under Law 4779/2021. For adolescents, families, or schools attempting to report harms or seek remedies, these overlapping mandates may also create uncertainty around where complaints should be directed and how authorities interact in practice. When complaints arise, these overlapping mandates may require forms of coordination that cut across institutional boundaries, particularly in relation to information sharing, supervisory responsibilities, and the consolidation of separate findings into a coherent response.

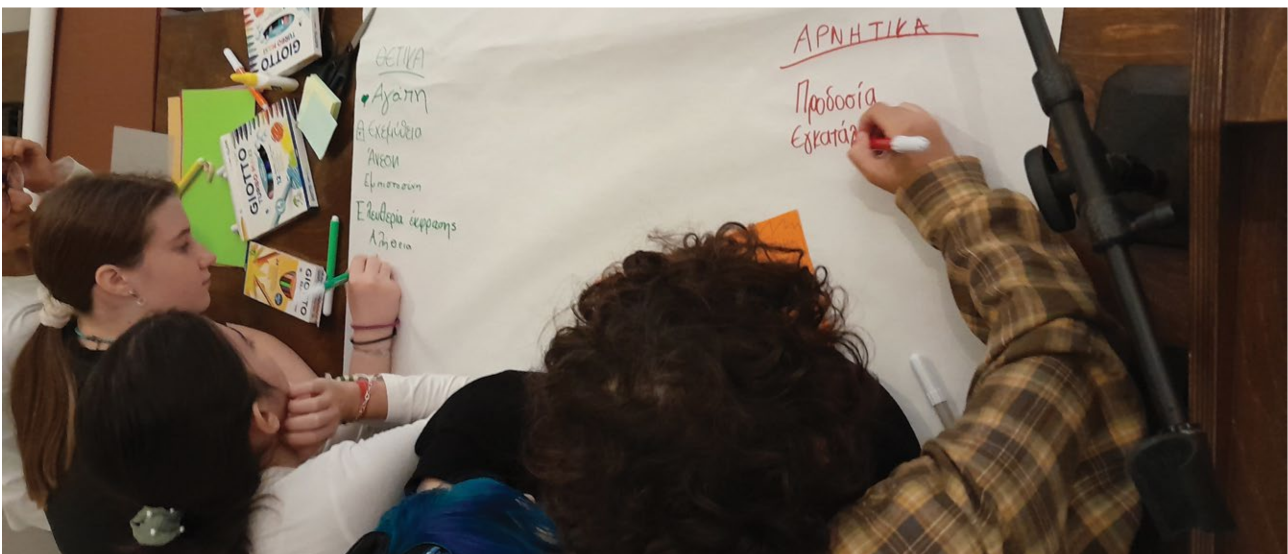
Alongside these institutions, complementary functions relating to awareness, prevention, reporting, and digital literacy are also supported through initiatives such as the Greek Safer Internet Centre, which plays an important role in online safety guidance, educational outreach, helplines, and reporting mechanisms for children, families, and schools.

Chapter 4 identified enforcement capacity and institutional coordination as the factors that most consistently distinguish jurisdictions where comparable legal duties produce meaningful change from those where they remain largely formal commitments. Greece's obligations are comparatively well specified. Whether they produce consistent protection in practice depends on how EETT, the HDPA, and the National Council for Radio and Television coordinate their activities, how enforcement priorities are set, and how EU-level enforcement of the DSA by the European Commission interacts with domestic supervision. This creates a multi-level enforcement environment in which some of the largest platforms are supervised primarily at EU level, while many practical questions around complaints, guidance, coordination, and implementation remain national responsibilities.

5.3. Policy initiatives beyond binding law

Greece has introduced policy measures that extend beyond what EU law directly requires, particularly in areas where legal obligations alone are considered insufficient.

The National Strategy for the Protection of Minors from Internet Addiction sets out policy directions for strengthening protective mechanisms, supporting responsible digital use, and reinforcing parental involvement. The strategy places particular emphasis on moving beyond self-declaration in age assurance and on strengthening parental-consent mechanisms for younger users.

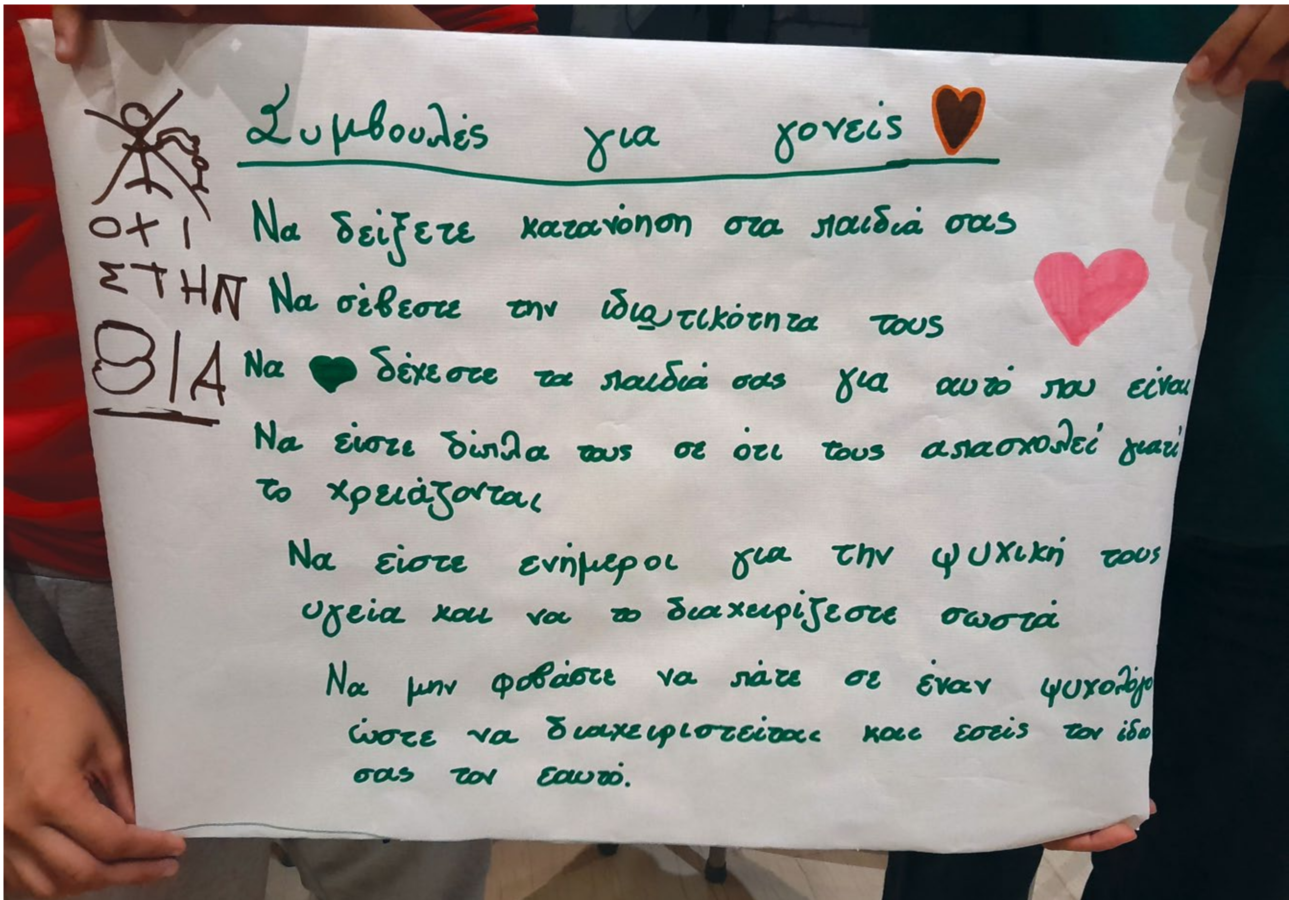


Activity in the YES programme, Heraklion.

The Kids Wallet initiative operationalizes a device-level approach. It provides parental -control and age-verification functions that allow parents to set limits on device use, restrict access to specific services, and apply rules for defined periods such as school hours. These tools complement legal obligations rather than substituting for them. The DSA does not prevent a 12-year-old from accessing a platform that formally requires users to be 13 if the platform's age check consists only of a self-declaration field. Device-level controls therefore add a layer of practical protection that platform-level rules alone do not reliably provide. Their limitation is that they depend on parental engagement and technical literacy, and may operate less effectively in households with fewer resources or lower levels of digital familiarity.

Both initiatives reflect a governance model that combines binding law, institutional supervision, and technological tools. Each component addresses a different dimension of the same problem, and none is sufficient on its own.

These initiatives are also emerging against a backdrop of growing concern about adolescents' digital wellbeing in Greece. Recent ESPAD findings suggest that self-perceived problems related to social media use among adolescents continue to rise, reinforcing the perception that baseline levels of problematic engagement are shifting over time (Figure 11). In this context, policy initiatives such as the National Strategy and the Kids Wallet initiative can be understood as attempts to respond not only to existing legal obligations, but also to broader social and public-health concerns that policymakers consider increasingly urgent.

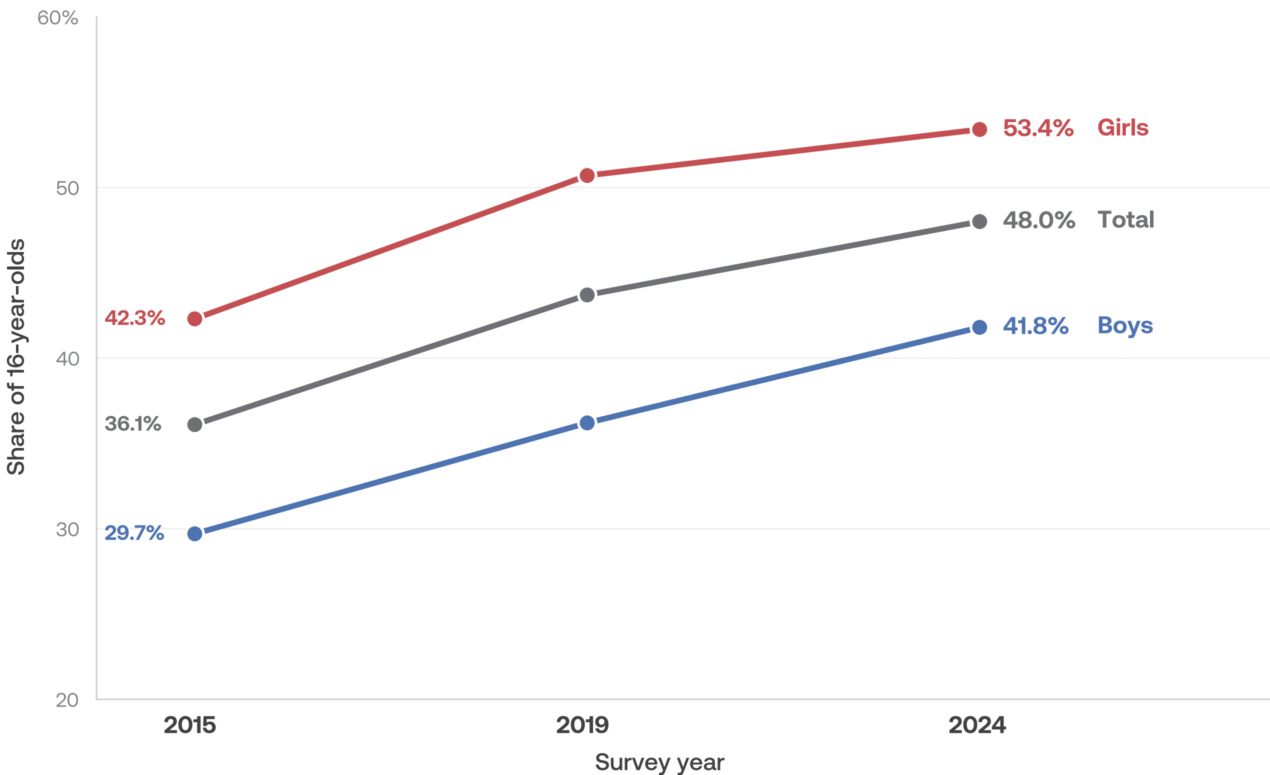


Activity in the YES programme, Heraklion.

Figure 11

The baseline is moving: self-perceived problems related to social media use keeps rising in Greece

Self-perceived problems related to social media use rose steadily from 2015 to 2024, with girls highest throughout.



Source: ESPAD-Greece trend values for problematic social media use, ages 15–16.

5.4. Enforcement, Coordination, and Implementation Challenges

Although the core legal obligations governing adolescent digital environments are now largely established through EU and national law, important implementation challenges and governance choices remain at the national level.

Enforcement priorities. EETT holds broad supervisory responsibilities under the DSA, but enforcement capacity remains necessarily finite. Decisions about which risks are prioritized, how complaints are triaged, which platforms receive closer scrutiny, and how sanctions are calibrated will shape whether the DSA produces visible changes in platform practices within the Greek context. As in many regulatory systems, uneven prioritization or limited enforcement capacity risks producing a framework that exists formally in law while operating inconsistently in practice.

Institutional coordination. The distribution of responsibilities across EETT, the HDPA, and the National Council for Radio and Television provides broad regulatory coverage, but also creates the possibility of fragmentation where responsibilities overlap. In practice, cases involving adolescent digital risk may simultaneously involve platform governance, data protection, audiovisual regulation, and child-rights concerns. The effectiveness of the Greek framework therefore depends not only on the

existence of formal competencies, but also on the development of clear protocols and mechanisms for coordination, information-sharing, escalation pathways, and the joint handling of cross-cutting cases.

Supplementary guidance. EU law establishes obligations and minimum standards, but their practical translation into everyday settings depends heavily on national guidance and institutional support. Schools, families, clinicians, and adolescents themselves require forms of communication and guidance that are understandable, accessible, and adapted to Greek social realities rather than broadly imported from international discussions. At present, however, the availability and consistency of such practical guidance remain uneven across different institutional settings. For example, while initiatives such as the Greek Safer Internet Centre and certain school-based programmes provide guidance on issues including cyberbullying, online safety, and digital wellbeing, comparable levels of support and implementation do not appear to exist uniformly across all schools or local support structures.

Child-rights safeguards. The DSA and GDPR both require that children can access remedies and challenge decisions affecting them. In practice, however, the usability of these protections depends on whether complaint mechanisms are comprehensible to adolescents, whether platform decisions are explained in accessible ways, and whether escalation pathways function effectively when initial complaints remain unresolved. Formal rights do not automatically translate into effective access to protection, particularly where complaint and redress mechanisms are procedurally complex or difficult for adolescents to navigate

School-level implementation. Ministerial Decision 102791/GD4/2024 establishes a national framework for school-device regulation, but implementation necessarily occurs across highly varied school environments. Differences in staff capacity, institutional support, training, local school culture, and available resources may influence how the framework is applied in practice across different schools. Questions also remain regarding how proportionate enforcement is maintained in practice, particularly in cases involving accessibility needs, medical conditions, or broader student wellbeing concerns.

5.5. The central challenge

Greece's legal foundation for adolescent digital governance is comparatively well developed. The DSA, GDPR, Law 4624/2019, Law 4779/2021, Ministerial Decision 102791/GD4/2024, and the National Strategy together constitute a substantial regulatory and institutional architecture.

Whether this architecture produces consistent protection in practice depends on coordination across institutions, enforcement robust enough to influence platform and school behavior, as well as guidance that helps families, educators, and clinicians act on what the framework requires. Greek data show that digital participation is intensive, that early entry is the norm, that harmful content exposure is common, and that risk is unevenly distributed, particularly among girls and older adolescents. The international evidence reviewed in Chapters 3 and 4 identifies the pathways that appear most consequential, alongside interventions with stronger or weaker empirical grounding.

The policy task is therefore to align these elements so they function as a coherent system rather than as parallel obligations operating in isolation. A framework that lacks coordination, enforcement capacity, or practical guidance will struggle to reach the mechanisms the evidence most consistently identifies as consequential. This raises a concrete institutional question for Greece: whether fragmented responsibilities across multiple authorities can provide sufficiently integrated oversight and

support for adolescent digital governance in practice, or whether a dedicated lead body or formal inter-institutional mechanism is needed to connect platform supervision, data protection, audiovisual oversight, school implementation, family guidance, and child-rights safeguards.

This need not take the form of a new regulator replacing existing bodies. A more feasible option may be a standing or time-bound interdisciplinary advisory mechanism, involving the relevant regulators, ministries, child and adolescent mental-health expertise, education specialists, child-rights and digital-rights actors, civil society, and youth representatives. The European Commission's Special Panel on Child Safety Online illustrates the value of such an advisory layer at EU level: it complements binding regulation by bringing interdisciplinary expertise and youth perspectives into questions of child safety online and possible age restrictions. A Greek equivalent could support shared priorities, implementation guidance, evaluation protocols, and escalation pathways across the existing institutional architecture. The distinction between a well-designed legal architecture and one that delivers meaningful protection in practice ultimately depends on how effectively these different layers are connected, implemented, and sustained over time.

Activity in the YES programme, Athens.

Chapter 6

What the YES discussions revealed: a thematic overview

The YES discussions offer a qualitative perspective on how adolescents themselves describe and interpret their digital lives. Across the dialogue sessions, social media and online platforms did not emerge simply as technologies or communication tools, but as environments deeply embedded in friendship, belonging, boredom, emotional regulation, visibility, conflict, self-presentation, and everyday social life. The themes that emerged across the discussions both reinforce and complicate the broader evidence reviewed in earlier chapters. Adolescents described pressures linked to comparison, visibility, and constant connectivity; the emotional role of scrolling, online interaction, and AI companionship; the effects of recommendation systems and rapid content exposure; and the tensions surrounding restrictions, monitoring, and adult intervention. At the same time, the discussions highlighted important differences in how digital experiences are lived and interpreted depending on context, emotional needs, school environments, social belonging, and forms of exclusion.

What follows is not a representative survey of Greek youth, but a thematic account of recurring patterns, tensions, and experiences that emerged across the YES dialogue sessions. Together, these discussions provide an experiential layer that helps situate adolescent digital life beyond regulatory categories or abstract policy debate.

6.1. Social media as a complex adolescent experience

To understand the relationship between social media and adolescent mental health, it is important to examine how digital platforms are actually used and the roles they play in everyday life. Across the YES discussions, social media did not emerge as a single, uniform environment, but as a set of distinct spaces organized around different forms of interaction, visibility, entertainment, communication, and participation.

Instagram was widely described as a space centered on peer interaction and everyday social communication, while TikTok and YouTube were more often associated with content consumption, trends, and continuous discovery. Messaging applications such as WhatsApp and Viber were presented as more functional

forms of communication, linked to coordination, everyday contact, and communication across more formal or intergenerational settings. Platforms such as Spotify, Pinterest, and Discord were associated with shared interests, personal expression, and forms of community participation.

Across the discussions, social media use emerged as a deeply embedded part of everyday adolescent social life rather than a separate online activity detached from offline experience. Adolescents described using platforms to maintain friendships, organize daily routines, alleviate boredom, explore interests, follow trends, and remain socially visible to peers. At the same time, these environments were also described as spaces of self-presentation, flirting, comparison, and social exposure. As one participant put it:

> ***"There are times when you talk to your friends and they don't really pay attention, but they will definitely see your post."***

6.2. Social life, belonging, and emotional regulation

For most adolescents, social media is a key arena where their social lives unfold. Their presence on these platforms is not just about communication; it is linked to a sense of belonging, the management of relationships, and the experience of various emotions, ranging from connection and intimacy to pressure or the fear of exclusion.

Activity in the YES programme, Ioannina.

In the YES group discussions, the relationship between social media and the emotional and social lives of adolescents was a key focus of discussion. Participants referred to friendships sustained across distance —including with friends from summer camps or other cities— as well as new relationships formed around shared interests and online interaction. In some accounts, social media were described as supporting the socialization of more introverted adolescents or creating a sense of safety that reduces some of the uncertainty associated with forming new relationships. This also appeared in how participants described navigating social interaction and interpreting identity online. As one group member noted:

> ***"Recently, I went out with a friend of mine and she liked someone who didn't have Instagram, which put her off because she couldn't get a sense of his personality without seeing what he posts. Another friend, though, had two profiles where she presented herself as a different person on each one."***

At the same time, participants repeatedly described a broader sense that "you have to be online" in order to remain socially present. Many participants described social media as closely tied to peer belonging and everyday social participation. Being absent from these platforms was often associated with feeling disconnected from peer groups or struggling to keep up with the social lives of others. At the same time, adolescents also distinguished between forms of participation rooted in genuine connection and those driven more by social pressure or fear of exclusion.

Some group members, particularly those on the autism spectrum or in specialized educational settings, described more distant or solitary forms of engagement shaped by differences in access, familiarity, participation, and social experience.

In these same discussions, mobile-phone and social-media use was strongly associated with emotional regulation and the management of stressful or uncomfortable situations. In some cases, adolescents described turning to their phones to manage feelings of awkwardness, create distance during social interactions, or withdraw momentarily even while physically present within a group of friends. The following comment was particularly revealing in this regard:

> ***"When you're having a good time somewhere, you forget about your phone, you don't need it. But if you don't have people around you that you relate to, even if you're in a group, you'll go on social media to feel better, to feel more comfortable and secure."***

Another participant described turning to their phone as a way of easing feelings of loneliness:

> ***"Videos make you feel less alone, because you see other people who feel the same way."***

Several group members also pointed to an emerging pattern of adolescents using AI tools for emotional support or companionship, particularly when peer relationships felt unavailable, difficult, or unsafe.

6.3. Time, content and compulsive use

The amount of time adolescents spend online does not always capture the full reality of their digital experiences. Time online can involve very different activities, from studying and staying in touch with friends to compulsive scrolling, exposure to harmful content, or seeking emotional support. In digital environments where communication, entertainment, school, and social life all unfold through the same device, time alone is often not enough to explain how digital use affects adolescents' wellbeing.

The relationship between time spent online and the quality of digital experience also emerged repeatedly in the YES group discussions, with adolescents reflecting on the different ways these dimensions shape everyday digital life. Many described spending long periods online in ways that felt repetitive, emotionally unsatisfying, or ultimately purposeless, with the feeling of "wasted time" recurring across multiple sessions. Others emphasized that even brief exposure can quickly lead to harmful, disturbing, or emotionally overwhelming material. Participants also described the rapid movement between radically different forms of content, shifting almost instantly from war footage or distressing news to memes, entertainment, or trivial videos, as producing a fragmented and emotionally disorienting experience. As one participant put it:

> ***"You see war one moment and something ridiculous the next. Many times, there is a feeling that we get lost in there, and when we come out, it feels as if we have lost all our time."***

This experience was frequently linked to overstimulation, shortened attention spans, and difficulty sustaining concentration. One participant reflected:

> ***"We've all become used to fast-paced information on social media, which makes us get bored very easily and that needs to change."***

Together, these accounts point to a dimension of risk that extends beyond discrete harmful incidents into the broader emotional environment produced by recommendation systems,

autoplay structures, and continuous streams of rapidly shifting content.

6.4. Night-time use, sleep, and concentration

Social media use was often described by adolescents as deeply embedded in the rhythms and routines of everyday life, particularly during evening and night-time hours. Within this broader pattern of everyday digital engagement, the impact of mobile-phone use on sleep emerged as one of the most consistent themes across all five YES sessions. Evening device use was widely described as extending almost unconsciously into the night, reducing sleep duration and making disengagement difficult.

Several participants described falling asleep with some form of media still playing beside them throughout the night. In some accounts, this was linked to platform features such as autoplay, notifications, or endless feeds that made disengagement difficult. In others, keeping background content playing was described as a way of managing anxiety, intrusive thoughts, or emotional discomfort at night. As one participant explained:

> ***"I can't sleep at all unless I have something playing in the background, otherwise I get really anxious. At night, the bad thoughts come, and having a video playing in the background helps stop them."***

Questions of concentration and school life were closely connected to these discussions. Group chats —particularly on Viber— were frequently described as sources of distraction during studying, while the use of AI tools for school assignments also emerged repeatedly across sessions. Some adolescents described using such tools to complete tasks more quickly or avoid effort, while others reflected more critically on their effects on concentration and learning routines.

At the same time, several participants described developing strategies to manage these challenges, including keeping phones away from study spaces, limiting notifications, or using music intentionally to improve concentration while studying.

6.5. Self-image, comparison, and social acceptance

Across several YES discussions, adolescents described social media as an environment of constant visibility, comparison, and evaluation, shaping how they viewed themselves and others. Exposure to idealised images of bodies and lifestyles, of "influencers with perfect bodies and successful careers", was described as fostering feelings of inadequacy or envy. Filters and edited images were seen as further blurring that boundary. As one participant put it:

> ***"The beauty standards promoted on social media are harmful. You can't really tell the difference between appearances and what is actually real."***

The dominance of narratives of constant success was also repeatedly noted, with reflections such as: *"Failure is never shown on social media, it's like everything always works out."* Participants often described this constant exposure to idealised versions of appearance, success, and happiness as emotionally pressuring. Such dynamics may carry particular weight during adolescence, a period in which identity and self-image are still developing.

Within the same discussions, participants also reflected on how digital environments shape experiences of visibility, recognition, and social acceptance. Positive feedback — comments, reactions, likes — was often described as emotionally significant, with one adolescent remarking that "*half of life is in everyday reality and the other half is on social media."* In one discussion, it was suggested that judgement and visibility on social media may feel even more intense in smaller towns, where "scrutiny

is already more pronounced."

At the same time, some adolescents described gradually developing more deliberate ways of managing their online presence, including the use of private profiles, selective audiences, or more controlled forms of participation over time.

6.6. Negative experiences and cyberbullying

Social media also emerged in the discussions as an environment in which experiences of conflict, exposure, and negative interaction are often woven into everyday online life. Participants described a wide range of such experiences, with frequent references to the risks of deception, manipulation, or exploitation — by both adults and peers — facilitated by the possibility of concealing or altering one's identity online. Practices such as the non-consensual use of personal photographs and the creation of fake profiles were described as contributing to feelings of insecurity and vulnerability. One participant described the experience in the following terms:

> ***"I had a friend who, at one point, someone created a hate account about him on TikTok and posted things encouraging him to commit suicide."***

Participants generally described these conflicts not as originating exclusively online, but as extensions of tensions already present in everyday social life that become intensified through public exposure, circulation, and the persistence of digital content. Group chats were repeatedly mentioned as spaces where conflict escalates rapidly, including situations in which individuals are added without consent, targeted collectively, or repeatedly re-added after attempting to leave hostile conversations. Several adolescents described these dynamics as creating a feeling that online conflict "never really ends."

At the same time, participants also demonstrated growing awareness of how recommendation systems and algorithmic filtering shape what users encounter online. Some referred explicitly to "echo chambers" and to the selective presentation of information and viewpoints through platform algorithms. As one group member put it:

> ***"What's happening now is excessive, and that's how risks emerge through the algorithm. In a way, our thinking gets shaped when we're overly online."***

These discussions suggest that adolescents increasingly experience online risk not only through isolated harmful incidents, but also through broader environments of continuous exposure, amplification, visibility, and algorithmically shaped interaction.

Drawing by Eve Katsarou, member of the YES team in Athens.

6.7. Limits, restrictions, and the role of adults

Questions of limits, restrictions, and adult intervention emerged as some of the most persistent and emotionally charged themes across the YES discussions. Participants expressed a complex and often ambivalent position: many recognized the need for some form of protection or boundary-setting around social media use, while also expressing strong scepticism about how restrictive measures are implemented in practice and whether they are capable of addressing the underlying dynamics shaping adolescents' digital lives.

Several adolescents aged 15–16 described restrictions as necessary for protecting younger children and adolescents, sometimes linking these concerns to broader reflections on growing up during and after the COVID-19 lockdown period. As one group member noted:

> ***"I think the lockdown played a role in this. Younger children grew up in it. We had a childhood, they didn't."***

At the same time, questions repeatedly emerged around whether restrictive measures can function effectively in practice. Age-based restrictions were widely described as relatively easy to bypass through false age declarations or alternative accounts. In one discussion, stricter access rules were even compared to the emergence of informal "black market" practices around older users' profiles, drawing an explicit parallel with patterns already observed in online gambling environments. Blanket prohibitions were frequently described as counterproductive or likely to intensify hidden or less controlled forms of use. As one participant put it:

> ***"Whatever you ban, you make it more extreme."***

Within the same framework, the potential role of schools was also discussed extensively during YES sessions. In many cases, participants called for more meaningful engagement through dialogue, skills development, and alternatives for socialisation such as group projects, school trips, and sports activities. This is important because the participants were not only asking for better rules about digital platforms. They were pointing to the wider educational and social infrastructure that helps adolescents build connection, confidence, and judgment offline: sustained dialogue about digital life, opportunities for collective activity, sport and recreation, and trusted adults who can engage with their actual experiences rather than deliver generic online-safety messages.

At the same time, however, in more than one instance, reservations were expressed about whether schools can effectively fulfil this role, based on examples suggesting a more limited or formal level of engagement. One group member noted:

> ***"In theory, something could be done, but not something interesting. Recently they organised a Safe Internet session, but it was boring and cringe."***

This scepticism was also linked to the perception that school approaches struggle to keep pace with the rapid evolution of digital environments, with reflections such as:

> ***"The way social media work has changed. Ever since TikTok emerged, everything has shifted. School sessions on social media still feel like 'Facebook in 2010'."***

Additionally, an ironic comment was noted about presentations in schools being created "with AI."

When discussing limits and restrictions, particular emphasis was ultimately placed on the role of parents and the broader family environment. Across the discussions, early guidance and boundary-setting within the family were consistently viewed as important, alongside

the need for parents themselves to model healthier relationships with phones and digital media. At the same time, monitoring tools such as Family Link were often perceived as intrusive or overly controlling. Within this context, more categorical views were also expressed regarding parents' approaches to social media, reflecting elements of a generational gap, as illustrated in the following account:

> ***"Parents don't really understand social media, so they make misguided efforts and go for easy solutions. The right solution is not to have screens from a young age, so you can learn what this online world actually is."***

Several discussions nevertheless pointed to the limits of approaches that place responsibility primarily on families, particularly under conditions shaped by time pressure, limited support, and wider everyday stresses. Rather than framing the issue solely in terms of parental responsibility, some participants described the need for broader forms of institutional and social support for parents. As one group member noted:

> ***"The state should have found a better way to support parents and help them spend more time with their children."***

Chapter 7
Conclusions

7.1. What this report establishes

Adolescent mental health concerns are rising. Patterns of problematic digital engagement are intensifying, particularly among older girls and adolescents with pre-existing vulnerabilities. Governments are acting. In this context, the question is not whether protective policy intervention is justified, but what form it should take and on what grounds it can be defended.

This report draws on 1,099 claims and 635 recommendations extracted from 32 major international documents, together with Greek national data and qualitative insights from youth dialogue sessions, to establish a sufficiently robust basis for protective policy action. The evidence carries important limits — only 2.3% of policy-facing claims are underpinned by longitudinal designs, and 0.7% by experimental evidence — but those limits call for proportionate, pathway-focused, and evaluable action, not for delay. In a context where digital environments are evolving faster than research cycles, where harms are already occurring, and where the most vulnerable adolescents bear the costs of inaction, incomplete evidence is a reason to act carefully, with explicit accountability for what each measure is intended to change.

The mental health implications of digital environments are real and specific. Online bullying and harassment are among the most stable risk signals in the reviewed literature, consistently linked to depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Exposure to harmful or age-inappropriate content, amplified by recommendation systems that continue serving similar material, is another consistent concern. Appearance-based social comparison on image-heavy platforms carries risks for body image and depressive symptoms, with stronger effects among girls. Sleep disruption, driven by late-night use, autoplay, and notification systems, is among the most consistently identified and practically modifiable pathways, appearing in 24 of 32 synthesized documents and supported by direct intervention evidence. A further and important pathway concerns the displacement of developmentally protective activities: when digital engagement crowds out sleep, physical activity, in-person connection, and unstructured recovery, it disrupts the conditions that support healthy adolescent development regardless of what the engagement itself contains.

As the evidence reviewed throughout the report has shown, these patterns are already visible in Greece: problematic social media use

has risen sharply among 15 and 16-year-olds, the majority of secondary students report accidental exposure to harmful content, and sleep difficulties have more than doubled among adolescent girls since 2014. These findings describe a population already navigating substantial digital risk, often without adequate institutional support.

Risk is concentrated rather than uniformly distributed. Population-level averages conceal substantial harm in specific groups, developmental stages, and exposure profiles, particularly among older girls and among adolescents with pre-existing anxiety, depression, or other vulnerabilities. Yet, digital participation also carries genuine benefits, especially for adolescents who are isolated, stigmatized, or geographically remote, for whom online spaces can provide connection and belonging that is unavailable offline. These benefits are real and must be preserved. The evidence does not, however, support treating benefits and harms as equally weighted. Signals of risk are more consistent, the affected populations more concentrated, and the underlying mechanisms more clearly characterised. Benefits are also strongly conditional on protective factors, including supportive adult engagement, stronger digital and media literacy, purposeful use, and platform conditions designed to reduce frictionless harm (Section 3.3). Where those factors are absent, the same platforms that provide connection for some generate harm for others. Reducing harm therefore requires precision rather than broad restriction. Approaches that limit harmful exposure while also undermining meaningful forms of connection and support for those who depend on them most are unlikely to serve adolescents well.

These findings matter because adolescence is not a single developmental stage. Early adolescence is marked by rapid changes in self-regulation, sleep, peer sensitivity, identity formation, and dependence on adult scaffolding. For this group, policy can more readily justify protective defaults, stronger adult mediation, age-appropriate design, and bounded restrictions where risks are plausible and widespread.

Middle adolescence is often the period in which peer status, body image, social comparison, sexualised visibility, autonomy, and belonging become especially salient. Here, the policy challenge extends beyond questions of access to issues of exposure, amplification, privacy, reporting, school climate, and support when digital experiences become socially or emotionally harmful. Late adolescence brings greater autonomy, stronger claims to privacy and participation, and more legitimate reliance on digital spaces for learning, connection, identity, and help-seeking. Interventions for this group therefore require a higher burden of justification when they restrict access and should place more emphasis on agency, redress, digital literacy, and support.

These are developmental tendencies rather than fixed age categories. Vulnerability varies according to context, prior mental health, household resources, peer environments, and individual development. Their policy relevance lies in ensuring that age-based measures do not become overly blunt or static, since the same intervention may require different safeguards, levels of justification, and forms of participation depending on the developmental group involved.

Digital environments now operate directly within these developmental tasks. They can widen connection, support exploration, and provide help when offline systems are weak. They can also intensify comparison, amplify peer conflict, disturb recovery, and make harmful content more persistent and harder to escape. Policy therefore needs to ask which digital conditions support healthy development, which conditions predictably undermine it, and which actors have the power to change those conditions.

Public debate, and a substantial share of the policy responses to date, have concentrated

primarily on time-based restrictions, asking how much is too much and when use crosses a line. Duration is relevant: heavy use, late-night use, and use that becomes difficult to control all carry real signals, and time-limiting approaches may in some contexts represent a necessary and practical first step while more refined mechanisms are developed. What the evidence most clearly supports, however, is a layered approach organized around specific exposures, mechanisms, and the actors with real leverage over those mechanisms, which is the framework the following section applies.

7.2. A policy agenda by actor

The evidence reviewed in this report maps the mechanisms through which digital environments affect adolescent mental health, identifies the actors who have operational control over those mechanisms, and points toward directions of action most consistent with what is known. The following is a set of evidence-informed directions, each grounded in the analysis in Chapters 3 and 4 and in the actor-accountability framework set out in Section 3.5. Each direction identifies a mechanism, an actor with leverage over it, and a practical step that would engage that mechanism directly. These are directions aligned with the evidence, not interventions whose effectiveness has been conclusively proven.

For governments and regulators. The following directions are organized across three time horizons, reflecting the reality that the instruments with the clearest immediate reach are often not those with the greatest long-term leverage.

In the short term, the most politically viable and operationally immediate measures are school-day phone restrictions and age-based social media access rules. School-day phone restrictions address a real and observable mechanism, including classroom distraction and, in some contexts, peer conflict or the migration of online tensions into the school day. The evidence is strongest for attentional and classroom-climate benefits, particularly where rules are credible, consistently enforced, and experienced as purposeful. Sleep protection is a related but distinct pathway, better addressed through evening routines, family guidance, and platform-design measures such as notification and autoplay defaults. In Greece, Ministerial Decision 102791/GD4/2024 provides the legal basis; the remaining task is implementation guidance that enables consistent application across diverse school environments. These restrictions should be understood as one necessary component of a wider response, imperfect and incapable of reaching the upstream conditions where most digital risk is generated, but potentially valuable in buying time and political space for more refined measures to take shape.

Age-based social media access restrictions occupy a similar position. The evidence supports age as a meaningful variable in vulnerability, and the precautionary rationale for acting is coherent even where the evidence that restrictions reduce harm in practice remains considerably weaker than their political momentum suggests.If Greece proceeds with the proposed under-15 legislation, its defensibility will depend on several conditions. These include age-assurance mechanisms that move beyond self-declaration, safeguards to avoid disadvantaging adolescents who depend on digital spaces for connection and support, and evaluation frameworks capable of determining whether the measure reduces harm or merely displaces it elsewhere. Age-based restrictions are best treated as one layer within a wider system, designed from the outset with those safeguards, rather than as a primary response.

In the medium term, the priority shifts toward building the capacity and infrastructure through which protective norms become embedded in everyday settings. This means digital literacy treated as a protective intervention embedded in the school curriculum, delivered through structured, ongoing dialogue

rather than one-off sessions, and supported by sustained professional development opportunities that equip teachers to address issues related to youth digital use effectively. It means accessible guidance for families designed for unequal resources rather than ideal conditions. It means clinical training and referral pathways that treat digital life as one dimension of adolescent context. It means enforcement of existing DSA and GDPR obligations as a serious operational priority, requiring the EETT, as Greece's designated Digital Services Coordinator, to prioritize safer defaults for minors, recommender-system safeguards, and usable reporting and redress tools, and requiring the HDPA to enforce privacy-by-default and parental consent requirements for under-15s. These are obligations that exist in law and need to become consistent in practice.

In the long term, the most consequential shifts concern platform design and structural governance. The mechanisms most clearly linked to harm, including harassment amplification, harmful content delivered through recommendation systems, notification-driven sleep disruption, appearance-based social comparison, and privacy-invasive profiling, are generated at the platform level. Changing those conditions requires regulatory pressure sustained over time: risk assessment duties, safer design requirements, transparency reporting, and enforcement that reaches the largest platforms through EU-level escalation mechanisms where national capacity reaches its limits. This is the direction in which the most developed regulatory systems internationally are moving, and it is where the evidence most clearly locates leverage.

A significant challenge for Greece's long-term governance architecture is institutional. Supervisory responsibility for adolescent digital governance is currently distributed across EETT, the HDPA, and the National Council for Radio and Television, each covering part of the landscape. As noted in Chapter 5, each of these institutions faces constraints in enforcement capacity and the practical difficulty of coordinating across overlapping mandates when harms cut across jurisdictional boundaries. Expecting robust coordination to emerge spontaneously among institutions with distinct mandates, histories, and resource levels is not a sufficient strategy.

A more feasible approach may be the creation of a targeted coordinating body with a specific regulatory mandate and a time-bound mission focused on the protection of adolescent digital lives. Such a body would coordinate existing institutions under a shared mandate and provide the escalation and implementation infrastructure that the current architecture lacks, rather than replacing the institutions themselves, which retain their legal functions. The European Commission's Special Panel on Child Safety Online, which brings together expertise across health, neuroscience, child rights, and digital literacy alongside youth representatives, illustrates the value of such a coordinating mechanism at EU level. A Greek equivalent could serve a comparable function nationally, giving coherence to a framework that currently exists as a set of parallel obligations that rarely intersect in practice.

For schools. School-day phone rules address a real mechanism, including classroom distraction and, in some contexts, peer conflict or the migration of online tensions into the school day. However, their effect depends entirely on whether they are experienced as purposeful and consistently applied. Schools also carry a responsibility that device restrictions alone cannot fulfil, particularly in helping adolescents develop the capacity to interpret, navigate, and seek support around digital risk. Digital literacy should therefore be treated as a protective intervention embedded within the curriculum, and supported through structured, ongoing dialogue, rather than through isolated awareness sessions that some adolescents in the YES discussions described as "boring and cringe." Honest engagement with students about cyberbullying, harmful content, sleep, appear-

ance pressure, AI companions, privacy, platform design, and help-seeking is more likely to produce lasting change than rules imposed without understanding or dialogue.

For families. Early conversation about digital life, including sleep routines, what adolescents encounter online, and how platform design works against disengagement, matters more than monitoring tools, which adolescents consistently describe as intrusive and easy to circumvent. Device-free periods before sleep are among the most actionable household-level protections, directly targeting the sleep pathway the evidence most consistently identifies. Parents who model thoughtful phone use make a measurable difference. Families with fewer resources, lower digital literacy, or less time cannot carry this responsibility alone. Guidance designed for ideal household conditions risks missing the families that need it most. Practical, accessible support rather than information alone is what reaches unequal circumstances.

For platforms. The design features most directly implicated in harm, including persistent notifications, autoplay, recommendation feeds that serve increasingly extreme content, default settings that prioritize engagement over privacy, and advertising systems that profile minors, are within platforms' operational control. Regulatory duties under the DSA, the UK Online Safety Act, and comparable frameworks increasingly require risk assessment and mitigation for these features. Safer default settings for minors, limits on notification frequency and timing, disabling autoplay by default, and making reporting and blocking tools genuinely usable for adolescents are all operational changes that address identified mechanisms. These are conditions under which adolescents can use platforms without platform design systematically working against their wellbeing, and they are increasingly required by law rather than left to voluntary commitment. At the same time, these changes are difficult to implement at scale because they may run counter to platforms' immediate business incentives, particularly where revenue depends on maximizing engagement, attention, and data extraction. Change here will require international collaboration, regulatory coordination, and sustained public pressure rather than isolated voluntary commitments by individual companies.

For health and mental health systems. Digital experiences increasingly appear as a contributing context in adolescent presentations of anxiety, depression, sleep difficulties, body image distress, and social withdrawal. Clinicians and school counselors need practical fluency in how digital environments work, what adolescents actually encounter, and how to discuss digital life without either panic or dismissal. Accessible support when digital experiences become harmful, including clear referral pathways and services that reach beyond urban centers, is part of the same protective infrastructure. Clinical responses should treat digital life as one dimension of adolescent context, interpreted alongside family, peer, school, and developmental circumstances, rather than as an isolated variable to be managed separately.

7.3. The research agenda this synthesis points toward

The structured comparison of claims and recommendations produces not only findings, but a map of where scientific knowledge is most needed and where future investment in research would most directly improve the quality of policy decisions.

Causal inference and longitudinal design. The most frequently endorsed research recommendation across the corpus, appearing in 18 of 32 documents with 47 associated recommendations, is the need for stronger causal and longitudinal designs. Cross-sectional studies cannot determine whether digital engagement precedes changes in mental health

or follows from them. Priority areas for longitudinal investment include the relationship between social comparison exposure and body image outcomes across platform types, the long-term effects of sleep disruption attributable to digital habits rather than pre-existing anxiety, and the developmental trajectory of problematic use patterns from early to late adolescence.

Measurement standardization. Seven documents in the synthesis explicitly recommend developing standardized measurement frameworks for digital exposure, harm outcomes, and functional indicators. Screen time, harmful content, problematic use, and cyberbullying are operationalized differently across studies and jurisdictions, making comparison unreliable and cumulative knowledge difficult to build. The most urgent priorities are: operational definitions for harmful content that are stable enough to be used across studies and contexts; validated instruments for experience-based exposures that move beyond duration as the primary metric; and functional outcome measures, particularly for sleep quality, attentional functioning, and daily recovery.

Platform design effects. The most significant structural gap in the evidence base is the near-absence of rigorous research on the causal contribution of specific platform features to adolescent outcomes. Only 3 of 66 platform-directed recommendations are linked to longitudinal or experimental/quasi-experimental evidence claims. Only 1 of those is also explicitly coded as such in the recommendation-level evidence-link field. The remaining 64 rest on partial evidence or precautionary reasoning. Independent access to platform data is severely limited, and the features themselves change faster than research cycles can accommodate. Addressing this gap requires structured data-sharing arrangements between platforms, regulators, and accredited researchers under privacy-preserving governance conditions, modeled on mechanisms already introduced in the DSA framework but not yet fully operational.

Intervention effectiveness. Of 635 recommendations extracted across the corpus, only 15.1% are explicitly linked to cited evidence. The remaining 84.9% are partially linked or rely on normative, precautionary, or consensus reasoning. Rigorous evaluation of interventions already being implemented, including natural experiment analysis of national policy changes such as school device bans and minimum age rules, represents one of the most immediately available research opportunities. Preregistered evaluation protocols should accompany new policy introductions rather than being added retrospectively.

Subgroup and equity effects. The corpus repeatedly emphasizes heterogeneity: effects vary by age, vulnerability, platform features, household resources, and social context, yet the research base on specific subgroups remains thin. Research priorities include the differential effects of platform design features across developmental stages; how household resources and caregiver capacity moderate or amplify digital risk in ways that interact with policy interventions; the experiences of adolescents with disabilities or neurodevelopmental differences; and how the same protective measures produce different effects across socioeconomic contexts.

The role of AI in adolescent digital life. The 32 documents reviewed for this synthesis were published between 2017 and 2026, and the most recent reflect a field only beginning to grapple with how conversational AI tools are entering adolescent daily life. The YES dialogue sessions across Greek cities also highlighted this emerging terrain, particularly in relation to the growing use of AI tools in schoolwork, information-seeking, emotional support, and everyday interaction. At the same time, several discussions reflected scepticism, distance, or limited engagement with such tools, pointing to a more uneven and ambivalent relationship with AI in adolescent everyday

life. Questions surrounding the relationship between AI use, social development, loneliness, emotional support, and help-seeking remain important and still underexplored, with potentially significant policy implications. Through its active youth engagement infrastructure, Greece is well-positioned to contribute valuable early insight into how these dynamics are experienced and negotiated by adolescents themselves.

Governance effectiveness research. A distinct gap exists at the policy level itself. There is almost no rigorous research on whether regulatory frameworks actually change platform behavior and reduce adolescent exposure to harm. Regulatory transparency, enforcement actions, and audit findings are increasingly available as data in jurisdictions operating under the DSA and UK Online Safety Act frameworks. Using these data to build a comparative evidence base on what types of governance design produce measurable changes in platform behavior would close a gap that is currently invisible to the corpus: the distance between enacting a law and adolescents experiencing less harm.

A global research agenda for the field. The research priorities identified in this report align with those reached through a structured international consensus process conducted by Orygen in 2026. Using a real-time Delphi method engaging interdisciplinary professionals and young people across world regions, La Sala and colleagues identified causal and longitudinal research, measurement of specific digital experiences and platform features, population diversity, and research independence from industry as the highest-priority areas for advancing the field (La Sala et al., 2026). Their findings reinforce the central methodological argument of this report: that progress requires moving beyond aggregate screen time toward the specific mechanisms, exposures, and design conditions through which digital environments affect mental health, and that global and youth perspectives must be embedded in that research from the outset.

Government-science partnerships. Several of the gaps identified above cannot be closed by academic research alone. The most productive model involves formal partnerships between government and research institutions, modeled on approaches already visible in Australia's eSafety research programme, the relationship between Ofcom and accredited researchers in the UK, and the EU's DSA researcher access provisions. Greece, operating within the EU framework and with an active child and adolescent mental health research infrastructure through CAMHI, is positioned to contribute to this agenda. Formal data-sharing agreements between EETT, the Hellenic Data Protection Authority, and research institutions would represent a concrete first step.

7.4. Youth engagement as policy infrastructure

This report has drawn on youth dialogue sessions conducted across five Greek cities through the YES programme within CAMHI. Throughout the report, insights from these discussions were used selectively as a complementary qualitative layer alongside the broader evidence synthesis. Rather than functioning as stand-alone evidence, they helped contextualize how adolescents themselves experience digital environments, interpret risk, respond to restrictions, and navigate the social and emotional realities of online life.

Across the discussions, social media emerged as a complex social environment deeply embedded in adolescents' everyday lives, shaping communication, social participation, emotional experience, and everyday routines. The discussions repeatedly pointed to the importance of context, peer dynamics, emotional state, and platform design in shaping digital experiences, while also highlighting concerns linked to compulsive use, emotional strain, online conflict, and broader forms of psychological

overstimulation. They also revealed persistent scepticism toward restrictive measures perceived as overly punitive, easily bypassed, or disconnected from the realities of contemporary digital culture.

Many of the themes emerging from these discussions sit at the center of current international policy and regulatory debates examined throughout this report. Questions around sleep disruption, algorithmic amplification, harmful content exposure, compulsive design, age assurance, school-device restrictions, parental mediation, and the emotional role digital environments can play in adolescents' lives are all issues shaping contemporary governance responses internationally. The YES discussions demonstrated how these policy questions are experienced in practice by adolescents themselves, while also highlighting the tensions, trade-offs, and unintended consequences that can emerge when interventions are designed without sufficient attention to everyday social realities. Discussions around schools and families were especially revealing in this regard, illustrating both the continued importance of these institutions and the limits of approaches experienced as overly formalistic, inconsistent, punitive, or disconnected from rapidly evolving digital environments.

More broadly, the YES programme demonstrates that meaningful youth engagement should not be treated as an optional consultative layer added only after policy questions and interventions have already been defined. The development of effective adolescent digital strategies and protections requires structured processes and spaces through which adolescents themselves can participate, reflect, disagree, and articulate how digital environments are experienced in everyday life. Integrating these perspectives into the analytical process from the outset is therefore not simply a participatory gesture, but part of the conditions for building policies that remain connected to the social realities they seek to address.

At the same time, adolescents' accounts of their experiences should be treated as indispensable but not dispositive evidence in policy analysis. Their perspectives are especially valuable because they identify which issues are salient to those directly affected, reveal forms of harm or benefit that may be invisible to adults, and help ensure that protective measures are designed in relation to actual digital lives rather than in abstraction from them. The methodological value of this input is not, however, the same as normative authority. The fact that adolescents report valuing, enjoying, or depending on a particular practice does not by itself establish that the practice ought to be encouraged, expanded, or treated as a policy objective.

This distinction matters particularly where the relevant practice may itself arise from conditions of vulnerability or absent support. When a teenager describes finding comfort in AI companionship because peer relationships feel unavailable or unsafe, that testimony is analytically significant: it points to a real need for connection, emotional support, and belonging. The appropriate policy response is one that addresses the conditions producing that need, including failures in social, educational, familial, or mental health support structures, rather than one that treats the coping mechanism as the objective. Taking adolescent voices seriously means attending carefully to what their experiences reveal about the conditions shaping their lives, not only to the surface content of their preferences.

7.5. Closing argument

The evidence reviewed here is sufficient to support action across several domains. Greece now faces a question of design: how to act proportionately on the strongest evidence, how to coordinate the institutions that share responsibility, and how to monitor whether interventions reduce harm, displace it, or create new burdens elsewhere. A govern-

ing principle follows directly from the analysis: doing no harm does not mean doing nothing. The status quo already distributes risks and benefits in particular and often unequal ways, and delay has costs that fall disproportionately on the most vulnerable adolescents.

The policy task is layered across time. In the short term, the most immediately available measures, including school-day phone restrictions and age-based social media access rules, are imperfect instruments that address real mechanisms and may be necessary to limit harm while the more consequential governance architecture is built. Their limitations are real and should be acknowledged rather than obscured: they do not reach the platform conditions where most of the risk is generated, and their effectiveness depends heavily on credible enforcement and careful design. Treating them as a starting point, accompanied from the outset by evaluation and a clear plan for what follows, is defensible.

In the medium term, the work is capacity-building: embedding digital literacy in schools as a substantive curriculum intervention, designing accessible guidance for families that reaches those with fewer resources, developing clinical competence in digital environments, and enforcing existing legal obligations under the DSA and GDPR in ways that produce visible change in platform practice. These are the measures through which any strategy becomes real.

In the long term, structural change at the platform level is where the evidence most clearly locates leverage. Addressing the design conditions under which harm is generated, through risk assessment duties, safer defaults, limits on engagement-maximizing features, and meaningful accountability for the largest platforms, requires regulatory capacity, international coordination, and sustained political commitment over years rather than months. Building that capacity is itself a policy priority.

Every policy instrument assigns responsibility. A school-phone rule gives ministries, school leaders, and teachers responsibility for the supervised environment of the school day. Age-assurance systems distribute responsibility across government, platforms, regulators, identity infrastructures, families, and adolescents themselves. Platform-design duties place responsibility on services that control recommender systems, default settings, reporting tools, advertising practices, and data flows. Family guidance asks households to manage daily routines, yet its effectiveness depends on resources, digital literacy, trust, and the wider platform environment. The most visible intervention may have limited leverage over the mechanism that produces harm. A defensible policy position should therefore identify the risk pathway, the actor with operational control, the trade-off being accepted, and the institution accountable for implementation.

Greece has the legal architecture in place. The DSA, the GDPR, Law 4624/2019, Law 4779/2021, and Ministerial Decision 102791/GD4/2024 together constitute a framework that most jurisdictions are still working toward. What that framework requires now is institutional coordination and practical application. School-day phone restrictions need to be experienced as purposeful and consistently enforced. Age-based access restrictions, if pursued, should be accompanied by rigorous evaluation and treated as one layer within a wider system. The question of whether the current distribution of supervisory responsibilities across multiple authorities can provide the integrated oversight that adolescent digital governance requires, or whether a dedicated coordinating mechanism is needed, deserves a direct and practical answer rather than continued deferral.

Education systems carry responsibilities that go beyond restriction. Digital literacy should be treated as a protective intervention. Greek schools need structured, age-appropriate dialogue with students about cyberbullying, harmful content, sleep, appearance-based

comparison, AI companions, privacy, platform design, and where to seek help. The kind of engagement YES participants described wanting belongs at the center of the strategy.

Equity considerations require explicit attention at every stage. The same digital restrictions that protect most adolescents may remove access to connection, learning, and support for those who depend on digital environments most. Parent support should be designed for unequal resources, unequal digital literacy, and unequal access to services. Mental health systems need to be equipped to respond when digital experiences contribute to distress, with services accessible across socioeconomic and geographic contexts rather than concentrated in urban centers.

Youth engagement should be a structural feature of how policy in this area is developed and evaluated. The YES programme has demonstrated that structured dialogue with adolescents produces analytically valuable material that the international evidence base alone cannot provide. Maintaining and expanding that infrastructure is one of the most cost-effective investments available.

The evidence base itself requires comparable investment. Longitudinal designs, standardized measurement frameworks, structured data-sharing arrangements between platforms and researchers, and preregistered evaluation of policy interventions already underway are the priorities the research agenda most clearly points toward. Forthcoming epidemiological work from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Global Center for Child and Adolescent Mental Health at the Child Mind Institute will add important evidence on the Greek context specifically, and its findings should be integrated into the monitoring and evaluation of the policy responses this report discusses.

The evidence will remain imperfect, as it always does when technology, adolescence, and commercial systems evolve faster than research. That imperfection calls for disciplined action: mechanisms over slogans, safeguards over delay, coordination over fragmentation, and evaluation over assumption. Greece has the legal tools, emerging research capacity, and growing experience in youth engagement to act responsibly. The teenagers who sat in those rooms across five Greek cities were asking for protection that is consistent, honest, and built on how digital life actually works. That is a reasonable standard. The evidence is sufficient to begin meeting it.

References

Age Check Certification Scheme. (2025). *Age assurance technology trial: Final report*. Australian Government, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.

Allcott, H., Braghieri, L., Eichmeyer, S., & Gentzkow, M. (2020). The welfare effects of social media. *American Economic Review, 110*(3), 629–676. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20190658

Alonzo, R., Hussain, J., Stranges, S., & Anderson, K. K. (2021). Interplay between social media use, sleep quality, and mental health in youth: A systematic review. *Sleep Medicine Reviews, 56*, 101414. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smrv.2020.101414

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2026). Digital ecosystems, children, and adolescents: Policy statement. *Pediatrics, 157*(2), e2025075320. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2025-075320

American Psychological Association. (2023). *Health advisory on social media use in adolescence*.

Baldini, V., et al. (2024). Association between sleep disturbances and suicidal behavior in adolescents: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Frontiers in Psychiatry. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2024.1341686

Bartel, K., Scheeren, R., & Gradisar, M. (2019). Altering adolescents' pre-bedtime phone use to achieve better sleep health. *Health Communication, 34*(4), 456–462. https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2017.1422099

Basta, M., Micheli, K., Koutra, K., Fountoulaki, M., Dafermos, V., Drakaki, M., Faloutsos, K., Soumaki, E., Anagnostopoulos, D., Papadakis, N., & Vgontzas, A. N. (2022). Depression and anxiety symptoms in adolescents and young adults in Greece: Prevalence and associated factors. *Journal of Affective Disorders Reports*, 8, 100334. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadr.2022.100334

Beland, L.-P., & Murphy, R. (2016). Ill communication: Technology, distraction & student performance. *Labour Economics, 41*, 61–76. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2016.04.004

Beneito, P., & Vicente-Chirivella, O. (2022). Banning mobile phones in schools: Evidence from regional-level policies in Spain. *Applied Economic Analysis, 30*(90), 153–175.

Bertoni, E., Centeno, C., & Cachia, R. (2025). *Social media usage and adolescents' mental health in the EU* (JRC141047). European Commission, Joint Research Centre.

Campbell, M., Edwards, E. J., Pennell, D., Poed, S., Lister, V., Gillett-Swan, J., Kelly, A., Zec, D., & Nguyen, T.-A. (2024). Evidence for and against banning mobile phones in schools: A scoping review. *Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools, 34*(3), 242–265. https://doi.org/10.1177/20556365241270394

Canadian Paediatric Society, Digital Health Task Force. (2019). Digital media: Promoting healthy screen use in school-aged children and adolescents. *Paediatrics & Child Health, 24*(6), 402–417. https://doi.org/10.1093/pch/pxz095

Centre for Emerging Technology and Security. (2025). *Age assurance technologies and online safety*. The Alan Turing Institute.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Initiative. (2022). *CAMHI annual report 2022*. CAMHI Greece.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Initiative. (2023). *CAMHI survey, 2023* [Survey dataset].

Chotpitayasunondh, V., & Douglas, K. M. (2018). Measuring phone snubbing behavior: Development and validation of the Generic Scale of Phubbing and the Partner Phubbing Scale. *Computers in Human Behavior, 88*, 9–17. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.06.020

Course-Choi, J., & Hammond, L. (2021). Social media use and adolescent well-being: A narrative review of longitudinal studies. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 24*(4), 223–237. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2020.0020

Dickson, K., Richardson, M., Kwan, I., MacDowall, W., Burchett, H., Stansfield, C., Brunton, G., Sutcliffe, K., & Thomas, J. (2018). *Screen-based activities and children and young people's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing: A systematic map of reviews*. EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, UCL Institute of Education, University College London.

Dyson, M. P., Hartling, L., Shulhan, J., Chisholm, A., Milne, A., Sundar, P., Scott, S. D., & Newton, A. S. (2016). A systematic review of social media use to discuss and view deliberate self-harm acts. *PLOS ONE, 11*(5), e0155813. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0155813

ESPAD Group, & European Union Drugs Agency. (2025). *ESPAD report 2024: Results from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs*. European Union Drugs Agency. https://doi.org/10.2810/3300854

European Commission. (2022). *A digital decade for children and youth: The new European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+)*.

European Commission. (2026). *Special panel on child safety online*. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/panel-child-safety-online

European Commission, Joint Research Centre, European Centre for Algorithmic Transparency. (2025). *European Centre for Algorithmic Transparency roundtables: Minors' health and social media—An interdisciplinary scientific perspective* (JRC141090). Publications Office of the European Union.

Fioravanti, G., Prostamo, A., & Casale, S. (2022). How the exposure to beauty ideals on social networking sites influences body image: A systematic review of experimental studies. *Adolescent Research Review, 7*, 419–458. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-022-00179-4

Frison, E., & Eggermont, S. (2017). Browsing, posting, and liking on Instagram: The reciprocal relationships between different types of Instagram use and adolescents' depressed mood. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 20*(10), 603–609. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2017.0156

Foundation for Research and Technology – Hellas, Greek Safer Internet Centre. (2025). *Panhellenic survey of 2,500 students aged 10–18: Online habits of children and adolescents*.

Godard, R., & Holtzman, S. (2024). Are active and passive social media use related to mental health, well-being, and social support outcomes? A meta-analysis of 141 studies. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 29*(1), zmad055. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmad055

Goldfield, G. S., Lopes, M. V. V., Mahboob, W., Perry, S., & Davis, C. G. (2026). Reducing social media use decreases loneliness regardless of gender or level of social comparisons in youth with anxiety and depression: A randomized controlled trial. Journal of Affective Disorders, 403, 121331. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2026.121331

Goodyear, V., Randhawa, A., Adab, P., Al-Janabi, H., Fenton, S., Jones, K., Michail, M., Morrison, B., Patterson, P., Quinlan, J., Sitch, A., Twardochleb, R., Wade, M., & Pallan, M. (2025). School phone policies and their association with mental wellbeing, phone use, and social media use (SMART Schools): A cross-sectional observational study. *The Lancet Regional Health – Europe*, 101211. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanepe.2025.101211

Gowin, J. L., Stoddard, J., Doykos, T. K., Sammel, M. D., & Bernert, R. A. (2024). Sleep disturbance and subsequent suicidal behaviors in preadolescence. JAMA Network Open, 7(9), e2433734. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.33734

Groupe de Pédiatrie Générale, Société française de pédiatrie. (2018). Children and screens: Groupe de Pédiatrie Générale (Société française de pédiatrie) guidelines for pediatricians and families. *Archives de Pédiatrie, 25*(2), 170–174. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.arcped.2017.12.014

Hales, A. H., Dvir, M., Wesselmann, E. D., Kruger, D. J., & Finkenauer, C. (2018). Cell phone-induced ostracism threatens fundamental needs. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 158*(4), 460–473. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2018.1439877

Hamm, M. P., Newton, A. S., Chisholm, A., Shulhan, J., Milne, A., Sundar, P., Ennis, H., Scott, S. D., & Hartling, L. (2015). Prevalence and effect of cyberbullying on children and young people: A scoping review of social media studies. *JAMA Pediatrics, 169*(8), 770–777. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.0944

Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Greece. (2023). *Adolescents' psychosocial health in Greece: 2022 findings and trends*. University Mental Health, Neurosciences and Precision Medicine Research Institute "Costas Stefanis" (UMHRI).

Holland, G., & Tiggemann, M. (2016). A systematic review of the impact of the use of social networking sites on body image and disordered eating outcomes. *Body Image, 17*, 100–110. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2016.02.008

House of Commons Education Committee. (2025). *Screen time: Impacts on education and wellbeing: Government response* (Third Special Report of Session 2024–25, HC 915). House of Commons.

Hunt, M. G., Marx, R., Lipson, C., & Young, J. (2018). No more FOMO: Limiting social media decreases loneliness and depression. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 37*(10), 751–768. https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2018.37.10.751

Indian Academy of Pediatrics Guideline Committee on Digital Wellness and Screen Time. (2022). Indian Academy of Pediatrics guidelines on screen time and digital wellness in infants, children and adolescents. *Indian Pediatrics, 59*, 235–244. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13312-022-2477-6

Information Accountability Foundation. (2025). *Mind the gap: Understanding age verification and assurance*.

Jensen, M., George, M. J., Russell, M. R., & Odgers, C. L. (2019). Young adolescents' digital technology use and mental health symptoms: Little evidence of longitudinal or daily linkages. *Clinical Psychological Science, 7*(6), 1416–1433. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702619859336

Keles, B., McCrae, N., & Grealish, A. (2020). A systematic review: The influence of social media on depression, anxiety and psychological distress in adolescents. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 25*(1), 79–93. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2019.1590851

Kostyrka-Allchorne, K., Stoilova, M., Bourgaize, J., Rahali, M., Livingstone, S., & Sonuga-Barke, E. (2023). Review: Digital experiences and their impact on the lives of adolescents with pre-existing anxiety, depression, eating and nonsuicidal self-injury conditions—A systematic review. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 28*(1), 22–32. https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12619

Koumoula, A., Marchionatti, L. E., Karagiorga, V. E., Schafer, J. L., Simioni, A., Caye, A., Serdari, A., Kotsis, K., Basta, M., Athanasopoulou, L., Dafoulis, V., Tatsiopoulou, P., Zilikis, N., Vergouli, E., Balikou, P., Kapsimalli, E., Mitropoulou, A., Tzotzi, A., Klavdianou, N., Zeleni, D., Mitroulaki, S., Botzaki, A., Gerostergios, G., Samiotakis, G., Moschos, G., Giannopoulou, I., Papanikolaou, K., Angeli, K., Scar-

meas, N., Emanuele, J., Schuster, K., Karyotaki, E., Kalikow, L., Pronoiti, K., Merikangas, K. R., Szatmari, P., Cuijpers, P., Georgiades, K., Milham, M. P., Corcoran, M., Burke, S., Koplewicz, H., & Salum, G. A. (2024). Understanding priorities and needs for child and adolescent mental health in Greece from multiple informants: An open resource dataset. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 33*(10), 3649–3665. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-024-02400-2

La Sala, L., Bailey, E., Branjerdporn, N., Rohde, L., Lindenberg, K., Torous, J., & Robinson, J. (2026). *Digital environments and youth mental health: A global research agenda*. Orygen.

Leimonis, E., & Koutra, K. (2022). Social media use and mental health in young adults of Greece: A cross-sectional study. *Clinical Psychology in Europe*, 4(2), Article e4621. https://doi.org/10.32872/cpe.4621

Maheux, A. J., Roberts, S. R., Nesi, J., Widman, L., & Choukas-Bradley, S. (2022). Longitudinal associations between appearance-related social media consciousness and adolescents' depressive symptoms. *Journal of Adolescence, 94*(2), 264–269. https://doi.org/10.1002/jad.12009

Misra, S., Cheng, L., Genevie, J., & Yuan, M. (2016). The iPhone effect: The quality of in-person social interactions in the presence of mobile devices. *Environment and Behavior, 48*(2), 275–298. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916514539755

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2024). *Social media and adolescent health*. The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/27396

Nesi, J., & Prinstein, M. J. (2015). Using social media for social comparison and feedback-seeking: Gender and popularity moderate associations with depressive symptoms. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 43*(8), 1427–1438. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-015-0020-0

O'Neill, B. (2023). *The influence of social media on the development of children and young people* (PE 733.109). European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies.

O'Reilly, M., Levine, D., Donoso, V., Voice, L., Hughes, J., & Dogra, N. (2023). Exploring the potentially positive interaction between social media and mental health: The perspectives of adolescents. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 28*(2), 668–682. https://doi.org/10.1177/13591045221106573

Office of the U.S. Surgeon General. (2023). *Social media and youth mental health: The U.S. Surgeon General's advisory*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Orben, A., & Przybylski, A. K. (2019). The association between adolescent well-being and digital technology use. *Nature Human Behaviour, 3*, 173–182. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0506-1

Orben, A., Meier, A., Dalgleish, T., & Blakemore, S.-J. (2024). Mechanisms linking social media use to adolescent mental health vulnerability. *Nature Reviews Psychology, 3*, 407–423.

Orben, A., Przybylski, A. K., Blakemore, S.-J., & Kievit, R. A. (2022). Windows of developmental sensitivity to social media. *Nature Communications, 13*, 1649. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-022-29296-3

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2018). *Children and young people's mental health in the digital age: Shaping the future*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/488b25e0-en

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2024). *Students, digital devices and success* (OECD Education Policy Perspectives No. 102). OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/9e4c0624-en

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2025a). *Finite time to learn and play: Whole student development and students' digital leisure outside of school* (OECD Education Policy Perspectives No. 130). OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/edbaa4bb-en

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2025b). *How's life for children in the digital age?* OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/0854b900-en

Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology. (2020). *Screen use and health in young people* (POSTnote 635). UK Parliament.

Parry, D. A., Davidson, B. I., Sewall, C. J. R., Fisher, J. T., Mieczkowski, H., & Quintana, D. S. (2021). A systematic review and meta-analysis of discrepancies between logged and self-reported digital media use. *Nature Human Behaviour, 5*, 1535–1547. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01117-5

Perrault, A. A., Bayer, L., Peuvrier, M., Afyouni, A., Ghisletta, P., Brockmann, C., Spiridon, M., Hulo Vesely, S., Haller, D. M., Pichon, S., Perrig, S., Schwartz, S., & Sterpenich, V. (2019). Reducing the use of screen electronic devices in the evening is associated with improved sleep and daytime vigilance in adolescents. *Sleep, 42*(9), zsz125. https://doi.org/10.1093/sleep/zsz125

Prospira Global. (2026). *Child & adolescent mental health and digital technology: Ecosystem landscape* (Landscape & recommendations report).

Przybylski, A. K., & Weinstein, N. (2013). Can you connect with me now? How the presence of mobile communication technology influences face-to-face conversation quality. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 30*(3), 237–246. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407512453827

Rau, T. (2025). *Mobile devices and children's development: The case for school restrictions* (IDB Working Paper No. 1758). Inter-American Development Bank. https://doi.org/10.18235/0013745

Royal Australasian College of Physicians. (2025). *Social media: Children/tamariki and young people/rangatahi* (Position statement).

Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. (2018). *The impact of media and digital technology on children and adolescents*.

Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. (2019). *The health impacts of screen time: A guide for clinicians and parents*.

Royal College of Psychiatrists. (2020). *Technology use and the mental health of children and young people* (College Report CR225).

Royal Society for Public Health, & Young Health Movement. (2017). *#StatusOfMind: Social media and young people's mental health and wellbeing*.

Sociedade Brasileira de Pediatria. (2019). *#Menos telas, mais saúde: Manual de orientação* [#Less screens, more health: Guidance manual].

Stoilova, M., Livingstone, S., & Khazbak, R. (2021). *Investigating risks and opportunities for children in a digital world: A rapid review of the evidence on children's internet use and outcomes* (Innocenti Discussion Paper 2020-03). UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.

Susi, K., Glover-Ford, F., Stewart, A., Knowles Bevis, R., & Hawton, K. (2023). Research review: Viewing self-harm images on the internet and social media platforms: Systematic review of the impact and associated psychological mechanisms. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 64*(8), 1115–1139. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13754

Turel, O., Cavagnaro, D. R., & Meshi, D. (2018). Short abstinence from online social networking sites reduces perceived stress, especially in excessive users. Psychiatry Research, 270, 947–953. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2018.11.017

United Nations Children's Fund. (2017). *The state of the world's children 2017: Children in a digital world*.

United Nations Children's Fund. (2025). *Drawing a line in digital spaces: Age-based restriction of social media*.

United Nations Children's Fund. (2026). *Taking stock of current and proposed age-based restrictions for social media: Rapid analysis*.

United Nations Children's Fund, Office of Research – Innocenti. (2025). *Childhood in a digital world: Screen time, skills and mental health*.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2023). *Guidelines for the governance of digital platforms: Safeguarding freedom of expression and access to information in a multistakeholder approach*.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2026, March 19). *Phone bans in schools are spreading worldwide as the policy debate rages*. Global Education Monitoring Report.

Verduyn, P., Gugushvili, N., & Kross, E. (2022). Do social networking sites influence well-being? The extended active-passive model. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 31*(1), 62–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/09637214211053637

Viner, R. M., Aswathikutty-Gireesh, A., Stiglic, N., Hudson, L., Goddings, A.-L., Ward, J. L., & Nicholls, D. E. (2019). Roles of cyberbullying, sleep, and physical activity in mediating the effects of social media use on mental health and well-being among young people in England: A secondary analysis of longitudinal data. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health, 3*(10), 685–696. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(19)30186-5

Vissenberg, J., d'Haenens, L., & Livingstone, S. (2022). Digital literacy and online resilience as facilitators of young people's well-being? A systematic review. *European Psychologist, 27*(2), 76–85. https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000478

Werling, A. M., Kuzhippallil, S., Emery, S., Walitza, S., & Drechsler, R. (2022). Problematic use of digital media in children and adolescents with a diagnosis of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder compared to controls: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Behavioral Addictions, 11*(2), 305–325. https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.2022.00007

World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. (2024). *A focus on adolescent social media use and gaming in Europe, central Asia and Canada: Health Behaviour in School-aged Children international report from the 2021/2022 survey* (Vol. 6).

World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. (2025a). *Addressing the digital determinants of youth mental health and well-being: Policy brief*.

World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. (2025b). *Addressing the digital determinants of youth mental health and well-being: Web annex: Findings from an evidence review and policy mapping*.

Ybarra, M. L., Mitchell, K. J., Palmer, N. A., & Reisner, S. L. (2015). Online social support as a buffer against online and offline peer and sexual victimization among U.S. LGBT and non-LGBT youth. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 39*, 123–136. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2014.08.006

Detailed methodological documentation, including the extraction framework, coding materials, and a complete information-source list, is available in the project's Open Science Framework repository, accessible via the QR code below:

Child & Adolescent Mental Health Initiative

Πρωτοβουλία για την Ψυχική Υγεία Παιδιών & Εφήβων

camhi.gr

Διεθνής Πρωτοβουλία για την Υγεία
Global Health Initiative

ΙΣΝ / SNF ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΣΤΑΥΡΟΣ ΝΙΑΡΧΟΣ STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION | επίκεντρο ο άνθρωπος humanity at the core

Child Mind Institute