

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002210/24
to the Commission
Eleonora Meletti (PPE)
(22 October 2024)**

Subject: The urgent need to control children's access to the Internet

Europe is very concerned to be witnessing the ever increasing use of the Internet and social media by children and adolescents. Such use is often linked to addiction problems, mental health issues and aggressive behaviour in the real world. Young people spend a significant amount of time online and are exposed to a plethora of false information and bad role models, leading to increased levels of anxiety, depression and isolation, with worrying consequences for the development of their personality and their healthy mental development.

Countries such as Australia are planning to impose age restrictions on social media use, while others like Belgium and Greece are outlawing the use of mobile phones in schools.

In view of the above:

1. Does the Commission plan on adopting EU-wide measures to restrict children's access to social media, bearing in mind their effects on mental health and the concerns about addiction and violence?
2. How does it intend to boost children's digital education so that they learn from a young age how to protect themselves from the dangers of the Internet, following up also on the new European strategy for a better Internet for kids (BIK+)?

Submitted: 22.10.2024

**Answer given by Executive Vice-President Virkunnen on behalf of the European Commission
(3 January 2025)**

The Commission takes social media's impact on young people's well-being and mental health very seriously. Under the Digital Services Act (DSA) ⁽¹⁾, all online platforms must ensure a high level of privacy, safety, and security for minors.

Moreover, providers of very large online platforms and of very large online search engines must also regularly assess systemic risks stemming from their services, including negative effects to users' mental and physical wellbeing, and effectively mitigate them. The Commission is developing guidelines related to the high level of privacy, security, and safety for minors.

In addition, protecting the mental health of children is addressed by the communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health ⁽²⁾, with the initiative to promote 'healthy screens, healthy youth'.

The Guidelines on well-being and mental health at school ⁽³⁾ offer recommendations to promote wellbeing in the digital age. This is complemented by dedicated funding under Erasmus+ ⁽⁴⁾.

In her political guidelines ⁽⁵⁾, the President of the Commission proposed to launch an EU-wide inquiry on the broader impacts of social media on well-being and develop an action plan against cyberbullying.

The Commission is also committed to strengthening children's digital education by equipping them with the digital skills to navigate the Internet safely and responsibly.

Through the Better Internet for children (BIK+) strategy ⁽⁶⁾, the Commission continues to foster child safety online. The EU co-funded network of Safer Internet Centres ⁽⁷⁾, and the EU BIK platform ⁽⁸⁾, aim to develop awareness campaigns and to provide resources for families in all EU languages.

⁽¹⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R2065>

⁽²⁾ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/european-health-union/comprehensive-approach-mental-health_en

⁽³⁾ <https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/discover/news/guidelines-wellbeing-and-mental-health-school>

⁽⁴⁾ For grassroots projects under the Erasmus+ Annual Work Programme (2024).

⁽⁵⁾ https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/towards-new-commission-2024-2029_en

⁽⁶⁾ A Digital Decade for children and youth: the new European strategy for a better Internet for kids (BIK+) COM(2022) 212 final.

⁽⁷⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/safer-Internet-centres>

⁽⁸⁾ <https://better-Internet-for-kids.europa.eu>

Digital skills and competences are also further strengthened under the Digital Education Action Plan ⁽⁹⁾.

⁽⁹⁾ Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027), <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan>, e.g. Guidelines for teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy which aim to ensure learners are aware of both the risk and opportunities of the Internet, <https://education.ec.europa.eu/news/guidelines-for-teachers-and-educators-on-tackling-disinformation-and-promoting-digital-literacy-through-education-and-training>