

Together for a Better and Safer Internet

Report on the Child and Youth Participation
by the Expert Commission on “Protecting
Children and Young People in the Digital World”



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World

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1 | Management Summary

Usage patterns and experiences reported by the children and young people involved reflect the representative picture of 12- to 19-year-olds in Germany described by the JIM Study 2025. Their needs, expressed in a total of 70 recommendations in the following report, cover a broad spectrum. They reveal a tension between a clearly articulated need for protection and the desire for reliable and competent persons to talk to on the one hand, and an equally clearly expressed need for autonomy and the desire for empowerment and self-regulation on the other. They attribute improvements in individual skills, opportunities for social interaction, relaxation and entertainment to the use of digital services, having a positive impact on young people's well-being and self-esteem.

For 12- to 17-year-olds, schools and teachers play a crucial role in developing the skills needed to navigate the digital environment. With regard to younger children, they suggest exposure to digital media and teaching of basic digital competencies should begin as early as preschool. To help them cope with the challenges they face in the digital environment, children are looking for adults in both educational institutions and the family environment having the necessary knowledge and showing empathy and an understanding of the significance the digital environment has for young people. The extent to which children and adolescents view their parents as fulfilling this role also depends on the family's educational background and socioeconomic status. Young people growing up in more disadvantaged environments should be regarded as particularly vulnerable, not least because they often lack adequate support within the family.

The children and adolescents taking part place responsibility for ensuring a safe and age-appropriate digital environment primarily on platform providers. They have concrete suggestions how potential harms can be reduced and risks avoided. These are reflected in particular in recommendations 1 and 2, 14, 18–25, 27–34, 36–38, 40–43, 50–54, and 66–68, many of which are aligned with the guidelines according to Article 28 (4) of the Digital Services Act. At the same time, they want to be involved in shaping the digital environment and to have greater control over their own online experiences.

Regarding possible bans on social media use for certain age groups, the participants are, overall, cautious and critical. In their view, the priority should be to enable young people to use digital services and to educate them about potential risks. In their opinion bans would more likely increase the appeal of using risky services than help to achieve the desired protective effect.

2 | Objectives of the Participation Process

Effective and sustainable youth protection in child and youth policy requires reflection on and consideration of the perspectives and opinions of young people. Their experiences, insights, and conclusions are essential to ensuring that necessary protections and intended provisions align with the needs and lived realities of young people. Furthermore, it may be assumed that regulations are more likely to gain acceptance and be complied with by young people if they can relate them to their own concerns and needs. Gathering the views of young people, preparing them for analysis, and making them available for consideration in discussions concerning matters that affect them also serves to implement Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Accordingly, the youth participation component of the project “Child Protection and Children’s Rights in the Digital World” supports the work of the expert commission initiated by the German Federal Ministry for Education, Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMBFSFJ).

Current debates taking place at national, European, and international level in both society and politics call for stronger efforts to protect young people in the digital environment. They also address the impact of digital technologies on the mental health of children and adolescents, new challenges associated with artificial intelligence, and the related need for a modern framework to strengthen media literacy among both children and adults.

Against this backdrop, in October 2025 the Digital Opportunities Foundation (Stiftung Digitale Chancen) applied to the BMBFSFJ for funding to organize, conduct, and evaluate five child- and youth-centered workshops involving participants aged 12 to 17. The workshops were carried out in cooperation with youth welfare organizations at various cities across Germany. The implementation of the project started in November 2025. The Foundation hereby presents its report on the findings generated through this participation process.

3 | Methodological Approach

The methodological framework for the workshops involving children and young people developed in November 2025 was primarily based on the Model of Participation developed by Laura Lundy, as well as the General Quality Standards for the Participation of Children and Young People (Allgemeine Qualitätsstandards für die Beteiligung von Kindern und Jugendlichen des Bundesfamilienministeriums sowie des Deutschen Bundesjugendrings) published in 2023 by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs and the German Federal Youth Council.

The objective was to create a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment in which children and young people are recognized as experts in their own lives and enabled to actively contribute their experiences, perspectives, and opinions (BMFSFJ/DBJR, 2023, pp. 9 and 21).

A positive participatory environment, clear guidelines for respectful interaction, and active facilitation were intended to ensure all participants were able to contribute. Key elements included a

respectful and appreciative space, dialogue on equal terms, and the professional distance maintained by the facilitators. Emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation was a key safeguarding measure (BMFSFJ/DBJR, 2023, p. 97).

Additionally, the Foundation's child protection policy requirements were implemented and communicated to the attending children, young people, and their parents or legal guardians.

Transparency was another constitutional element of the participation process (BMFSFJ/DBJR, 2023, p. 37). Accordingly, participants were comprehensively informed about the objectives, background, and opportunities to have an impact within the participation process. Also, direct interaction with members of the expert commission was considered essential, ensuring that the views of children and young people were not only provided with space, voice, and an audience, but also – consistent with the Lundy model – to give them the opportunity to exert direct influence. Participants were further informed that the findings from the workshops would be incorporated into the expert commission's ongoing consultation and decision-making processes (BMFSFJ/DBJR, 2023, p. 116).

Quality assurance was performed through continuous formal evaluation and adaption of the findings to further workshops. Feedback from participants was used to review and, where necessary, modify the workshop formats (BMFSFJ/DBJR, 2023, p. 116). In addition, the protection of personal data was consistently guaranteed. Data protection and child safeguarding requirements were upheld without restricting opportunities for participation (BMFSFJ/DBJR, 2023, p. 38).

To meet these standards, the following premises of the workshop concept were defined:

- Provision of information on the objectives and the remit of the Expert Commission, children's rights in the digital environment, and further opportunities for participation in this area, (BMFSFJ/DBJR, 2023, pp. 34–35, 116),
- use of a variety of methods and an appropriate timeframe to take account of the participants' individuality and their experiences (BMFSFJ/DBJR, 2023, p. 34),
- scenario based work in small groups to protect children and young people, encourage them to form their own opinions and promote their well-being,
- ensuring that workshop results are comparable, and
- provision of the opportunity to hold discussions with representatives of the expert commission, and joint documentation and reflection on the participants' ideas, wishes and recommendations.

Children and young people were involved at an early stage and took part also in the co-design of the workshops' content and methodology. To this end, a workshop was held in Berlin on November 22, 2025 as part of the nationwide conference „Blick zurück und nach vorn“ (“Looking Back and Forward.”). This workshop served both to collect young people's experiences in the digital environment and to pilot the workshop concept in practice as well as to assessing it for potential options of improvement (BMFSFJ/DBJR, 2023, p. 51). A total of 21 young people aged 16 and above participated in the event at the Federal Ministry for Youth Affairs.

Based on the youths' online experiences collected, and taking into account the risk phenomena described in the so-called Risk Atlas (Gefährdungsatlas) published by the Federal Agency for the Protection of Children and Young People in the Media (BzKJ, 2022, p. 102 ff.), scenarios were developed for discussion in the participatory workshops.

Subsequently, the aggregated case studies were reviewed in a further participatory phase with young advisory board members of the Federal Agency for the Protection of Children and Young People in the Media on 20 January 2026, with regard to authenticity, plausibility and comprehensibility. The questionnaires used in the workshops were also discussed with the young people in this context.

The structure and content of the participation workshops were based on the four thematic areas underpinning the Expert Commission's remit: media literacy, child protection and safety, wellbeing and mental health, and artificial intelligence. The prototype structure of a workshop comprised the following phases.

Duration	Content
	Phase 1: Information
40 min	Arrival Introduction, getting to know each other, purpose of the workshop, warm-up, overview of the day
20 min	Thematic input UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 25, JIM Study
15 min	Break
	Phase 2: Participants' perspectives
30 min	First interaction phase Self-assessment and reflection
60 min	Second interaction phase Scenario based work
30 min	Break
	Phase 3: Transfer
60 min	Discussion with the expert commission Moderated discussion
15 min	Closing Further participation opportunities, feedback, certificates, thank-you remarks

The workshop results were documented using both textual and visual methods. Notes recorded on posters and flip charts were photographed and supplemented with descriptive and explanatory text. In addition, comprehensive written notes were taken on the issues and problems encountered, as well as on the wishes and recommendations from the children and young people. The workshop reports have been submitted to the expert commission on an ongoing basis.

This final report summarises the findings of all the workshops held in the framework of the child participation process. It sets out the views, wishes and recommendations from the children and young people involved, provides a statistical overview of the participants and the geographical locations of the workshops, and concludes by analyzing the findings from an academic perspective.

4 | Results

The following section summarises the results of the workshops, focusing in particular on the ideas, suggestions, wishes and recommendations from the young participants across the four thematic areas of ‘media literacy’, ‘child protection and safety’, ‘well-being and mental health’ and ‘artificial intelligence’. The findings derived from this, together with their contextualisation within the current research literature, are presented in Chapter 5 of this report.

4.1 Media Literacy

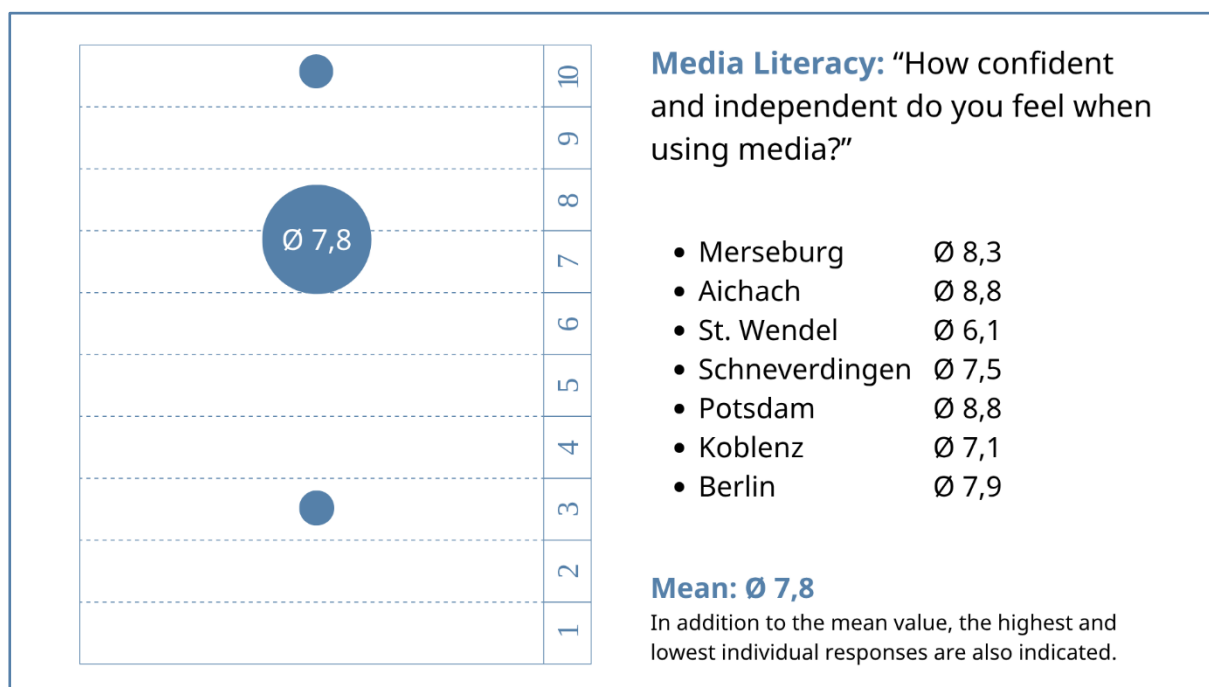


Throughout the workshops, media literacy was defined as the ability to use and navigate digital services, such as social media and gaming platforms, and operate hardware, including computers, game consoles, smartphones, and tablets. The discussions addressed self-assessments of competencies as well as questions regarding the type and extent of acquisition of skills in formal, non-formal, and informal educational settings.

In their self-assessment using a scale from 0 (no literacy at all) to 10 (very high literacy), participants generally placed themselves in the more literate range. This indicates that they largely consider themselves capable of independently navigating the digital environment and operating the necessary devices.

Nevertheless, they also identified challenges and critical situations. The following section outlines how these challenges should be addressed from the perspective of children and young people.

Figure 1: Participants’ self-assessment of their media literacy skills in the workshop



4.1.1 Protection

The children and adolescents involved criticise the complexity of rules in the context of using digital services, as well as the often hard to understand language used by platform and app providers. In particular, regarding data protection, they complain about complicated settings and suspect that these are intentionally designed against their interests.

They therefore demand that information and guidance on how to use a service be phrased in clear language easily understandable for children and adolescents as well as neutral settings to protect their data and privacy. Manipulative practices by providers (dark patterns) are to be eliminated.

Rec. 1: Use of child-friendly language in digital services

Rec. 2: Neutral settings without interference by service provider

They encounter similar difficulties with undefined terminology. For example, participants are unclear about what constitutes harassment and how it can be distinguished from behaviour that is still acceptable. They request clarification that provides orientation, enabling them to assess when reporting a comment, image, or person to a provider is justified.

From the perspective of the young participants, the concept of harassment should be defined in legislation that also establishes concrete measures for protection against online harassment.

Rec. 3: Definition of the term 'harassment' in the digital environment

Rec. 4: Legislation to protect against online harassment

Across all workshops, the desire for school lessons teaching how to navigate the digital environment safely was central (see also 4.1.2 Provision). In this context, the children and adolescents repeatedly stated they see schools as responsible for protecting them from harmful and inappropriate content, and complained being exposed to unwanted content and imagery during lessons sometimes.

They therefore demand school-issued devices be equipped with standardised rights, preconfigured privacy settings, and activated protective functions before being handed out to students. These settings should not be circumventable by students. Notwithstanding this, participants recommend to refrain from using digital devices in primary schools and claim instead engaging and varied forms of teaching.

Rec. 5: Activated safety measures on school devices

Raising awareness for informed and safe media use should be part of regular medical check-ups for children, the participants suggest, where parents and children could be informed about problematic behavioural patterns, and be made aware of available support services.

Rec. 6: Addressing children's media usage in preventive medical check-ups

The issues of age verification and restrictions on usage times have also been discussed repeatedly and in depth in the context of media literacy. Both topics are covered in detail in this report in the section on child protection under 4.2.1.

4.1.2 Provision

Across all workshops, participants expressed support for comprehensive, early, and continuous education and support in acquiring digital literacy in schools. Some children suggest that digital literacy education should begin as early as in kindergarten. They want to learn how algorithms work, how to manage their own smartphone use, how to use reporting mechanisms, and where to get support and help in case of negative or critical experiences. Current issues should be addressed on a case-by-case basis, they say.

Some participants argue digital literacy education should be mandatory in school curricula, while others advocate for implementation through workshops, project days, or voluntary forms such as extracurricular clubs. Until teachers are sufficiently qualified for these tasks, external experts should take over these responsibilities in order to ensure the timely provision of digital literacy education. Such experts could also provide ongoing support to teaching staff.

In addition to digital literacy education, participants suggest to establish media consultation hours in schools, offering students timely, low-threshold advice and support for specific challenges. They also suggest peer-to-peer schemes where young people can inform, advise, and support each other. Dedicated funds should be provided for the implementation of such measures and funding of external experts.

Rec. 7: Establish digital literacy education in schools

Rec. 8: Offer consultation hours on digital media usage in schools

Rec. 9: Establish peer-to-peer support schemes in schools

Rec. 10: Funding to promote digital literacy education in schools

Regardless of the recommendations above, participants across all workshops emphasized the importance being able to turn to competent contact persons they can confide in when it comes to their media usage and experiences, potential challenges or risks in the digital environment. Depending on individual preferences, these may include parents or other family members, trusted teachers, school-based educational staff, social workers, subject-matter specialists, or other persons.

It is particularly important to children and adolescents that these individuals understand young people's experiences in the digital environment are open minded, showing empathy, and a constructive, solution-oriented attitude when supporting them. Adults who primarily focus on restrictions, limitations, or prohibitions and do not show comprehension of young people's usage practices would not be perceived or accepted as suitable contact persons.

Rec 11: Competent adult contact persons

To fulfill their demand for competent adult contact persons, children and adolescents suggest to provide digital literacy programmes, information, awareness-raising, and exchange formats for all age groups. Participants would like to see greater awareness among parents, teachers, and other caregivers in regard of “online safety” with the objective to ensure these individuals are capable of providing meaningful support to children and adolescents.

In particular, teachers should take part in trainings on a regular basis so they can effectively implement digital literacy education in school lessons and remain informed about current trends and risks. For parents and other family members digital literacy trainings should be provided preferably outside school settings, promoting exchange among parents. It should be taken into account that such programmes must be attractive and low-threshold in order to reach adults with little prior knowledge as well as those currently not interested.

Rec 12: Qualification and regular digital literacy training for teachers

Rec 13: Information and awareness programmes for parents

4.1.3 Participation

In the context of the previously described need for clarification regarding the concept of harassment and the children’s demand for legally establishing preventive and protective measures, participants also expressed their wish for a simple, anonymous, and rapid procedure to report online harassment directly to platform providers. Such a system should be available at all times, being separate from already existing reporting mechanisms.

Rec 14: Introduction of a “harassment button”

Similarly, participants across several workshops called for simpler reporting systems in general. Suggestions and ideas in this regard are presented in more detail in the child protection section (4.2.3).

Beyond options to get in contact with platform providers, children and adolescents also want more opportunities to participate in shaping their online experiences and digital environments. They demand more control over which content and recommendations they see and which they can avoid (see also 4.2.3).

As regards the use of school devices during lessons, some participants complain that their school has an internet connection that is not powerful enough and/or devices that cannot process the volume of data within a reasonable time. To ensure targeted and effective participation in (digital) lessons, schools therefore need a stable internet connection capable of handling the required data volumes, as well as up-to-date devices.

Rec. 15: Improvement of IT infrastructure and equipment in schools

Participants are calling for meaningful and clear agreements regarding (private) use of digital devices in schools. Rather than imposing a blanket ban on private devices, they advocate for arrangements developed in consultation with young people promoting responsible use of smartphones during the school day.

Rec. 16: Jointly negotiated agreements for the responsible use of smartphones during the school day

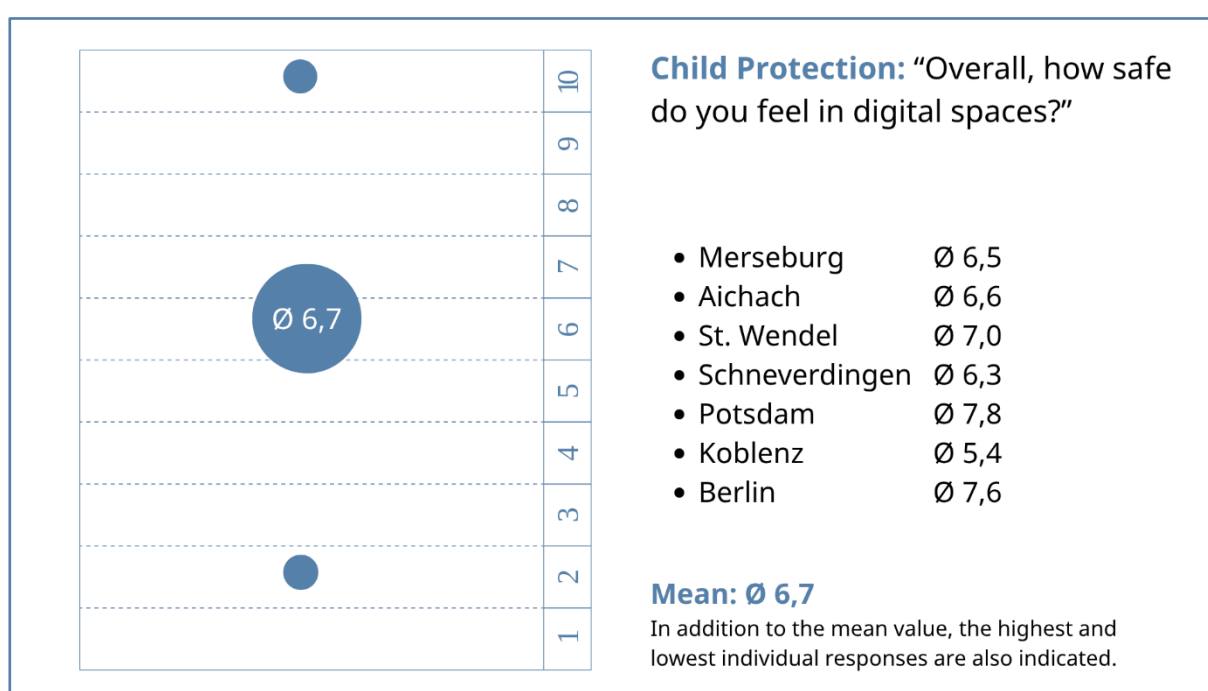
4.2 Child Protection and Safety



In the area of child protection and safety, potential hazards and risks were discussed from the perspective of the children and youths concerned as well as that from their parents and guardians. In addition, known and practiced coping strategies for dealing with these risks were examined.

In the self-assessment based on a scale from 0 (not at all confident) to 10 (very confident), the majority placed themselves in the middle-range thereby indicating a need for (greater) protection in specific areas and for specific functionalities of digital services and platforms. The views and ideas that the participants have developed on this subject are set out below.

Figure 2: Participants' self-assessment of their perceived sense of safety in the workshop



4.2.1 Protection

The participants were unanimous in their view that policymakers should hold platform providers more accountable so that they fulfil their obligations to provide a safe environment for children and young people. They are therefore calling for reported content be reliably reviewed and removed, for user-generated content be more strictly monitored and regulated, for hate speech and fake news to be prevented from going viral, for addictive design features to be disabled, and for algorithms to be designed in such a way that they do not display content unsuitable for children. In the event of breaches, there should be consistent penalties for both users and platform providers, such as fines or the suspension of users. Legislation to this effect could be drafted with the involvement of experts, such as psychologists, to assess the negative effects of hate speech.

When it comes to tackling hate speech in particular, participants would like to see increased and targeted moderation by the platforms in order to combat the denigration and discrimination of people more effectively. They are keen to emphasise that such moderation should not be carried

out solely by artificial intelligence, but also by human moderators. In this context, they propose that AI could be used to prioritise hate speech, with specially trained moderators then being directly assigned serious cases for further action.

Accounts or profiles from which hate speech, insults and/or bullying originate should be subject to warnings and, where appropriate, temporarily suspended. The participants also consider the storage of IP addresses for the purpose of tracing violations to be an effective measure. To ensure that abusive users can be identified using these means and that incidents can be dealt with, each person should in future be permitted to hold only one account or profile per platform. Otherwise, measures and sanctions targeting a particular account would be ineffective, as users could continue to cause harm on the platform via a second or third account.

Rec. 17: Stronger action by platforms against hate speech, fake news, and insults

Rec. 18: Disabling addiction-promoting design features

Rec. 19: Child-friendly designed algorithms

Rec. 20: Firm sanctions against platforms and users non-compliant with rules

Rec. 21: Restriction to one account or profile per person on a platform

Participants report that they sometimes spend very long periods using their devices, and mention the associated, sometimes undesirable or even negative effects. To better protect themselves from these effects, many of the children and young people believe it would be useful for the services to introduce defined restricted periods during which the platform or app would be inaccessible to young people, for example at night. If this were designed in such a way that it could not be circumvented, it would help them to better manage their usage behaviour and improve their concentration. Some participants also welcome settings that allow parents to limit usage time; however, it is pointed out that quite a few parents are unable to set these up properly.

Rec. 22: Time limits for usage of digital services and devices

In addition to design features that encourage excessive use of services, participants regularly criticise being exposed to unwanted and age-inappropriate content. They demand that platforms ensure children and young people are not confronted with content that could disturb or endanger them. Participants emphasise that apps should be designed with the intention of protecting users, rather than maximising usage time.

They propose creating of age-appropriate versions of platforms. Depending on the user's age, protective measures and features within a service should be tailored to the user; comment functions should be disabled for young users. Some children and young people would like to be able to be contacted only by people of a similar age. Other participants want to be able to choose for themselves who they want to chat with.

Rec. 23: Better protection against age-inappropriate content

Rec. 24: Age-appropriate platform design

Most workshop participants are aware that designing a platform suitable for a particular age group requires the user's age to be verified. Many of them can envisage mandatory age verification when registering for an app or service, particularly if the service includes purchasing functions. Information on the user's age should also be a decisive factor when it comes to playing online games. Age checks should be put in place for services that are not suitable for children and young people, in order to prevent minors from coming across such content unintentionally. The state should monitor whether providers comply with these requirements.

Age assessment should be based on as little data as possible. In this context, it is important to the children and young people that the age assessment process is carried out securely, transparently and with minimal use of data. Some of them do not wish to reveal their faces, and some participants are concerned that verifying their residence permits will result in more data being disclosed than is necessary for the age assessment.

Rec. 25: Reliable age assurance mechanisms to enable age-appropriate online experiences

Participants criticise the widespread sharing of children's images by adults online and on social media platforms. They believe it is the responsibility of policymakers to ensure that images of children cannot be posted online, primarily to protect younger children who are not yet able to decide for themselves whether content featuring them should be made public on the internet. To better protect young children, the children and young people propose that legislation be introduced to prohibit the uploading of images and depictions of babies and toddlers onto photo and video platforms.

Rec. 26: Prohibiting the upload of images of babies and young children

4.2.2 Provision

In order to use platforms and social media services more safely, participants would like to see more support from providers. They would like better guidance to help them recognise and avoid potential dangers and risks. For example, there should be short introductory sessions for new users, clear information on reporting procedures, and warning messages when strangers attempt to contact them.

To facilitate communication between very different age groups, they suggest clearly displaying users' ages on profiles, as well as age-group-specific chat rooms that allow interaction only within certain age groups. Content and images created using artificial intelligence applications should be labelled so they can be distinguished from other content. To help them better assess whether videos or other content might be unsuitable or distressing them, children and adolescents recommend more accompanying information and relevant warnings. Before clicking on a link to an external website, they could envisage first receiving a neutral notice providing information about the content they can expect to find on the page. If the content is of a specific nature, the notice

could also include an age rating. This could help young users navigate the content more effectively and protect them from accessing content that they do not wish to view.

Rec. 27: Introductory services and information for new users of digital services and platforms

Rec. 28: Guidance on reporting procedures

Rec. 29: Guidance on what to do if strangers (attempt to) make contact

Rec. 30: Visible indication on users' age

Rec. 31: Age-specific chat rooms

Rec. 32: Labelling of AI generated content

Rec. 33: Information and descriptors for videos and content

Rec. 34: Neutral information before redirecting to another page

In addition to the measures outlined to support the safe individual use of online services, some participants also consider it helpful for their own parents to actively monitor their use of media. In particular, when making online purchases parents should be notified so that they can authorise the transaction. Similarly, some of the children and young people would like parents of younger children to block content that is unsuitable for them and to limit the time spent using the services. Younger teenagers, however, would prefer less control, as privacy is important to them.

Rec. 35: Parental authorisation of purchase transactions

When it comes to child protection issues, participants also repeatedly emphasise the need for competent adult contact persons, trusted individuals, and parents who are familiar with young people's online world. They would like information, education, and support services both for themselves and for adults, as already outlined in the section regarding provision of digital literacy (4.1.2).

4.2.3 Participation

To ensure that younger children can also use social media platforms, the participants suggest that they should only be able to open an account or profile on a platform together with their parents. A verification process should ensure that the parents in question are indeed the child's parents. The platform could then inform them of any problematic behaviour on the child's part (such as posting hate messages), so that they can discuss the matter with their child. Such children's accounts or supervised profiles should only be shown age-appropriate content and information.

Rec. 36: Accounts for younger children only with parental supervision

When it comes to potential bans or age limits on social media platforms, the majority of participants are cautious or skeptical. Nine out of the 105 children and young people are in favour of a

social media ban for under-16s, such as the one in force in Australia. This corresponds to 9.45 per cent of the participants. Four of these nine children would themselves be affected by such an age limit.

A ban for children and young people under the age of 14 – as currently favoured by the CDU federal party and policy experts from the SPD parliamentary group in the Bundestag – is supported by 27 participants (28.35 per cent). Of the 27 children and young people who support this, a majority of 23 participants are aged 14 or over and would not be affected by such a regulation.

In the participants' view, reporting functions within the platforms are essential for carefree participation in the event of an unpleasant experience. However, many report that these are designed too complicatedly and that the procedures and decision-making mechanisms are not transparent to them. They also often get the impression that, following a report, the providers take no action. Against this background, the participants are calling for social media providers to be obliged to improve their reporting functions. On the one hand, these should be age-appropriate and easy to understand; on the other hand, once a report has been submitted by the provider, they want to be kept informed of the progress and outcome of the process. They want reports to be reliably reviewed by external experts and for the users concerned to face appropriate consequences, such as warnings or account suspensions.

Rec. 37: Simplified reporting procedures

Rec. 38: Feedback on the progress and outcome of a reporting process

To improve their participation in digital services and their online experience, children and adolescents would like to be able to have a say in the content presented to them. They want to be able to use categories to select which content and formats they are (or are not) interested in. Participants want to help shape their online experience through their own decisions for example by specifying which content they would like to see or use and which they would prefer to avoid. Providers should take this information into account and tailor users' feeds accordingly. There was also a general call for children and adolescents to be involved in the design of the digital environment.

Rec. 39: Participation of children and adolescents in shaping the digital environment

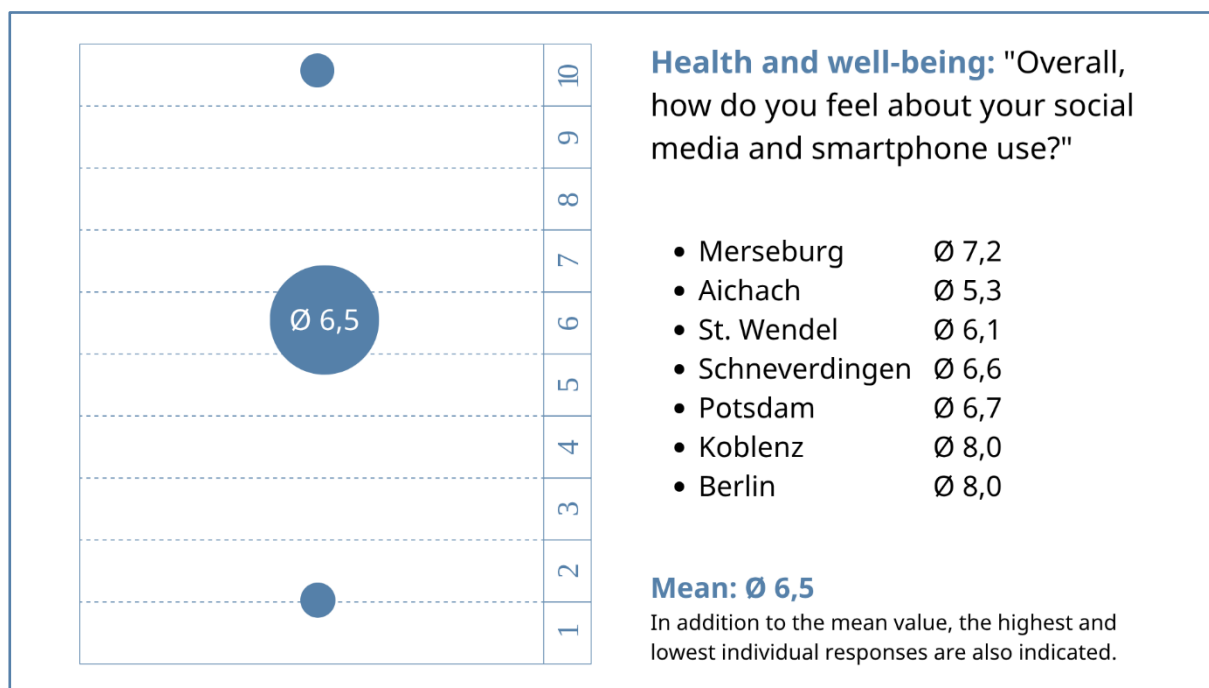
Rec. 40: Enabling co-creation of one's own online experience

4.3 Well-being / Mental Health



In the area of well-being and mental health, the participating children and young people explored their own perceptions of the positive and negative effects of using digital services on their physical and mental well-being.

Figure 3: Participants' self-assessment of their well-being



In their self-assessment on a scale of 0 (not at all good) to 10 (very good), participants primarily highlight the positive effects of using digital services – such as relaxation and entertainment – and rate their well-being in relation to social media use as being in the middle of the scale. They also point to negative effects associated with excessive usage times or age-inappropriate content – such as violent material – as well as distractions. How these issues should be addressed, in line with the participants' suggestions, is set out below.

4.3.1 Protection

Participants emphasise that, in their view, platform providers bear significant responsibility for the impact their services have on the health and well-being of children and adolescents. They should therefore design their algorithms in such a way that users are not kept on a service for as long as possible. Addictive design mechanisms should be disabled. In addition, platforms should also ensure that inappropriate or sensitive content is not displayed to children and adolescents. Stronger action should be taken against users who exhibit harmful behaviour against others, such as spreading hate or engaging in cyberbullying. Accounts belonging to young users should – as a rule – be set to private mode.

In this context, the issue of potential sanctions against users, as well as the simplification of reporting procedures, was raised once again. To enable age-appropriate design, secure age verification methods can be introduced. Platforms that fail to ensure the safety of young users should

be held accountable by the state through appropriate penalties. Some participants can envisage a scenario in which a platform or app might be banned entirely in such cases.

In addition to the measures already mentioned, participants advocate restricting or adapting certain functionalities in order to create platforms that are appropriate for their age and protect their mental health. Among other things, they would like to see restrictions on short-form video content for under-16s and pop-up notifications regarding the time already spent using a service. Apps should automatically suggest break times and switch themselves off if the recommendations are not followed. Such time limits on the use of services should not be circumventable by users.

Alternatively, parents at home and teachers in schools should set-up 'mobile phone storage areas' or other forms of secure storage for personal devices during lessons to support young users in taking a break from digital media. Such measures should be agreed upon in consultation with children and adolescents. In particular with regard to adolescents, participants stress that reminders or checks by parents are often perceived as an encroachment on autonomy. Therefore, they emphasise the importance striking a balance between protection, trust, and personal responsibility.

The issues and requests mentioned above are raised regularly, increasingly and repeatedly by the workshop participants. Key aspects of these requests made by the children and young people are therefore also discussed elsewhere in this report.

Rec. 41: Automated reminders to take breaks whilst using digital services

Rec. 42: Automated deactivation of digital services after a defined time span

Rec. 43: Prevention of access to digital devices

Above all, participants would like to see more information and support on how to use digital applications, particularly with regard to their impact on health. For them, this includes information on mental health issues, signs of addiction, and existing help and support services. Some participants consider links to external support services which can be found on social media platforms to be particularly useful. These should be displayed regularly to encourage mindful use. At school too, students would like to see discussions about social media and guidance on support systems. They hope that adults will show more understanding of their situation.

Rec. 44: Information and exchange on already existing support mechanisms

Rec. 45: Consideration of the situation and needs of children in the digital world among adult caregivers

To promote their well-being and health, participants are calling for programmes to prevent addiction. These should be implemented within the school setting. They would like their teachers to provide information and education on the mechanisms that encourage excessive use of digital services and on how they can counteract them. In addition, they would like support and counselling services provided by school psychologists so that mental health issues can be addressed and

those affected can find trusted people to talk to. In this context, it was also suggested that in specific cases faster referral to further counselling or therapy places would be helpful, so that students in exceptional situations can receive long-term support.

Rec. 46: Addiction prevention programmes in schools

Rec. 47: Psychological support staff in schools

Several participants describe difficulties falling asleep. For some children and young people, the causes lie in the distractions presented by the myriad possibilities in digital environments. Others, however, report that these possibilities are not the cause of their sleep deprivation, on the contrary, they tend to offer relaxation and a greater sense of well-being. There is, however a consensus that physical activity and sport have a positive effect on the ability to sleep and recover. A few participants complained that suitable opportunities are not available. It was also discussed that a later start to lessons would be beneficial for meeting the need for rest. Some participants also favour a mandatory blue light filter on devices to help them sleep better.

4.3.2 Provision

In order to be able to navigate the digital environment independently and purposefully whilst keeping their own well-being and health in mind, the participants would like to see ongoing and comprehensive media education programmes. They would like to be supported in developing a conscious and reflective approach to using social media (see also Media Literacy, section 4.1.2).

In this context, many participants also support rules restricting smartphone use at school. Sixty-four percent of children and adolescents believe that there should be a ban of personal smartphones in primary schools. A ban of this kind from Year 1 to Year 10 would be acceptable to 17 per cent of participants. Two per cent can, in principle, envisage this applying throughout their entire school career from Year 1 to Year 13. A further 17 per cent do not, in principle, consider a ban on personal smartphones at school to be effective. There is support for regulating the use of personal devices primarily during lessons in the classroom, in order to reduce distractions from teaching.

Rec. 48: Rules restricting use of personal mobile phones at school

To enable young people to use the digital environment and social media independently and safely, the participants consider clear information, classifications and guidance in the form of descriptors, pop-up windows, or even options to choose from – to be very helpful. These tools can support them in making independent and informed decisions and navigating the content in a targeted manner. Information on the recommended age of use is also desirable (see also the section on child protection under 4.2.2).

4.3.3 Participation

To support one another and create opportunities for exchange beyond their immediate circle of friends, the participants would like to see school-clubs or other peer-to-peer formats. They can

also envisage older and/or more experienced adolescents helping younger and/or less experienced children to use digital services safely (see also Media Literacy, section 4.1.2).

The participants consider regular engagement with issues that are important to their generation to be crucial for their well-being, even beyond the digital environment. The children and adolescents clearly express that their views and perspectives are not being taken into account and against this backdrop they would like more opportunities to engage with decision-makers.

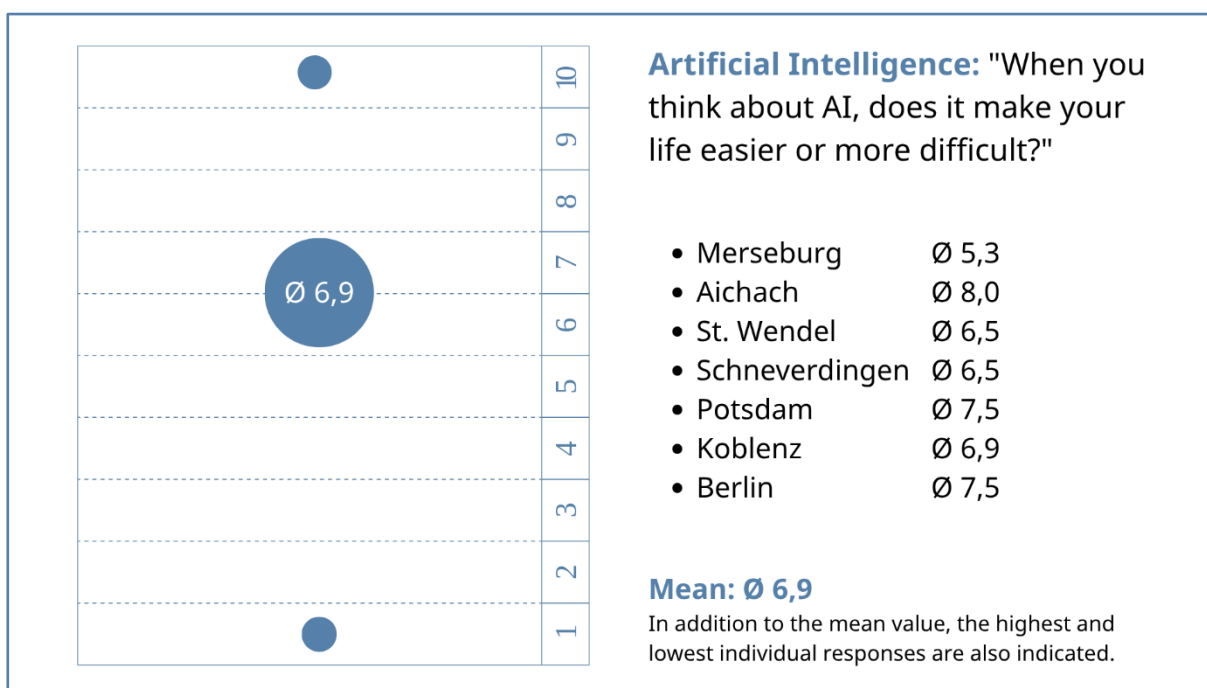
Rec. 49: A say for children and young people on issues that directly affect them, and consideration of their recommendations and wishes



4.4 Artificial Intelligence

In the area of artificial intelligence, the work with participating children and adolescents focused on their perceptions and understanding of AI applications, as well as the impact of these applications on their individual use of digital media. In their self-assessment using a scale from 0 (rather difficult) to 10 (rather easy), the majority of the children and young people place themselves in the category of 'making life easier through artificial intelligence applications'. The findings show that all participants already have, in some cases, extensive experience with AI applications, even though most are not permitted to use them in a school context. At the same time, however, significant uncertainties and fears regarding potential effects and risks are evident. How these should be addressed from the perspective of children and adolescents is outlined below.

Figure 4: Participants' self-assessment regarding artificial intelligence



4.4.1 Protection

AI applications are regularly used by participants and are generally perceived as making their everyday lives easier, despite the shortcomings that are (still) evident. In this context two topics are of great importance to children and adolescents, both of which were raised and discussed in all workshops.

On the one hand, children and adolescents are calling for strict regulation to ensure that artificial intelligence applications cannot generate violent or pornographic content. In particular, they want it to be impossible to manipulate images of other people in order to prevent deepfakes, deep-nudes, and other malicious depictions. The use of technical means for non-consensual sexualised alteration of images of other children and adolescents (nudification) is a major concern for the participants. Some of them are calling for photos of children to be completely exempt from AI-based editing. To prevent the manipulation of images, the children and young people argue that

it should not be possible to upload images and photos to Artificial Intelligence applications. However, image generation and editing based on text prompts should remain possible.

Rec. 50: Ban on AI-generated violent and sexualised content

Rec. 51: Ban on nudification tools

Rec. 52: Ban on the upload of images of third parties without consent

On the other hand, participants are deeply concerned that artificial intelligence applications could provide information and advice that might not be beneficial to them, or might even be harmful. For safety reasons, sensitive topics should not be handled by AI systems. In this context, they would like to see regulations governing emotional and personal matters on which AI must not be allowed to communicate with children and adolescents.

Furthermore, children and young people would like to prohibit artificial intelligence applications from giving advice or providing information that could be harmful to young people.

Rec. 53: Ban on AI-generated advice on personal and emotional issues

Rec. 54: Ban on harmful suggestions and recommendations generated by AI

Participants can also envisage restrictions on the use of artificial intelligence in school settings. This was discussed in the context to concerns that students' own research and critical thinking skills, as well as their interaction with the teacher, might suffer as a result. Participants would therefore like AI, when used for research purposes to support them in finding solutions by posing specific questions, but not to take over the task of working through the assignments and/or present the solution to them. At the same time, they welcome the use of AI as a support tool, for example to have concepts explained to them again or in a different way. AI should promote the development of children and adolescents.

Where AI applications are used in schools, the children and young people argue that AI should only be used for specific areas of application or purposes, and that its use should be supervised in order to minimise any risks and undesirable effects. Accordingly, they call for the sensible integration of these applications into lessons so that their use is more conscious and reflective. Some participants also advocate a ban on the use of artificial intelligence by minors. The aim is to preserve problem-solving skills and to prevent children and adolescents from being exposed to any risks.

Rec. 55: Regulated use of AI tools as a learning aid

Participants expect artificial intelligence providers to ensure that users cannot edit personal content – such as posts and photos belonging to other users – using AI and subsequently publish or share it. It is also important to them that their personal data is handled with care and not passed on to third parties. They would like data entered to be stored only on their own device – and not

on the servers of AI providers – even when using generative AI. Furthermore, this data should not be used to train the AI.

Age verification, the protection of users' privacy and the labelling of AI-generated content could help to ensure the safe use of artificial intelligence; ideally, AI applications would be offered specifically designed for children.

The required regulations should be implemented by the providers and compliance with them monitored by the state. To ensure this succeeds, the participants are calling for appropriate penalties that will have a tangible impact on providers. In addition, they would like teachers to take students' uncertainties and concerns seriously regarding AI-generated content, personal data being processed inappropriately, and the ongoing challenge of having to recognise disinformation.

In order to better curb disinformation and fake news through artificial intelligence, the participants recommend that artificial intelligence applications should only draw on content that has been pre-classified as reliable sources. They also want the sources used by the application to be cited at all times, so that children and young people have the opportunity to verify them.

Furthermore, AI should be used to detect misinformation on platforms and block it immediately, particularly where political content is concerned. It was also suggested that AI be used to detect subtle insults and hate speech, so that these can be reported and removed.

Rec. 56: Ban on the AI aided manipulation of third-party content

Rec. 57: High standards of protection for the data of children and young people

Rec. 58: No training of AI based on the data of children and young people

Rec. 59: Oversight on AI by state authorities and effective sanctions for non-compliance with the

Rec. 60: Pre-classification of reliable sources as the basis for AI applications

Rec. 61: Reference for all AI-generated content

Rec. 62: AI deployment for detection and removal of misinformation, insult/harassment and hate speech

4.4.2 Provision

Participants wish to be trained in the use of artificial intelligence applications. In the view of children and adolescents, providers of Artificial Intelligence applications should offer introductory courses, advice centers and support services to provide them with free assistance in using such applications as well as to offer help in the event of any critical situations. This could include for example basic information on using AI, as well as specific guidance on avoiding disturbing content or results generated by AI. The participants would like providers of AI services to inform users about potential dependencies and mental health risks.

Rec. 63: Introductory programmes and support provided by AI providers

A key concern for children and young people is to be taught about the advantages and disadvantages of artificial intelligence in the classroom and to learn how to use it. They want to be educated at school about possibilities and limitations, applications and risks involved in the (critical) use of Artificial Intelligence.

They would like to be able to use AI as a support tool, for example to better understand content and tasks and thus receive help with their learning. They would like to see media literacy taught in the classroom, which also encompasses the use of AI applications. They wish to be informed about the risks and opportunities, learn how to use AI effectively, be informed about energy consumption and environmental impact, and learn how to interact with chatbots. They would like to see an interdisciplinary approach to teaching them how they can use AI, for example, when carrying out research. At the same time, they wish to remain capable of researching content without relying on AI. To ensure this, the participants advocate for training programmes for teachers on the use of and how to handle artificial intelligence applications.

When it comes to support and assistance with problems, or guidance on using (new) AI tools, the participants would like to have knowledgeable adults they can turn to. Corresponding requests from the participants can also be found in the section on media literacy under 4.1.2.

Rec. 64: Comprehensive AI education in schools

Rec. 65: AI training of teachers

Rec. 66: AI-competent adult contact persons

Participants are calling for clear labelling of content created using artificial intelligence so that it can be distinguished from content created by humans. They also demand that accounts belonging to users who publish AI-generated content be subject to a labelling requirement. If users increasingly spread disinformation on social media platforms, the participants would like to see such accounts and profiles labelled as such. This would make children and young people more aware of the need to verify the details and information they encounter.

The participants also consider the suspension of accounts and profiles that have repeatedly spread disinformation to be appropriate in extreme cases, but reject the immediate suspension of accounts following a single instance of disinformation being spread. It is important to them that chatbots available to children and young people are clearly labelled as artificial intelligence, so that minors are aware when they are not communicating with a human being.

All of this corresponds to the fundamental desire for greater guidance in the digital environment enabling them to navigate and participate safely (see also the section of child protection 4.2.2).

Rec. 67: Labelling of accounts that disseminate AI-generated content

Rec. 68: Labelling of accounts and profiles that disseminate disinformation

Rec. 69: Clear labelling of chatbots

4.4.3 Participation

The participating children and adolescents recognize the potential of AI and the opportunities for participation that arise from the use of AI applications. ChatGPT and similar tools are used to cope with everyday situations and as sources of advice, as well as to access necessary information and get help with schoolwork. “You can simply ask the AI anything,”, and despite a justified skepticism regarding the accuracy of the answers received, gain a degree of independence from adult mentors and become more self-reliant.

As one way for young people to get involved, they envisage that knowledgeable students could train and educate both their peers and teachers in the use of artificial intelligence applications.

Rec. 70: Involvement of competent young people in training their peers and teachers in the use of AI applications

5 | Findings and an overarching analysis of the qualitative results, taking into account relevant external studies

The following section provides an overview of the key findings of the participation process. Although the sample of 105 young people who took part cannot be considered representative, the information provided by the children and young people regarding their own usage behaviour, their preferred applications and their self-assessment of their skills and protection needs shows clear similarities with the findings of the latest JIM Study 2025.

The smartphone dominates media use in leisure time and is used daily by most participants (Feierabend et al., 2025, p. 13 ff.). The estimated usage times also fall within the range reported in the JIM Study, averaging just under four hours a day, with usage increasing with age (Feierabend et al., 2025, p. 25). WhatsApp is widely used by workshop participants. Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok are popular; YouTube, which ranks only fifth among the most important apps in the JIM Study, is mentioned more frequently in the workshops as a source of entertainment and for educational purposes. Based on surveys conducted in June and July 2025, the JIM Study states that the topic of artificial intelligence has become part of young people's everyday lives and that ChatGPT is by far the most important application among 12- to 19-year-olds (Feierabend et al., 2025, p. 61). This finding is also confirmed by the survey results, although the range of AI tools in use has since expanded and ChatGPT's lead over Gemini and Meta AI appears to have narrowed. The encounters with potential risks identified by the 2025 JIM Study – such as fake news, hate speech, unwanted pornographic content, extreme political views, personal insults and bullying, as well as sexual harassment – were also addressed to varying degrees in the workshops.

5.1 Protection

The children and young people involved express a strong need for protection – despite rating their own skills in using digital applications as at least moderate to high. They place the primary responsibility for the precautionary measures they would like to see – not only in terms of traditional youth media protection but also with regard to data protection and consumer protection – on the platform providers.

They report on their own negative experiences, as well as those of other children and young people, and describe specific instances of encountering age-inappropriate content and unwanted contact, as well as sexualised harassment and distress caused by hate speech and disinformation. On this basis, they develop concrete ideas on how potential dangers can be reduced and risks avoided. These are reflected in particular in recommendations 1 and 2, 14, 18 to 25, 27 to 34, 36 to 38, 40 to 43, 50 to 54 and 67 to 69, many of which are in line with the guidelines set out in Article 28 of the Digital Services Act. To ensure the protection of young people, they consider it the state's duty to enforce applicable rules and the demands they have formulated (for example, demands 19 and 59).

The young people involved accept that age verification is a prerequisite for their protection through the age-appropriate design of digital services. At the same time, they are aware of the

potential disclosure of data to platform providers that this may entail. Both of these considerations are reflected in demands 24 and 25, which are in line with the recommendations of the Leopoldina's discussion paper (Brailovskaia et al., 2025, p. 37 ff.).

Across all age groups, the young people in the workshops highlighted varying levels of protection needs among younger children and older adolescents and, building on this, developed ideas such as educating and raising awareness among parents during routine medical check-ups (demand 6) or parent-supervised profiles for younger children (demand 36). In addition to developing their own ability to use digital services safely, they would like to see the media literacy of parents and other carers strengthened (Recommendations 12 and 13).

It is clear from the experiences and statements of workshop participants that the role parents can play in protecting children and young people also depends on the family's level of education and socio-economic status. Many parents reach their limits when it comes to keeping up to date with all the latest online trends and risks, as Dreyer (2026, p. 41) also notes. Particularly among young people growing up in more precarious circumstances, a lack of family support can lead to vulnerabilities that should be addressed through other measures. However, most of the young people involved regard purely monitoring functions and control mechanisms – such as those identified in the analysis of parental control apps by Jennewein et al. (2026) – as unsuitable and largely reject them. Instead, they would like to see more dialogue with adult caregivers, along with empathy and understanding for the importance of digital media in their everyday lives.

5.2 Provision

The workshop findings show that the children and young people taking part make a direct link between their need to be protected and their ability to use digital media safely and responsibly. The role attributed to educational institutions in the Leopoldina's discussion paper with regard to teaching media literacy (Brailovskaia et al., 2025, p. 27 ff.) is in line with the views of the young people involved. However, they lament a significant shortfall in implementation and report only isolated instances of positive experiences in a school setting. In all workshops, the participants called for comprehensive, early and continuous education and support for the development of their media literacy within the framework of school lessons (Call 7). Some children and young people are calling for such measures to begin as early as in nursery schools. These demands are in line with the recommendations set out in the Leopoldina's discussion paper as follows: 'At the same time, a digital education curriculum should be established in nursery schools and schools and taught in an interdisciplinary manner, preparing pupils for key aspects of digital life' (Brailovskaia et al., 2025, p. 41).

The children and young people express a desire to acquire specific skills, such as understanding algorithmic recommendation systems or applications of artificial intelligence (demands 63 and 64) and control mechanisms. Furthermore, they also want to be empowered to act independently, safely and responsibly in the digital environment – a demand also raised by Lampert (2026, p. 14 ff.), but which he does not consider to be adequately addressed through bans "that are experienced as a restriction of autonomy and trigger reactance". As children's knowledge of how to use

digital services and devices varies greatly depending on their age, this is accompanied by increasing cognitive abilities to reflect on content and assess their own and others' behaviour as they grow older, as noted by Köhler-Dauner et al. (2025, pp. 2 ff.). Media consultation sessions (Recommendation 8) and peer-to-peer initiatives (Recommendation 9) could also help to develop these skills at an early stage, as could the restrictions on usage times imposed by platform providers (Recommendation 22) – as called for by the children and young people involved – and jointly negotiated usage agreements (Recommendation 16), which can support the development of self-regulation skills.

In their analysis of parental control apps, Jennewein et al. (2026, p. 32) conclude that “particularly with regard to fostering reflective and affective skills such as self-regulation, impulse control and risk management [...] the educational potential relating to media and protection often remains untapped – primarily because the design of most applications is not geared towards this purpose”. This shortfall in technical control tools can – as also called for by the children and young people in the workshops – only be addressed through a comprehensive range of media education programmes at all levels of the education system. Similarly, Lampert (2026, p. 15), in line with the demands formulated by the young people involved, advocates for “jointly agreed arrangements [...] that take seriously and strengthen both the increasing personal responsibility and the growing media literacy of young people”. Last but not least, reference can also be made in this context to the protective objective newly enshrined in Section 10a of the Youth Protection Act in 2021: “promoting guidance for children, young people, legal guardians and educational professionals regarding media use and media education”.

5.3 Participation

For the vast majority of the children and young people involved, social media services are an integral part of their everyday lives. These platforms offer them opportunities to interact with peers and family, access to information and educational resources, as well as a space for exploring sexual orientation and identity formation. This assessment is consistent with various position papers and surveys, such as Discussion Paper No. 40 from the Leopoldina (Brailovskaia et al., 2025, p. 13 ff.) and the assessment by the AWO Expert Committee on Family, Children, Youth and Women's Policy from October 2025 (Hilkert/Landes, 2026, p. 6).

Notwithstanding the diversity of the young people who took part in the workshops in terms of their social and economic circumstances and their backgrounds, their comments reveal a strong need for social participation, which they fulfil through digital media. Any exclusion of specific age groups would run diametrically counter to this need, as further current participation formats also demonstrate (including Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2026, p. 4). “Adolescence – that is, the phase between the ages of twelve and 18 – is regarded as particularly sensitive in developmental psychology. The focus is on the development of a stable identity, the pursuit of autonomy and the development of self-directed control,” writes Lampert (2026, p. 14 ff.) and, referring to Schmidt et al. (2011: Growing Up with the Social Web), the important role played by social media platforms in experimenting with social interaction, self-expression and participation. The desire expressed by the participating children and young people for peer-to-peer formats, as well as their demand to

help shape the digital space and their own online experience (demands 38 and 39), confirm the previously described role of the digital environment as an indispensable space for young people's social experiences.

The children and young people involved report that using digital services provides relaxation and stress-relieving entertainment, as well as social contacts and exchanges with other young people – even outside their immediate social circle – which they perceive as positive. At the same time, they recognise negative effects such as distraction from schoolwork and excessive screen time, which conflict with their need for participation. Their calls (22 and 46 to 48) for tools and services that help them resolve this dilemma and empower them to self-regulate are in line with the findings of the Vodafone study (2025, p. 10 ff.).

The young people involved display an ambivalent attitude towards applications of artificial intelligence. Their scepticism, stemming from the possibility of misuse – for example, to create deep-fakes – is counterbalanced by their interest in the potential of AI and their desire to be empowered to use AI tools competently. This is reflected, for example, in their calls for AI-supported moderation of hate content, as also proposed in the Leopoldina discussion paper (Brailovskaia et al., 2025, p. 34).

5.4 Conclusion

The findings from youth participation reveal a tension between, on the one hand, clearly articulated needs for protection and young people's desire for reliable and competent support figures, and, on the other hand, an equally clearly expressed need for autonomy and a desire for empowerment and self-regulation. These findings are thus consistent with those of numerous academic studies and recent surveys, and complement them by offering young people's own perspective. At the same time, they confirm just how great a challenge it is to devise an appropriate, feasible approach that is accepted by the young target group. This is because children and young people attribute to the use of digital services an enhancement of individual skills, opportunities for personal contact, as well as relaxation and entertainment, which has a positive effect on their well-being and self-esteem. Young people's willingness to accept restrictions on the use of digital services and devices is limited to measures they consider sensible for enabling them to grow up carefree in a digital environment; it therefore corresponds only to a limited extent, if at all, with the expectations of comprehensive bans set out in some discussion and position papers.

6 | Organization

The organization of the child and youth participation process was coordinated with the expert commission, particularly with regard to the selection of workshop regions. In terms of scheduling, efforts were made to take into account the availability of individual members of the expert commission in order to enable direct exchange with the participating young people.

To ensure nationwide coverage across different regions of Germany, cooperation was established with various regional partners. Contacts were primarily developed through local networks, network labs, and initiative partners of the Initiativbüro "Gutes Aufwachsen mit Medien" (Office of the Federal Initiative: "Growing Up well with Media,") which is based at the Digital Opportunities Foundation. The participating institutions have active regional networks through which further contacts to additional organizations could be established.

In doing so, care was taken to ensure that the workshops were held in local authorities of varying sizes, so as to enable children and young people in rural areas to participate as well. The diversity of the partner organisations (community media, educational institutions, emergency and rescue services, sports clubs, libraries, cultural centres, youth leisure centres, youth associations, and child and adolescent psychiatric services) ensured that young people from a variety of backgrounds were reached.

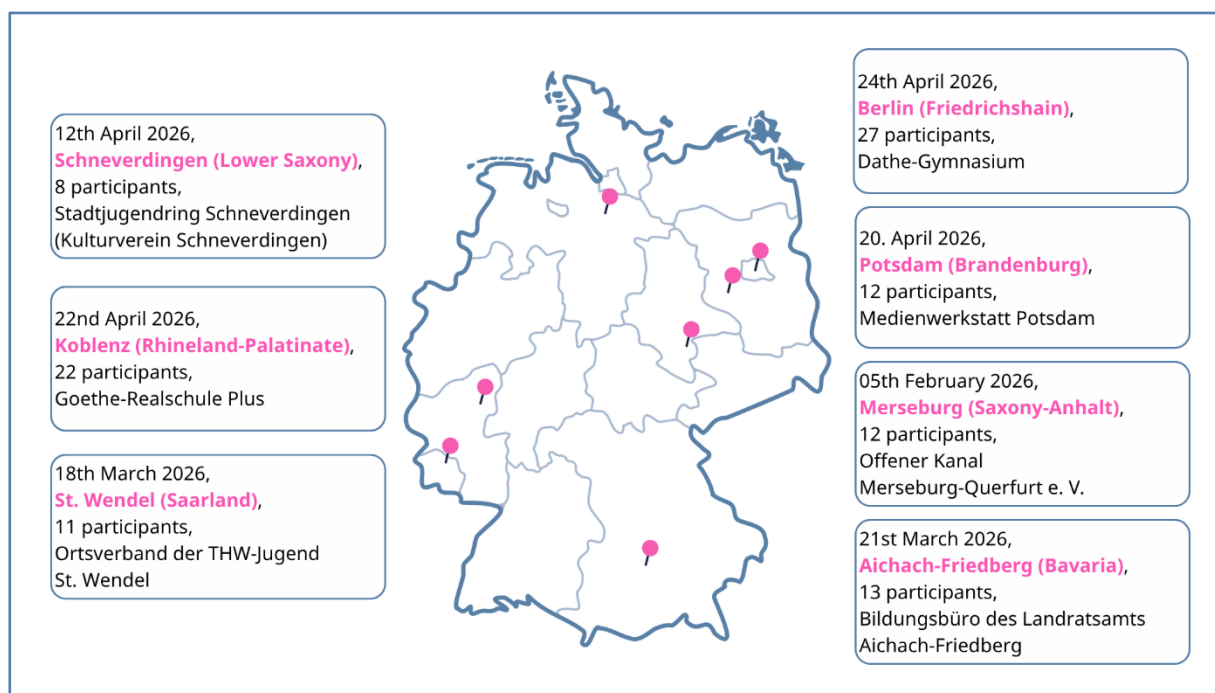
The workshops were conducted in cooperation with the following institutions:

- Workshop 1 in cooperation with the Offener Kanal Merseburg-Querfurt e. V. in Merseburg (Saxony-Anhalt) on 5 February 2026.
- Workshop 2 in cooperation with the Education Office of the Aichach-Friedberg District Office in Aichach (Bavaria) on 21 March 2026.
- Workshop 3 in cooperation with the volunteer THW Youth St. Wendel, supported by the Saarland Media Authority, the S(mar)t Wendeler Land project, the Vereinsplatz WND, and the volunteer exchange office in Sankt Wendel (Saarland) on 28 March 2026.
- Workshop 4 in cooperation with the Stadtjugendring Schneverdingen, GenZ GmbH, and the cultural center "Alte Schlachtereier" in Schneverdingen (Lower Saxony) on 12 April 2026.
- Workshop 5 in cooperation with the Medienwerkstatt Potsdam at fjs e. V. in Potsdam (Brandenburg) on 20 April 2026.
- Workshop 6 in cooperation with a class of the Goethe Realschule plus in Koblenz-Lützel (Rhineland-Palatinate) on 22 April 2026.
- Workshop 7 in cooperation with a class of the Dathe-Gymnasium in Berlin-Friedrichshain (Berlin) on 24 April 2026.

Potential participants were approached in different ways depending on the region, in close coordination with the respective local partners. In all cases, information material was prepared for parents and carers, educational specialists and teachers, as well as in child-friendly language for children and young people, and leaflets were made available for display and for use on social media. The materials were shared via newsletters and email distribution lists run by educational

institutions and published on websites and in regional events calendars. Locally, information was made available in youth centres, libraries, clubs and schools, and in some cases also via regional newspapers and radio stations. Local outreach was carried out primarily by social workers known in the community, targeting existing youth groups, including those at sports clubs, churches and voluntary organisations. Registration was open to all children and young people aged between 12 and 17. No specific selection process took place.

Figure 5: Regional distribution of the workshops conducted

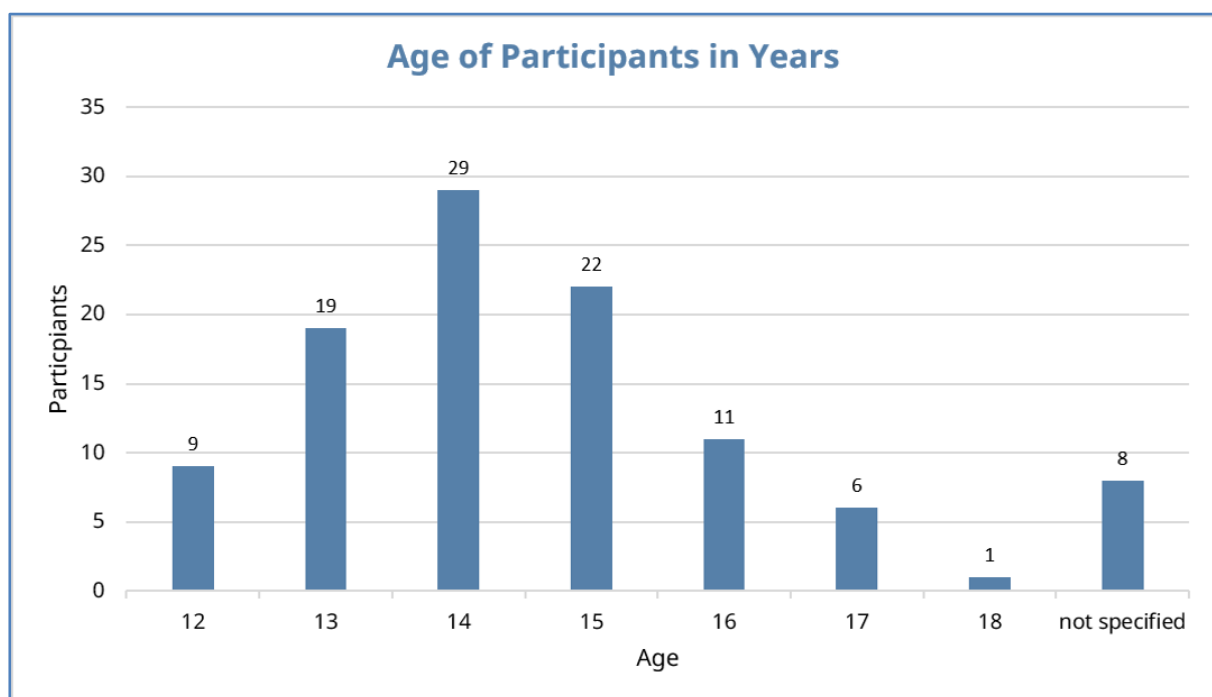


7 | Overview of Workshops / Participant Statistics

In addition to regional distribution, the aim was to ensure as diverse a representation as possible of young people from different social groups. A total of seven workshops were held, with a total of 105 participants. The composition of the groups was almost balanced, with 45 female and 55 male participants. Five participants did not provide any information regarding their gender or gender identity.

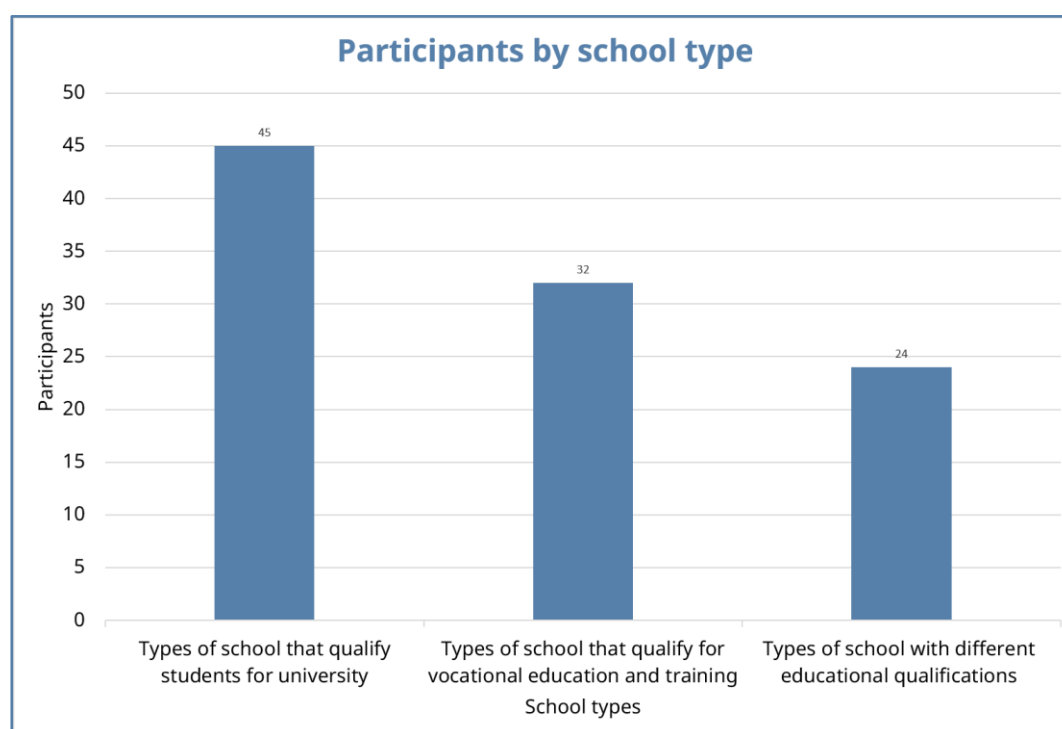
At 29, the 14-year-olds formed the largest group of participants, followed by 22 15-year-olds and 19 13-year-olds. In addition, nine 12-year-olds, eleven 16-year-olds, six 17-year-olds and one 18-year-old took part in the workshops. Eight people did not provide details of their exact age.

Figure 6: Number of workshop participants by age (in years)



The children and young people taking part attend different types of school and are working towards different school-leaving qualifications. Given the diversity of educational pathways across the federal states, three groups have been formed for the purposes of this overview, distinguished by the qualifications they are aiming to achieve. Accordingly, 45 children and young people who took part in the workshops attend school types that predominantly lead to university entrance qualifications (Gymnasien, Oberstufenzentren offering the Abitur, and Fachoberschulen). A further 32 participants attend institutions that prepare pupils for vocational training (Realschulen plus, Mittelschulen, Hauptschulen, vocational schools). Other types of school offering various qualification pathways (Gesamtschulen, Gemeinschaftsschulen, special schools) are attended by 24 children and young people.

Figure 7: Number of workshop participants by type of school



8 | Challenges/Limitations

During the course of the project, several challenges and limitations were identified, not all of which could be fully addressed as the project progressed.

For organisational reasons, it was necessary to plan for a minimum number of participants. To achieve this, binding registration was required. Due to data protection requirements and research ethics standards, this required an informed consent form from participants and, where they were under 16 years of age, from their legal guardians. Ensuring this was consistently met proved to be a challenge. Against this background, it can be assumed that the project primarily reached those target groups which had sufficient organisational resources and a high level of commitment. Nevertheless, in order to achieve as heterogeneous a target group composition as possible, cooperation took place with various organisations that were able to reach different target groups (see also Section 6).

A further challenge concerned cooperation with the organisations approached. All the partners contacted generally showed a high level of interest in collaboration and were, in principle, open to cooperation. Nevertheless, tight deadlines and the resources required on the ground to recruit and approach potential participants sometimes presented a significant hurdle. Many of the organisations approached have limited staff and time resources, which restricts their flexibility and ability to cooperate.

Against the background described in section 3, workshops totalling five hours were planned and carried out. For some potential participants, the duration of the programme may have conflicted with school commitments, voluntary work, traditional and folk celebrations, or their right and

need for leisure and relaxation. Efforts were made to address this challenge effectively by running the sessions on various weekdays and weekends, during school holidays as well as during school hours, whilst taking into account locally recognised events.

For all workshops, the aim was to minimise any psychological strain on participants by holding the sessions in locally familiar venues with the involvement of locally known contact persons. Furthermore, at every session, at least one person qualified in child protection was present, and a private space was available for participants to withdraw to if needed. In addition to participation being entirely voluntary, participants were regularly reminded during the workshops that they were free to withhold information or take a break at their own discretion. Despite these precautions, the workshops were designed without addressing individually distressing experiences or issues, in order to minimise any potential burden on participants. Nevertheless, it cannot be entirely ruled out that potential participants may not have taken up the offer due to its thematic focus, or that children and young people may have had negative recollections of traumatic experiences. However, there are no indications or findings to suggest this.

It is now not uncommon for children and young people to receive some form of compensation for their time and effort in taking part in research and/or participatory processes. However, in order to avoid creating an incentive that might motivate or even pressure potential participants to take part against their interests, this was not offered, in consultation with the secretariat of the Expert Commission. This may have contributed to certain individuals not being reached or persuaded to participate. Nevertheless, the participation of all was valued and their involvement was acknowledged with a certificate.

9 | About the Foundation

The Digital Opportunities Foundation is a non-profit, operational foundation based in Berlin. Since 2002, it has been researching the social implications of digitalisation and campaigning for equal access to the internet for all.

The foundation's purpose is to promote scholarship, research and education in the field of media use and literacy, particularly with regard to internet use, especially in Germany. It fulfils this purpose through measures designed to promote media literacy and the safe and responsible use of digital media among all sections of the population affected by a potential digital divide.

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11 | Annex

Appendix 1: Overview of all recommendations

Appendix 1: Overview of all recommendations

Protection

- Rec. 1:** *Use of child-friendly language in digital services*
- Rec. 2:** *Neutral settings without interference by service provider*
- Rec. 3:** *Definition of the term 'harassment' in the digital environment*
- Rec. 4:** *Legislation to protect against online harassment*
- Rec. 5:** *Activated safety measures on school devices*
- Rec. 6:** *Addressing children's media usage in preventive medical check-ups*
- Rec. 17:** *Stronger action by platforms against hate speech, fake news and insults*
- Rec. 18:** *Disabling addiction-promoting design features*
- Rec. 19:** *Child-friendly designed algorithms*
- Rec. 20:** *Firm sanctions against platforms and users non-compliant with rules*
- Rec. 21:** *Restriction to one account or profile per person on a platform*
- Rec. 22:** *Time limits for usage of digital services and devices*
- Rec. 23:** *Better protection against age-inappropriate content*
- Rec. 24:** *Age-appropriate platform design*
- Rec. 25:** *Reliable age assurance mechanisms to enable age-appropriate online experiences*
- Rec. 26:** *Prohibiting the upload of images of babies and young children*
- Rec. 41:** *Automated reminders to take breaks whilst using digital services*
- Rec. 42:** *Automated deactivation of digital services after a defined time span*
- Rec. 43:** *Prevention of access to digital devices*
- Rec. 44:** *Information and exchange on already existing support mechanisms*
- Rec. 45:** *Consideration of the situation and needs of children in the digital world among adult caregivers*
- Rec. 46:** *Addiction prevention programmes in schools*
- Rec. 47:** *Psychological support staff in schools*
- Rec. 50:** *Ban on AI-generated violent and sexualised content*
- Rec. 51:** *Ban on nudification tools*
- Rec. 52:** *Ban on the upload of images of third parties without consent*
- Rec. 53:** *Ban on AI-generated advice on personal and emotional issues*
- Rec. 54:** *Ban on harmful suggestions and recommendations generated by AI*
- Rec. 55:** *Regulated use of AI tools as a learning aid*
- Rec. 56:** *Ban on the AI aided manipulation of third-party content*
- Rec. 57:** *High standards of protection for the data of children and young people*
- Rec. 58:** *No training of AI based on the data of children and young people*
- Rec. 59:** *Oversight on AI by state authorities and effective sanctions for non-compliance with the rules*
- Rec. 60:** *Pre-classification of reliable sources as the basis for AI applications*
- Rec. 61:** *Reference for all AI-generated content*
- Rec. 62:** *AI deployment for detection and removal of misinformation, insult/ harassment and hate speech*

Provision

- Rec. 7:** *Establish digital literacy education in schools*
- Rec. 8:** *Offer consultation hours on digital media usage in schools*
- Rec. 9:** *Establish Peer-to-peer support schemes in schools*
- Rec. 10:** *Funding measures to promote digital literacy education in schools*
- Rec. 11:** *Competent adult contact persons*
- Rec. 12:** *Qualification and regular digital literacy training for teachers*
- Rec. 13:** *Information and awareness programmes for parents*
- Rec. 27:** *Introductory services and information for new users of digital services and platforms*
- Rec. 28:** *Guidance on reporting procedures*
- Rec. 29:** *Guidance on what to do if strangers (attempt to) make contact*
- Rec. 30:** *Visible indication on users' age*
- Rec. 31:** *Age-specific chat rooms*
- Rec. 32:** *Labelling of AI generated content*
- Rec. 33:** *Information and descriptors for videos and content*
- Rec. 34:** *Neutral information before redirecting to another page*
- Rec. 35:** *Parental authorisation of purchase transactions*
- Rec. 48:** *Rules restricting use of personal mobile phones at school*
- Rec. 63:** *Introductory programmes and support provided by AI providers*
- Rec. 64:** *Comprehensive AI education in schools*
- Rec. 65:** *AI training of teachers*
- Rec. 66:** *AI-competent adult contact persons*
- Rec. 67:** *Labelling of accounts that disseminate AI-generated content*
- Rec. 68:** *Labelling of accounts and profiles that disseminate disinformation*
- Rec. 69:** *Clear labelling of chatbots*

Participation

- Rec. 14:** *Implementation of a 'harassment button'*
- Rec. 15:** *Improvement of IT connectivity and equipment in schools*
- Rec. 16:** *Jointly negotiated agreements on the responsible use of smartphones during the school day*
- Rec. 36:** *Accounts for younger children only with parental supervision*
- Rec. 37:** *Simplified reporting procedures*
- Rec. 38:** *Feedback on the progress and outcome of a reporting process*
- Rec. 39:** *Participation of children and young people in shaping the digital environment*
- Rec. 40:** *Enabling co-creation of one's own online experience*
- Rec. 49:** *A say for children and young people on issues that directly affect them, and consideration of their recommendations and wishes*
- Rec. 70:** *Involvement of competent young people in training their peers and teachers in the use of AI applications*



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