JRC141047

European Commission

SCIENCE FOR POLICY BRIEF

Social media usage and adolescents' mental health in the EU

HIGHLIGHTS

- → **In 2022, on a typical weekday, 96% of 15-year-olds in the EU engaged in social media activities, with 37% spending over three hours per day browsing on these platforms.**
- → **Results from a representative sample of over 40,000 adolescents from four EU countries (Ireland, Hungary, Slovenia and Spain) show that nearly half (47%) of 15 year olds report depression and over half (53%) struggle with anxiety. Excessive social media usage (i.e., more than three hours per day) is associated with negative mental health outcomes, specifically depression and anxiety.**
- → **Female adolescents exhibit higher intensive (over three hours per day) social media usage rates than their male peers (42% vs. 32%), and are significantly more likely to experience symptoms of depression (60% vs. 35%) and anxiety (65% vs. 41%), highlighting the need for gender-specific policy interventions and research.**
- → **Future research and policy interventions should consider the intensity of social media use, the nature of activities, and the unique vulnerabilities of different demographic groups, particularly young females. Gender-sensitive and context-specific policies are essential to address and bridge these disparities. Media and digital literacy, as well as awareness raising for students and all educational stakeholders, are fundamental.**
- → **Qualitative and quantitative studies are needed to better understand the underlying mechanisms driving the relationship between social media usage and poor mental health among adolescents, particularly given the challenge of establishing causality.**

BACKGROUND AND POLICY RELEVANCE

Social media[1] refers to online platforms, tools and technologies that emerged during the early 2000s that enable users to create and share their own content, and engage with other users through an interactive digital environment (boyd, 2014; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The most used social media platforms by the young people (15-24 years old) in the EU are Instagram (used by 76%), YouTube (69%), WhatsApp (60%) and TiKTok (55%).[2]

1 For the purpose of this work, we use the terms 'social media' and 'social networking sites' interchangeably.

2 *https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3153*

Joint Research Centre

The influence of social media use on adolescent mental health has become a topic of significant concern (Coyne et al., 2025). Given the pervasiveness of digital technology in the lives of young people, and the cognitive and brain development that occur during adolescence (Marciano et al., 2025), it is essential to investigate the effects of social media usage on mental well-being during this critical period when mental health vulnerabilities may arise. Furthermore, it is crucial to develop evidence-based policies to support young people's mental health and well-being.

While the relation between social media use and mental health is complex (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2024; Borst et al., 2025), time spent on social media has been identified in scientific literature as one of the main factors intervening in the relationship between adolescents' individual use of social media, mental health outcomes and well-being (Sala et al., 2024; Blasko and Castelli, 2022). Some studies show that moderated use of social media (approximately under two hours per day) is associated with greater social support, improved social relationships, participation in social and political life and subjective well-being (Alcott et al., 2020; Bottaro and Faraci, 2022). However, on the contrary, 'high social media use' (starting from above two hours per day) is associated with worsened outcomes in terms of social well-being and happiness, risk of depression, low self-esteem, poor sleep, poor body image, and distraction (Webster et al., 2021; Bozzola et al., 2022). Recent research suggests that an approach strictly based on the amount of use time may oversimplify the complex interactions between social media use and adolescent well-being. Rather than screen time alone, factors such as the nature of online activities, the quality of interactions, individual differences in vulnerability and resilience play a crucial role in shaping the effects of social media use (Orben et al., 2024; Mansfield et al., 2025).

The European Commission has taken various steps to regulate social media services and protect users' rights. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) enacted in 2018 regulates personal data collected through social media. The Digital Services Act,[3] enacted in 2022, in its Article 34, foresees obligations for very large online platforms to identify, analyse and assess systemic risks related of their algorithmic systems and harmful content that may have serious negative consequences on the physical and mental well-being of people and minors in particular. Article 35 requires these platforms to mitigate the risks identified by adapting their services. The 2022 Council of the European Union's Conclusions[4] on supporting well-being in digital education[5] referred to the negative effects of social media in relation to social comparisons and 'the fear of missing out', and invited Member States to develop awareness of the need to balance on-screen and off-screen time, and to support schools in developing appropriate time management as regards digital and face-to-face teaching and learning activities.

In response to crises such as Covid-19, the war in Ukraine and, the climate - that have all put a negative impact on the mental health of people, in particular on children and young people - the Commission adopted in 2023 the Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health.[6] The Communication focuses particularly on supporting vulnerable groups, such as children and young people. Four flagship initiatives have been identified that particularly aim to boost mental health, with one specific on the better protection for children in the digital sphere, online and social media.

Following the above Communication, the Council and the Representatives of the governments of the Member States in their Conclusions of 30.11.2023 on a comprehensive approach to the mental health of young people in the European Union[7] invited the Member States and the Commission to promote a safer and healthier digital space for young people, in line with the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles.[8] This includes encouraging awareness-raising and training in media and information literacy, and in the responsible use of social media with safeguards against risks such as cyberbullying, hate speech, grooming, and excessive screen time.

More recently, in May 2024, the Council Conclusions on the future of EU digital policy to address the societal effects of digitalisation[9] stressed the importance to further reflect on the societal risks stemming from digital services, and to consider the need for any measures, including non-legislative measures, to address issues related to addictive and deceptive designs. Under the European Commission (2024-2029), addressing the impact of social media and excessive screen time on mental health and wellbeing, especially on young people, is a priority.

---

3 Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market for Digital Services, at *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?toc=OJ%3AL%3A2022%3A277%3ATOC&uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2022.277.01.0001.01.ENG*

4 *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX%3A52022XG1209%2801%29*

5 Well-being in digital education is understood as a feeling of physical, cognitive, social and emotional contentment that enables all individuals to engage positively in all digital learning environments including through digital education and training tools and methods, maximise their potential and self-realisation and helps them to act safely online and supports their empowerment in online environments. This relates to the development of critical thinking skills, digital empowerment and digital resilience, so that young people can build a digital behaviour that will allow them to address online threats and fully benefit from the opportunities of the digital world

6 *https://health.ec.europa.eu/document/download/cef45b6d-a871-44d5-9d62-3cecc47eda89_en?filename=com_2023_298_1_act_en.pdf*

7 *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C_202301337*

8 *https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/european-declaration-digital-rights-and-principles*

9 *https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9957-2024-INIT/en/pdf*

In this context, the main purpose of this policy brief is to provide further scientific evidence on the relation between social media usage and the mental health of adolescents (15-year-olds) and suggest some possible actions to mitigate related risks and challenges identified.

DATA

PISA 2022

We explore the correlation between adolescents' mental health outcomes and social media usage in the EU, through an analysis of the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data administered for 15-year-olds in school grade seven or higher. Among others, PISA 2022 data include an optional ICT survey which collects information for 22 EU countries[10] on digital behaviour (including frequency of digital device use and types of digital activities), and an optional well-being survey which collects information for five EU countries[11] on adolescents' well-being indicators (Cignetti and Piacentini, 2024), such as mental health, life satisfaction, and feelings of belonging, among others. For this policy brief, we conduct two types of analysis: i) descriptive with all PISA data; and ii) regression analysis with the subsample of the four countries who undertake both modules of ICT and well-being.

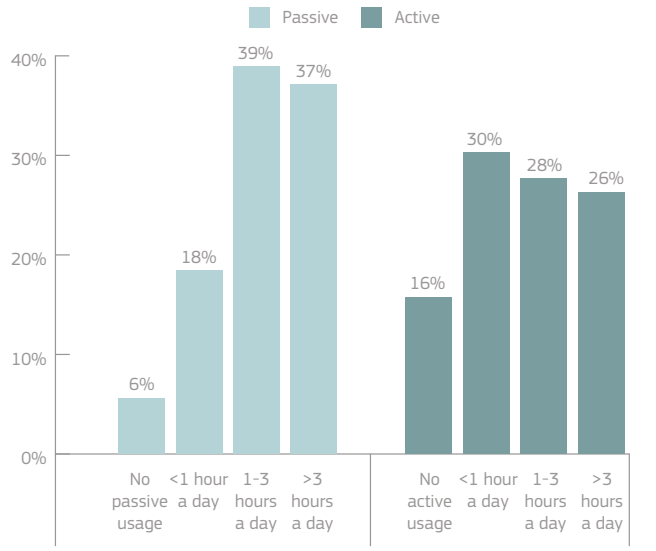
RESULTS

Social Media use in the EU

Based on the PISA ICT survey data from 22 EU Member States (MS), during a typical weekday in 2022, 96% of 15-year-olds engaged in social media activities. Around 80% engaged in both passive (i.e., browsing social networks) and active (i.e., communicating and sharing digital content) social media activities. Around 4% of 15-year-olds in the EU did not engage with social media at all.[12] Data from Eurostat show that in 2022, 84% of young people (16-29) in the EU used the internet to participate in social media.[13] The difference could be associated to the different ages of the surveyed individuals.

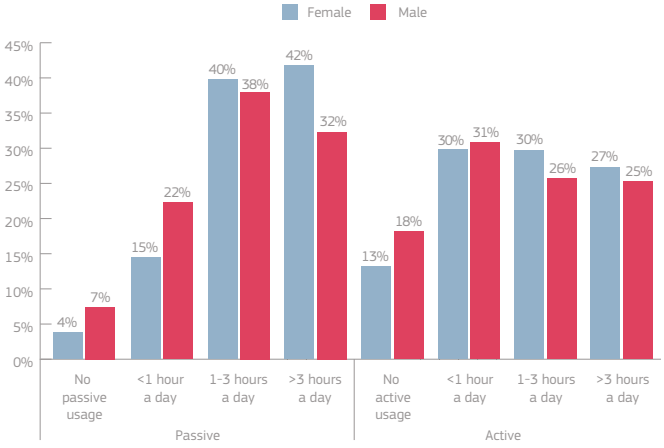
In terms of time spent on social media, while 37% of 15-year-olds in the EU engage in passive social media activities for more than three hours per day,[14] only about 26% do so in active social media activities (Figure 1). These figures are similar to those of Dhombres et al. (2024), who report that about 34.5% and 26.1% of respondents aged 16-30 use social networking sites[15] and instant messaging tools for over two hours per day, respectively. According to PISA data, female users are more likely than males to spend over three hours a day on social media, with almost 10 percentage points (pp) gender difference in passive activities (Figure 2).

Figure 1 – Percentage distribution of 15-year-olds by time of usage in passive and active social media activity, in a typical weekday, PISA 2022.



Source: PISA data.

Figure 2 – Percentage distribution of 15-year-olds by gender and time of social media usage in passive and active social media activity, in a typical weekday, PISA 2022.



Source: PISA data.

We run the analysis for both passive and active social media activities and find no significant differences between the two

10 All EU countries except Cyprus, France, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Portugal.

11 Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain.

12 From the individual characteristics available in the PISA 2022 data, we can see they are mainly male (66%), evenly distributed across socioeconomic levels, living in urban areas (72%) and of non-immigrant background (85%).

13 *https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20230714-1*

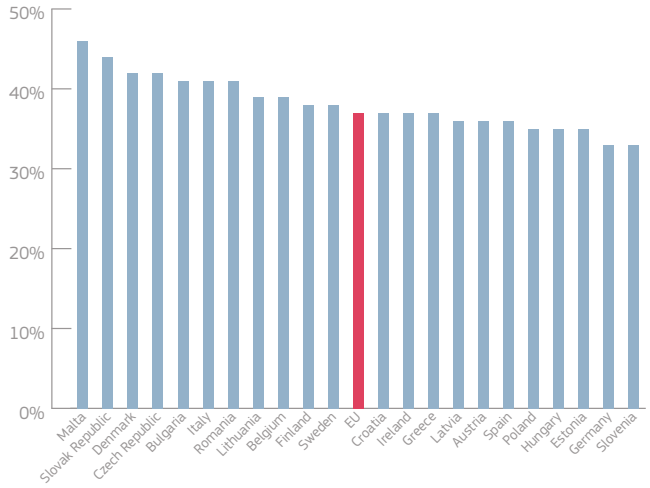
14 We select this threshold based both on the evidence showing that 'high SOCIAL MEDIA use' (above two hours per day) is associated with negative well-being outcomes (Sala et al., 2024) and on data availability constraints. The PISA data aggregates SOCIAL MEDIA usage into the following categories: 'No time at all,' 'Less than 1 hour a day,' 'Between 1 and 3 hours a day,' 'More than 3 hours and up to 5 hours a day,' 'More than 5 hours and up to 7 hours a day,' and 'More than 7 hours a day.' For this report, we combined the last three categories into a 'More than 3 hours a day' threshold.

15 Social networking sites are online applications that allow users to create and share personal profiles. Instant messaging tools offer a standalone application or embedded software enabling real-time conversations via text messages amongst users.

sets of results.[16] Accordingly and given that 15-year-olds report on average higher engagement with passive social media activities, the next analysis focuses on passive social media activities given their potential higher negative impact on mental health (Bottaro and Faraci, 2022).

Within the EU, across the 22 EU countries analysed, there is some but limited variability in the percentage of 15-year-olds engaging in passive social media activities for more than three hours per day, ranging from 33% in Slovenia to 46% in Malta (Figure 3), indicating that the level of intensive social media use remains high across countries.

Figure 3 – Percentage of 15-year-olds using social media for more than three hours a day by 22 EU countries, PISA 2022.



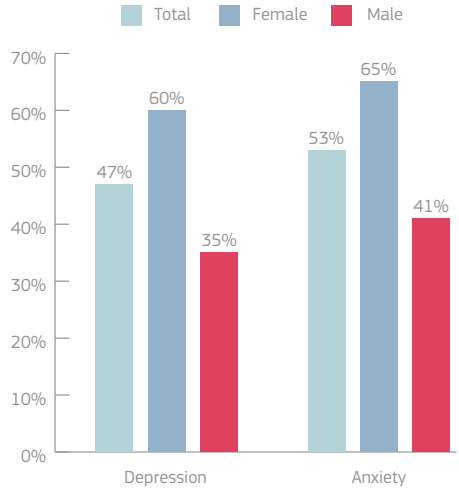
Source: PISA data.

Social media use and mental health – results from four EU Member States: Hungary, Ireland, Slovenia and Spain

This next analysis is based on countries that took both the ICT and the well-being PISA 2022 survey modules, namely: Hungary, Ireland, Slovenia and Spain, covering a representative sample of 40,102 15-year-old students[17] in 1,743 schools in Europe.

According to PISA descriptive statistics, almost half of 15-year-olds (47%) report having feelings of depression and 53% report feelings of anxiety. These figures vary considerably across gender. Females are more likely to report feelings of depression (60%) and anxiety (65%), in contrast to 35% and 41% of males, respectively (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – Share of 15-year-olds experiencing poor mental health by gender, PISA 2022.



Source: PISA data.

The following results are derived from a regression model, where the outcome variable represents the probability of experiencing depression or anxiety.[18] The model controls for several characteristics: gender, year of birth, PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS),[19] reading outcomes (PV1READ), family support (FAMSUP),[20] sense of belonging at school (BELONG),[21] experience with bullying (BULLIED),[22] and country indicator. We select these parameters based on existing evidence on individual demographic and psycho-socio characteristics affecting individuals' relationship with social media usage and mental health outcomes.[23] The graphs below show the probability of feeling depressed or anxious for each group after adjusting for the other characteristics in the model.

16 This could be due to the fact that, in this survey, students are asked to indicate their time allocation across both types of activities, but the overlapping and simultaneous nature of active and passive use in real-world usage complicates the distinction. For instance, while actively posting or messaging (active use), students might simultaneously browse through feeds or consume content (passive use), making it difficult to isolate one behaviour from the other. At the same time, researchers are starting to question the distinction between active and passive use as it may be too simplistic and does not always adequately capture the complexity of the phenomenon. (e.g., Valkenburg et al., 2022; Verduyn et al., 2022; Godard & Holtzman, 2024).

17 Number of participating students: Hungary (6,198); Ireland (5,569); Slovenia (6,721); Spain (30,800). Coverage of 15-year-old population: Hungary (86.2%); Ireland (100%); Slovenia (99.6%); Spain (90.4%) (OECD 2023a) *https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/007f7d8e-en.pdf?expires=1733133587 &id=id&accname=guest&checksum=48D4209CCBD9833B4403644287C3E231*.

18 We run a logit model where the outcome variables take the value of 1 if the students have experienced depression or anxiety at any level of intensity within the past six months. Outcome categories are defined by responses to the question: 'In the past six months, how often have you experienced feeling depressed or anxious?', where response options include: 'Rarely or never', 'About every month', 'About every week', 'More than once a week', and 'About every day'.

19 The ESCS score is based on three indicators: highest parental occupation status (HISEI), highest education of parents in years (PAREDINT), and home possessions (HOMEPOS) (OECD, 2023b).

20 Students' ratings of how often their parents or someone else in their family engaged in a range of behaviours indicative of family support (e.g., 'Discuss how well you are doing at school', 'Spend time just talking with you') (OECD, 2023b).

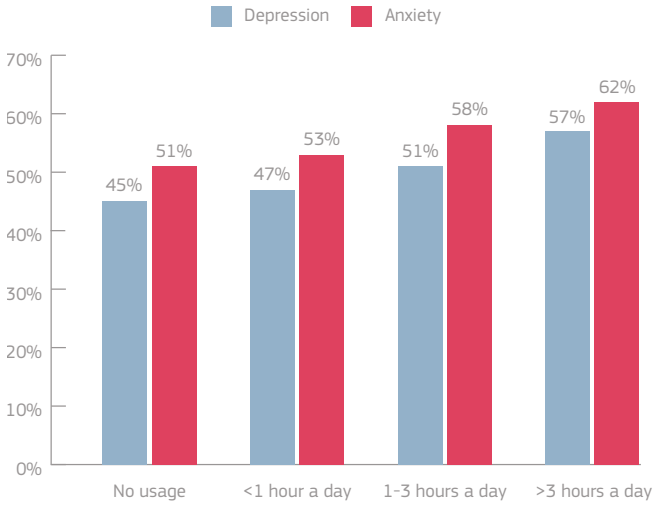
21 Students' ratings of their agreement with six statements (e.g., 'I feel like I belong at school', 'I feel lonely at school') (OCED, 2023b).

22 Students' ratings of how often they had a range of experiences at school that are indicative of being bullied during the past 12 months (e.g., 'Other students left me out of things on purpose', 'Other students made fun of me') (OECD, 2023b).

23 For a complete discussion of the intervening factors in this relationship see Sala et al., 2024.

In line with previous studies (Bozzola et al., 2022; Senekal et al., 2023; Dhombres et al., 2024), we find a positive correlation between high social media usage and reporting of poor mental health outcomes. **Fifteen-year-olds engaging in social media activities for more than three hours per day are around 10pp more likely to feel more often depressed or anxious than adolescents who use them for less than one hour per day**; and around 5pp more likely than adolescents who use them between one and three hours per day (Figure 5).

Figure 5 – Estimated probabilities of 15-year-olds experiencing poor mental health by time spent on social media, PISA 2022.

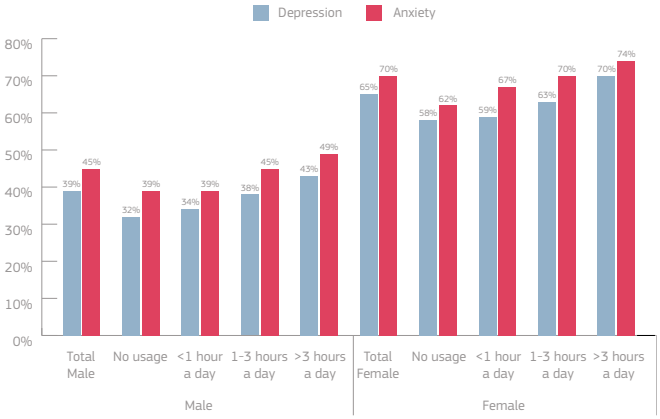


Source: PISA data.

Additionally, we explore whether the intensity of social media usage on mental health outcomes varies by gender, this being an important contextual factor influencing the correlation between social media usage and well-being outcomes (Sala et al., 2024). Research shows a stronger correlation between time spent on social media and negative mental health outcomes for girls compared to boys (Ivie et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2022).

Our analysis indicates that the correlation between time spent using social media and mental health is relatively consistent across genders, with both male and female adolescents reporting higher rates of depression and anxiety as social media usage increases (Figure 6). While differences exist – for example, female adolescents using social media for more than three hours per day have an 11pp higher likelihood of depression compared to those using it for less than one hour per day, and a 9pp difference when compared to males – the overarching pattern suggests a similar relation between time spent on social media and mental health for both groups. These findings suggest that factors other than time spent, or combinations of multiple factors, are likely to influence the relationship between the use of social media and mental health outcomes.

Figure 6 – Estimated probabilities of 15-year-olds experiencing poor mental health by gender and time spent on social media, PISA 2022.

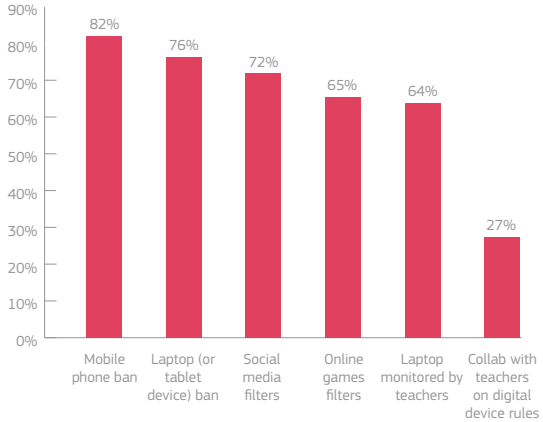


Source: PISA data.

Youth's perception of regulations on digital devices

Finally, we look at how adolescents in the 22 EU countries perceive regulations on digital device usage to get insights into their attitudes towards external control and self-regulation in relation to ICT. This perspective is crucial, because adolescents are key stakeholders whose behaviours, motivations, and agency are directly influenced by these policies. We observe that 15-year-olds are generally against blanket restrictions on tech devices (e.g., mobile phone or other personal tech devices bans) and oppose school control such as social media or online games filters and teachers' monitoring of students' online activities. However, they support the collaboration with teachers to jointly decide on the rules regarding the use of digital devices during lessons (Figure 7).

Figure 7 – Percentage of 15-year-olds disagreeing with ICT use regulations, PISA 2022.[24]



Source: PISA data.

24 These elements are taken from the PISA 2022 ICT questionnaire asking students: 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?': Students should not be allowed to bring mobile phones to class; Students should not be allowed to bring their own laptop (or tablet device) to class; Students should collaborate with teachers to decide on the rules regarding the use of digital devices during lessons; The school should set up filters to prevent students from going on social media; The school should set up filters to prevent students from playing games online; Teachers should monitor what students do on their laptops. Response categories include: 'Strongly disagree', 'Disagree', 'Agree', 'Strongly agree'. Percentages presented in Figure 7 combine the categories 'Strongly disagree' and 'Disagree'.

DISCUSSION

This policy brief provides evidence on the relationship between social media use and mental health among adolescents in four EU countries. In 2022, on a typical weekday, 96% of 15-year-olds in the EU engaged in social media activities, with 37% spending over three hours per day browsing on these platforms. Female adolescents are particularly affected, reporting higher levels of social media usage.

Additionally, 47% of 15-year-olds in the four EU MS analysed (Hungary, Ireland, Slovenia and Spain) report feelings of depression and 53% report feelings of anxiety. Females report 25% greater prevalence of negative mental health outcomes than males.

Our results show an increase in the probability of experiencing feelings of depression and anxiety with greater time spent on social media irrespective of gender.

These results suggest the need for multi-dimensional interventions. First, in line with the Digital Services Act (Arts. 34 and 35), mitigation measures to reduce the addictive features of social media should be promoted. Second, awareness-raising campaigns and digital literacy education should focus on promoting healthy social media use, such as time self-regulation, enabling young people to benefit from social media while being more aware of and mitigating its negative effects and risks. Third, tailored interventions for education stakeholders, including parents, such as training on the opportunities and risks of social media and the role of all educational actors across different levels, are essential. Moreover, gender-specific policies are critical to addressing the higher social media use and the disproportionately high mental health challenges faced by female adolescents. National disparities in social media usage across the EU point to the need to consider national contexts and country-specific factors when studying the impact of technology, as challenges and benefits may vary significantly between and within countries and may be related to overall digital literacy, among others. Finally, our findings confirm the need for young people to be included in the dialogue on the use and impact of social media and on the measures that could be taken to protect their mental health, as highlighted in the new political guidelines for the European Commission 2024-2029.[25]

Further research is needed to better understand the underling mechanisms driving the correlation between social media and poor mental health, particularly as establishing the direction of causality remains challenging.[26] To accomplish this, qualitative research, including participatory approaches, would allow to capture adolescents' perspectives and needs regarding social media usage and its impact. Meanwhile, EU-wide longitudinal research is needed to systematically monitor social media usage across Europe. Additionally, complementing self-reported data with actual usage data related to specific social media activities, would expand the knowledge base on factors influencing poor mental health.[27] Such methods would allow for a more comprehensive understanding and inform the development of more targeted and effective measures to mitigate the potential negative effects of social media use on adolescents' mental health.

REFERENCES

Allcott, H., Braghieri, L., Eichmeyer, S., & Gentzkow, M. (2020). The welfare effects of social media. *American Economic Review, 110(3)*, 629–676.

boyd, d. (2014). *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens*. Yale University Press.

Blasko, Z., & Castelli, C. (2022). *Social media use and loneliness* (EUR 31092 EN). Publications Office of the European Union. *https://doi.org/10.2760/700283*

Borst, G., Bozzola, E., Buellens, K., Cataldo, I., Hale, L., Kent, M., Montag, C., Nivins, S., O'Reilly, M., Rubaek, L., Schiotz Thorud, H.-M., Sterpenich, V., & Vandenbosh, L. (2025). Minors' health and social media: An interdisciplinary scientific perspective. In A. Manolios, E. Sala, S. Sundorph, S. Chaudron, & E. Gomez (Eds.), *European Centre for Algorithmic Transparency roundtables* (JRC141090). European Commission.

Bottaro, R., & Faraci, P. (2022). The use of social networking sites and its impact on adolescents' emotional well-being: A scoping review. *Current Addiction Reports, 9(4)*, 518–539. *https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-022-00445-4*

Bozzola, E., Spina, G., Agostiniani, R., Barni, S., Russo, R., Scarpato, E., Di Mauro, A., Di Stefano, A. V., Caruso, C., Corsello, G., & Staiano, A. (2022). The use of social media in children and adolescents: Scoping review on the potential risks. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19(16)*, 9960. *https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19169960*

Cignetti, M., & Piacentini, M. (2024). Beyond grades: Raising the visibility and impact of PISA data on students' well-being (*OECD Education Working Papers, No. 313*). OECD Publishing. *https://doi.org/10.1787/806233fe-en*

Council of the European Union. (2022). *Council conclusions on supporting well-being in digital education* (N. 14982/22). Official Journal of the European Union, C 469, 19–28.

Council of the European Union. (2023). *Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States on a comprehensive approach to the mental health of young people in the European Union* (N. 15322/23). *http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2023/1337/oj*

Council of the European Union. (2024). *Council conclusions on the future of EU digital policy* (N. 9957/24).

Coyne, S. M., et al. (2025). Social media and youth mental health: A departure from the status quo. In D. A. Christakis & L. Hale (Eds.), *Handbook of children and screens (pp. 1–17)*. Springer. *https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-69362-5_17*

25 *https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf*

26 Examples of recent evidence exploring these mechanisms include Fardouly et al., 2024 and De Coninck et al., 2023.

27 This could be facilitated by the DSA draft delegated act on access to online platform data, which will allow researchers to access data to study systemic risks and to assess online platforms' risk mitigation measures in the EU. *Delegated act on data access published for consultation - European Commission*

De Coninck, D., Waechter, N., & d'Haenens, L. (2023). Predicting self-reported depression and health among adolescents: Time spent online mediated by digital skills and digital activities. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 26(10)*, 747–754. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2023.0079

Dhombres, B., Kovacic, M., Schnepf, S. V., & Blaskó, Z. (2024). *Loneliness and social media use in the European Union* (JRC135806). European Commission.

European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. (2024). *Wellbeing and mental health at school – Guidelines for education policymakers, school leaders, teachers and educators*. Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/590

Fardouly, J., Magson, N., Rapee, R. M., Oar, E. L., Johnco, C. J., Richardson, C., & Freeman, K. (2024). Investigating longitudinal and bidirectional relationships between parental factors and time spent on social media during early adolescence. *New Media and Society, 26(3)*, 1610–1626. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221076155

Godard, R., & Holtzman, S. (2024). Are active and passive social media use related to mental health, wellbeing, and social support outcomes? A meta-analysis of 141 studies. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 29(1)*, zmad055.

Ivie, E. J., Pettitt, A., Moses, L. J., & Allen, N. B. (2020). A meta-analysis of the association between adolescent social media use and depressive symptoms. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 275*, 165–174. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2020.06.014

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons, 53(1)*, 59–68. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003

Liu, M., Kamper-DeMarco, K. E., Zhang, J., Xiao, J., Dong, D., & Xue, P. (2022). Time spent on social media and risk of depression in adolescents: A dose-response meta-analysis. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19(9)*, 5164. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19095164

Mansfield, K. L., Ghai, S., Hakman, T., Ballou, N., Vuorre, M., & Przybylski, A. K. (2025). From social media to artificial intelligence: Improving research on digital harms in youth. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health.*

Marciano, L., Dubicka, B., Magis-Weinberg, L., Morese, R., Viswanath, K., & Weber, R. (2025). Digital media, cognition, and brain development in adolescence. In D. A. Christakis & L. Hale (Eds.), *Handbook of children and screens* (pp. 1–17). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-69362-5_4

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2024. *Social Media and Adolescent Health*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/27396

OECD. (2023a). *Annex A2. The PISA target population, the PISA samples, and the definition of schools.* OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/007f7d8e-en

OECD. (2023b). The construction of reporting scales and of indices from the student context questionnaire. In *PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The state of learning and equity in education.* OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/671f1935-en

Orben, A., Meier, A., Dalgleish, T., & Blakemore, S. J. (2024). Mechanisms linking social media use to adolescent mental health vulnerability. *Nature Reviews Psychology*, 1–17.

Sala, A., Porcaro, L., & Gómez, E. (2024). Social media use and adolescents' mental health and well-being: An umbrella review. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports, 14*, 100404. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2024.100404

Senekal, J. S., Groenewald, G. R., Wolfaardt, L., Jansen, C., & Williams, K. (2023). Social media and adolescent psychosocial development: A systematic review. *South African Journal of Psychology, 53(2)*, 157–171. https://doi.org/10.1177/00812463221119302

Valkenburg, P. M., Beyens, I., Pouwels, J. L., van Driel, I. I., & Keijsers, L. (2022). Social media browsing and adolescent well-being: Challenging the 'Passive Social Media Use Hypothesis'. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 27(1)*, zmab015.

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.

Webster, D., Dunne, L., & Hunter, R. (2021). Association between social networks and subjective well-being in adolescents: A systematic review. *Youth & Society, 53(2)*, 175–210. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X20919589

World Health Organization. (2022). *Fact sheets: Mental health: Strengthening our response.* Retrieved from https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the following colleagues for their review and comments on earlier versions of this policy brief: Montserrat López Cobo, Jude Cosgrove, Carlo Reggiani, Bruno Carballa Smichowski, Néstor Duch Brown, Miguel Barreda Ángeles, Elaine Van Rijn, Stephane Chaudron, Emilia Gómez (JRC), Marta Markowska (DG EAC) and Stefan Craenen and Marianne Takki (DG SANTE). Thanks also to Michele Vespe and Eva Martínez Rodríguez for guidance and support and Carmen Capote for the graphic design of this document.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed are purely those of the authors and may not in any circumstances be regarded as stating an official position of the European Commission.

COPYRIGHT

© European Union, 2025

EU Science Hub
joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu