Children, Digital Use and Social Media

Lessons learned and Perspectives







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Foreword

Alain Berset

Secretary General of the Council of Europe

For many young Europeans, the public square has always fit in a pocket. The screen is often where they first encounter public life, where they form their opinions and begin to express them.

Yet the platforms that host this square are designed to capture attention, and this affects all of us, whatever our age. Their design can cost us sleep and feed anxiety. It can also bring every crisis closer, often without context. Declining mental health, particularly among the young, has become a serious concern. It is also a question of democratic health: a square built to hold our attention is not built to hear our voices. If we want young people to become confident citizens, their public square must be safe and fair.

I commend Monaco for placing children at the heart of its Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The Thematic dialogue it initiated brought together some 150 policy makers, experts and civil society representatives, as well as youth ambassadors from Ireland and Malta. The aim was to ground a polarised debate in science, and in what children themselves have to say. This publication gathers the main lessons of that dialogue, alongside contributions from our Commissioner for Human Rights and from WHO/Europe.

Too often, the public debate is framed as a choice between protecting children and respecting their rights. This is a false choice: children have a right to be protected, and a right to take part safely in digital life. Age limits and other restrictions may have their place, but they must not relieve those who design addictive platforms of their responsibility.

A more balanced approach is possible: learn, protect and innovate. This is the approach of the New Democratic Pact for Europe, which aims to rebuild trust in institutions and strengthen democratic resilience in an age of permanent crisis and technological change.

To learn is to give children the tools to think critically so they need not be shielded from everything. To protect is to hold platform designers to account. To innovate is to embed children and human rights in digital spaces from design.

No country can regulate global platforms alone. The Council of Europe’s common legal space, built on the European Convention on Human Rights, can help shape a European response. Children must be part of it.



Foreword

Christophe Robino

Minister of Health and Social Affairs, Principality of Monaco

The place of digital technology in the lives of children and young people has become a major issue for our societies. It affects their health, their development, their social relationships, their access to information and, more broadly, the conditions in which they learn to exercise their rights and to participate in community life.

In the face of this reality, the responsibility of public authorities cannot be limited to preventing risks. It also consists in preserving the opportunities offered by these technologies, while ensuring that digital environments remain compatible with the needs, rights and best interests of children.

It is this requirement of balance, but also of action, that the Principality of Monaco wished to champion during its Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The dialogue held in Strasbourg on 4 June 2026, devoted to social media and children's mental health, marked an important milestone in this regard.

Prepared in close co-operation with the Council of Europe, with the support of scientists, experts and international partners, including WHO/Europe, it brought together complementary approaches: those of public health, human rights and digital governance.

It also gave young people a prominent role, whose experiences and contributions directly informed the discussions.

This exchange of perspectives highlighted the complexity of the issues at stake, but also the need to move beyond certain oppositions that dominate the public debate.

This is neither about condemning tools that have become central to young people's lives, nor about taking the view that their benefits justify leaving young people to face the risks they entail on their own. It is about creating the conditions for a digital life that is compatible with their rights, their health and their development.

This requirement also means that protection must not rest solely on young people and their families. It also entails a responsibility on the part of platforms, both in the design and operation of their services and in the transparency of their practices, as well as in the implementation of effective safeguards to protect and respect users' rights.

My experience as a medical doctor leads me to approach these issues with a twofold requirement: to take seriously the risks to young people's health and development, while exercising the caution that is indispensable when faced with complex scientific, psychological and social phenomena.

Such caution must not become a reason for inaction. On the contrary, it must motivate and guide our action. Public responsibility consists precisely in acting on the levers at our disposal, while continuing the rigorous examination of those responses that still require further knowledge, safeguards or assessment.

In Monaco, this method has guided a national reflection on these issues since 2025, building on action already taken in the fields of education, prevention and support.

The Government chose to give priority to an approach based on consulting young people, understanding digital practices, involving institutions and civil society, and drawing on both national and international expertise.

This reflection led to a further step in the second half of 2026, with the launch of an inter-ministerial task force on “Digital Use and Youth”. Its objective is to bring greater coherence to our action, by consolidating existing measures and preparing a national roadmap, which is expected to be rolled out gradually from 2027 onwards.

Our approach is based on a key distinction: taking immediate action when needs are identified and measures can be implemented, whilst at the same time continuing to examine more far-reaching regulatory measures, the feasibility and implementation of which still need to be assessed.

This approach does not claim to provide a definitive answer to constantly evolving challenges. It reflects a determination to build coherent, proportionate and sustainable public action, capable of adapting to developments in both knowledge and practices.

In connection with the work undertaken with our international partners, including the Council of Europe and WHO/Europe, it also illustrates the value of a form of co-operation in which national experiences inform European reflection, while international work in turn informs the choices made by States.

This publication seeks to sustain this momentum.

By drawing on the lessons learned from the Strasbourg dialogue, it offers a basis for reflection to better understand the issues relating to young people’s digital use, beyond social media alone, and to continue the dialogue between institutions, experts, families and, first and foremost, young people themselves.

Protecting children in the digital space does not mean keeping them out of it. Respect for their rights is not an obstacle to digital progress. It is a precondition for it. At both national and international level, the digital environment cannot be a zone of exception. Children’s rights must be capable of being exercised there as fully and as effectively as in any other sphere of community life.



Contribution

Michael O'Flaherty

Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe

"Regulate platforms, not children"

I welcome the timeliness and quality of the dialogue on social media and children's mental health under the auspices of the Monegasque Chairmanship of the Council of Europe.

Ongoing efforts to better protect children from online harms should not deflect attention from ensuring that platforms respect human rights through clear legal duties, independent oversight, and effective enforcement.

The online ecosystem is failing children. They are exposed to harmful and abusive content, addictive features and manipulative design practices that influence their behaviour and impact on their well-being and development.

However, simply blocking children's access to social media shifts the responsibility for safety from the platforms that design and manage these environments to the children navigating them. Such restrictions risk pushing young people into riskier ways of accessing social media. Instead, states should require social media companies to adjust their business models, prevent and mitigate risks to children's rights by design and by default, and face consequences for failures.

Regulatory intervention at the source is essential. This includes ensuring algorithmic transparency and auditability, effective reporting and redress mechanisms, children's rights impact assessments, independent audits, and restrictions on targeted advertising. These obligations must be enforceable, subject to independent oversight, and supported by sanctions and liabilities.

The European Commission's enforcement measures under the Digital Services Act set a strong precedent. Member states of the Council of Europe could support a similar approach by allocating enforcement resources, coordinating supervision, and ensuring that penalties far exceed any economic benefit derived from exploitative engagement models.

Before enacting bans, governments and parliaments should pause. They should consult with experts, civil society, children and young people, to ensure that all measures are adequately tailored, proportionate and compliant with human rights standards.

The source of harm is rooted in the design of the platforms and their business models. That is where the focus of regulation should lie.

Editorial

Purpose and approach

This publication follows on from the joint initiative and collaboration launched at the end of 2025 between the Principality of Monaco and the Council of Europe on issues relating to children's use of social media. It forms part of the priorities pursued by Monaco during its Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, from May to November 2026.

On 4 June 2026, the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), in co-operation with the Steering Committee for Human Rights in the fields of Biomedicine and Health (CDBIO), held a Thematic dialogue on social media and children's mental health in Strasbourg and online, under the auspices of the Presidency of Monaco of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers. The event also contributed to the reflections under the Council of Europe's New Democratic Pact for Europe.

Opened by Alain Berset, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, and Christophe Robino, Minister of Health and Social Affairs of Monaco, the event brought together 150 participants in Strasbourg, including policy makers, international experts, civil society representatives and youth ambassadors from Ireland and Malta, as well as over 350 participants online.

Prepared with the support of scientists, experts and international partners, including WHO/Europe, the dialogue had a twofold aim: to gain a better understanding of the relationship between social media and children's mental health, in the light of scientific knowledge and lived experience; and to help inform possible responses, reconciling public health, protection and the exercise of rights. The participation of young people was a central feature of the event.

The discussions made it possible to compare available knowledge and the various approaches under consideration, without seeking to reduce the complexity of the subject to a single answer. They also highlighted issues that extend beyond social media alone and concern digital environments more broadly, in which children learn, communicate, seek information and participate in community life.

This reflection has since been taken forward, in particular, through the preparation of a Council of Europe thematic guidance note, continued co-operation between the various partners involved and the preparation of this publication.

Following the high-level forewords, this publication presents the main lessons learned from the dialogue (I) and then sets out perspectives for public policy (II), drawing in particular on the work of the Council of Europe, the public health perspective of WHO/Europe and the national initiatives undertaken by Monaco. Particular prominence is given to the voices of children and young people (III). The consultations of children and young people conducted in Monaco ahead of the dialogue, together with the additional testimonies gathered in its wake, shed light on their experiences, concerns and proposals, thereby enriching and informing the reflection.

This publication thus seeks to bring together available knowledge, the experiences of children and young people and the responsibilities of the various stakeholders, in order to contribute to better-informed public action that is attentive to evolving digital practices and grounded in respect for the values of the Council of Europe.

It will be presented at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg at a follow-up event to the dialogue, to be held on 27 November 2026 on the occasion of the 14th plenary meeting of the CDENF.

1. Lessons learned

What the Thematic dialogue brought to light

1.1. Digital risks and opportunities: moving beyond simplistic readings

The first lesson of the dialogue concerns the complexity of the relationship between social media, digital use and children's mental health.

The experts meeting in Strasbourg emphasised that the available scientific evidence does not support the view that social media is the main cause of children's mental health difficulties. These difficulties should be understood in the context of multiple factors, including individual vulnerabilities, family and social relationships, the school environment and the characteristics of the platforms themselves. Whilst certain links – particularly those relating to sleep and sedentary behaviour – are better documented, others, especially those with long-term implications, require further research.

The youth ambassadors, present at the Thematic dialogue, also illustrated this complexity, referring to some of the difficulties young people may face, such as cyberbullying, social pressure or isolation, while also recalling, alongside the experts, the opportunities offered by these same platforms in terms of communication, learning, access to information and self-expression. For some young people, these environments can also provide spaces of support and belonging.

Contribution by WHO/Europe

Following its participation in the dialogue of 4 June and the co-operation established with the Principality of Monaco, the WHO Regional Office for Europe was invited to provide an additional public health perspective, in the words of Dr Natasha Azzopardi-Muscat, Director of Health Systems, WHO Regional Office for Europe

"Young people's mental health is shaped by the environments in which they grow up, and today those environments are increasingly digital. Our review of the evidence shows a mixed picture. Technology can support connection, creativity and learning. It can also expose children to harm, and those already vulnerable bear the greatest burden. Long-term effects remain uncertain, and the link runs both ways: mental health difficulties may drive more use, and more use may deepen difficulties. The science is complex and nuanced, but we know enough to act.

From a public health perspective, uncertainty is not a reason for inaction. Where there is plausible risk to young people's health and well-being, a precautionary approach is warranted, shifting the burden of proof toward demonstrating that platforms are safe. But protection must not come at the cost of participation. Young people have a right to enjoy the benefits of the digital world, particularly those who may find it hard to connect offline.

Health ministries must have a voice in digital governance, with policy action that balances rights, risks, and responsibilities: prioritising digital well-being, regulating harmful platform design, holding industry to account, building capacity of health workers, and investing in offline alternatives. Above all, it must be shaped with young people and families, not for them. WHO/Europe is supporting countries to lead on this, with evidence and clear priorities for action."

The first lesson thus underlines the need to recognise both the benefits and the risks of digital use, while distinguishing between what scientific knowledge can establish and what remains uncertain. This nuanced approach helps to inform appropriate responses, without minimising the difficulties identified or overgeneralising their effects.

1.2. Acting on digital environments, beyond individual behaviour alone

The second lesson calls for the protection of children in the digital environment to be approached at several levels. Beyond individual behaviour and family support, the discussions highlighted the importance of platform design and of the complementarity of the means of action available.

The protection of children cannot rest solely on their ability to manage their own use, nor on the vigilance of their families. When a digital environment is designed to capture attention, recommend content and prolong the use of a service, its very architecture can become a factor of vulnerability. Conversely, its design can also help to strengthen users' safety and autonomy. The discussions thus highlighted the importance of safety by design, the transparency of recommender systems, the prevention of harmful features and effective reporting and redress mechanisms.

The question of access restrictions, particularly age-based ones, illustrated the complexity of the possible responses. Several speakers highlighted the potential limitations of blanket bans: difficulties of implementation, the possibility of circumvention and possible consequences for children's access to information, support or participation. In this respect, the discussions also underlined the importance of assessing the effectiveness, proportionality and actual conditions of application of any regulatory measures.

The exchanges between experts, as well as the testimonies of the youth ambassadors, also highlighted the need for a multi-stakeholder response involving the various actors concerned, including digital platforms, public authorities, families and young people themselves, with due regard for their respective responsibilities and capacities.

The discussions thus revealed a wide range of complementary levers, including digital citizenship education, prevention, support for families, training for professionals and the provision of offline spaces and activities. Several of these levers can be directly mobilised or strengthened by public authorities within their areas of competence, irrespective of the outcome of more complex regulatory measures.

The second lesson thus underlines the need to consider not only how children use platforms, but also how platform design can influence their scope for choice, autonomy and protection. In this respect, responses can draw on two complementary dimensions: taking into account the responsibilities of those who design and operate digital environments, on the one hand, and mobilising the education, prevention and support levers available to public authorities, on the other.

1.3. Recognising the digital environment as a space for rights and participation

The third lesson concerns the place that digital environments now occupy in the exercise of rights and participation in democratic life.

For many children and young people, social media have become places for accessing news, discussion, self-expression and, at times, mobilisation. They contribute to the formation of opinions and can offer new opportunities for engagement in community life. These spaces can also foster inclusion and give greater visibility to people or experiences that are under-represented in traditional forms of participation.

However, ease of access to information and opportunities for expression do not, in themselves, guarantee the conditions for free and informed debate. Disinformation, hate speech, cyberbullying and certain effects of recommender systems can affect access to reliable information, the pluralism of exchanges and everyone's ability to take part in public debate.

The youth ambassadors, present in Strasbourg, illustrated these tensions, recalling that the same environments can foster social connection, expression and engagement while exposing children to harmful content, pressure or forms of exclusion. The discussions thus recalled that reflection on digital use is directly linked to reflection on the exercise of fundamental rights. Freedom of expression, respect for private life, access to information and participation must also be capable of being exercised in these environments.

This reflection takes on particular significance in the context of the New Democratic Pact for Europe, whose ambition to strengthen democratic resilience calls for consideration of the environments in which young people develop their critical thinking and progressively exercise their citizenship.

The third lesson is therefore that protection is inseparable from participation. Beyond reducing risks, it is also important to preserve the conditions in which children can seek information, express themselves, engage with different points of view and effectively exercise their rights.

2. Perspectives

Considerations for public policy

2.1. Combining access to opportunities, protection and participation

The Thematic dialogue highlighted the need for a comprehensive, child rights-based approach that would rely neither on a single instrument nor on an exclusively restrictive conception of protection.

Following these exchanges and complementing the background note prepared for the event, a thematic guidance note was drawn up by the Council of Europe. Drawing on relevant international and Council of Europe standards, this thematic guidance note aims to help member states to design proportionate, evidence-based and anticipatory responses.

It proposes combining three complementary dimensions: safe and equitable access to digital environments, protection, and the participation of children.

1

Access

The first seeks to enable children to benefit from the opportunities offered by digital environments, in conditions appropriate to their age, evolving capacities and needs. It includes, in particular, digital citizenship education, the development of critical thinking, access to appropriate services and support for families.

2

Protection

The second concerns protection from risks and harm. It would require, in particular, acting on the design of digital environments, strengthening the accountability of service providers, preventing harmful practices and guaranteeing access to support, reporting and redress mechanisms.

3

Participation

The third enshrines the place of children in decisions that affect them. Their experience should be able to inform public policy and contribute to the design of digital environments that respect their rights.

The strength of this approach would lie in the interplay between these dimensions. Access to opportunities should go hand in hand with safeguards; protection should not lead to disproportionate restrictions; and participation should contribute to the relevance of the responses provided. The challenge would therefore not be to choose between enabling, protecting and involving, but to create the conditions in which these requirements can be pursued together.

2.2. Anticipating changes in digital use

While the Thematic dialogue took social media and children's mental health as its starting point, it follows from the above that the issues identified may extend well beyond this scope. Attention capture, recommender systems, exposure to harmful content and privacy-related issues would also concern other digital environments

and services, including online gaming, messaging services and new applications based on artificial intelligence (AI).

These environments do not all share the same characteristics and do not necessarily call for the same responses. Risks should be assessed according to the features, practices and situations concerned. They would nonetheless raise common requirements in terms of health, safety, personal data protection, autonomy and the exercise of rights.

At the same time, their rapid evolution would suggest that public policies should not be built solely around the platforms or issues that are most visible today. It would call for a capacity for anticipation, evaluation and adaptation. From this perspective, the Council of Europe's thematic guidance note also underlines the value of anticipatory governance, based on available knowledge, the evaluation of public interventions and the consideration of technological developments.

This approach would highlight the importance of designing public policies that are sufficiently tailored to the risks identified, while retaining the adaptability needed to evolve with technologies, practices and knowledge. In this respect, European and international co-operation could also be an important tool, given the transnational nature of digital environments and of the responsibilities associated with them.

2.3. Involving children and young people in shaping responses

The Thematic dialogue highlighted the importance of recognising children not only as rights holders, but also as actors in the reflections and decisions that affect them. Their experience can help to identify actual practices, better understand the difficulties encountered, examine the responses envisaged and, where possible, assess their effects.

Such participation can therefore help to ensure that public policies are relevant, provided that it is organised in an appropriate manner and does not shift the responsibility for decisions, which lie with the competent authorities, onto children.

This approach may be implemented in different ways at national level, depending on the institutional contexts and the specific resources available to each state.

◆ **Focus on Monaco**

Consultation, co-operation and public action

In the Principality of Monaco, the discussion on young people's digital habits builds on initiatives already underway, particularly in the areas of digital literacy, ensuring safe school environments, prevention and support for families. From 2025 onwards, the Government has undertaken to expand this approach around two complementary objectives: to gain a better understanding of young people's digital habits, the benefits they derive from them and the difficulties they encounter; and, at the same time, to carry out a review of existing measures in order to identify their achievements and areas for improvement. It was therefore not a question of starting from scratch, but of gaining a better understanding of the needs in order to bring greater coherence and scope to the work already being carried out.

Involving young people was one of the first cornerstones of this approach. A consultation of pupils in state secondary schools brought to light their perceptions of social media, their concerns and their expectations. The discussion also benefited from the opinion of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE), prepared with the involvement of the Youth CESE. This opinion notably underlined the limits of a response based exclusively on access restrictions and the importance of an approach combining prevention, education, support and platform accountability.

This national work informed Monaco's contribution to the Thematic dialogue of 4 June. In turn, the exchanges held with the Council of Europe, WHO/Europe and international experts helped to deepen the discussion under way in the Principality.

In the second half of 2026, this momentum was formalised with the launch of an inter-ministerial task force on "Digital Use and Youth", co-led by the Ministries of Health and Social Affairs (DASS) and of the Interior (DINT). Bringing together the relevant administrations, the task force was mandated to prepare a national roadmap, with a scope broadened to digital use as a whole.

This work made it possible to structure two complementary courses of action, to be pursued in parallel. The first consists in making full use of the levers directly available to the national authorities, by consolidating existing measures and examining additional responses capable of better informing, preventing, identifying and supporting young people, families and professionals. The second seeks to continue the examination of more far-reaching regulatory measures, particularly legal and technical ones, with regard to their legal basis, their proportionality and the actual conditions for their application in the Principality.

This distinction makes it possible to strengthen public action in areas falling directly within the competence of the national authorities, without making such progress conditional on the completion of regulatory or technical work that also depends on international developments.

The work is due to continue until the end of 2026, with a view to a broader national round of exchanges involving the other public institutions (including the National Council, the Principality's legislative chamber, and the Municipality), young people, families, associations and practitioners on the ground. The choice to hold these exchanges at the Lycée Albert Ier, a state secondary school in the Principality, is symbolic: it reflects a determination to continue placing young people at the heart of the discussions that concern them. These exchanges are intended to enrich the orientations under consideration before they are finalised, with a view to the gradual roll-out of the roadmap from 2027 onwards.

This initiative illustrates a step-by-step approach to public action: taking stock and building on existing measures, listening to young people as those most directly concerned, comparing expertise and different perspectives, mobilising the resources available and continuing to examine more complex responses, in order to create the conditions for coherent public action. It also shows how discussions at national and international level can build on one another, without one replacing the other.

3. Voices of young people from Monaco

Diverse experiences, proposals to inform action

3.1. Young people's perspectives and experiences

The following elements are drawn from an overall process undertaken in Monaco in 2025/2026:

- **A questionnaire** on the use of social media, its perceived effects and the levers identified to manage it better, distributed to pupils in state secondary education (lower and upper secondary schools and equivalent programmes), excluding primary education. Responses were received from 21.2% of the target population, i.e. nearly one in five pupils concerned, with most respondents aged between 12 and 17;
- **An opinion of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE)**, the preparation of which involved the Youth CESE at the Government's request – a first for this institution. Adopted unanimously, this opinion made a distinct institutional contribution, highlighting in particular the limitations of a response based solely on access restrictions and the need instead to combine protection, prevention, support and platform accountability;
- **Additional testimonies from young people**, gathered in the second half of 2026 with the support of the Youth CESE, the Ministry of the Interior (DINT) and the Directorate of National Education, Youth and Sport (DENJS) of the Prince's Government, making it possible to deepen the discussion through individual experiences, perceptions and proposals. All the young contributors are listed in the acknowledgements of this publication.

Methodological note

The scope of these elements must be assessed in the light of their nature. The questionnaire is based on self-reported responses and does not constitute a statistically representative survey of all young people in the Principality. The additional testimonies follow a qualitative approach and reflect individual points of view. These contributions are presented as insights intended to inform the discussion. They constitute neither general conclusions nor collectively adopted recommendations. Their value lies precisely in the diversity of the experiences, sensitivities and proposals expressed.

The questionnaire in a few figures

21.2%
of the target population responded, i.e. nearly one in five pupils in state secondary education

68%
of respondents see platforms as the main actors that should take action

72%
use social media as a source of information

41.6%
of girls cite comparison with others, compared with 16% of boys

Managing use and preserving social relationships

The responses of Monaco's pupils to the questionnaire reveal a nuanced perception of social media. Communication is among the most frequently cited benefits, while access to information and learning also features prominently.

Among the difficulties reported, time wasted through infinite scrolling comes first. Concerns relating to self-image (social comparison, pressure regarding appearance and comments) form another significant cluster.

Differences by age and sex emerge in the responses collected. In the sample, girls more often cite wasted time, social comparison and pressure regarding appearance. The gap is particularly marked for comparison with others, cited by 41.6% of girls compared with 16% of boys. Wasted time is cited across all age groups but appears particularly high among 15- to 17-year-olds. Difficulties relating to sleep and social comparison are also more frequently mentioned among the oldest respondents.

These differences describe respondents' perceptions; they do not, in themselves, make it possible to conclude that effects differ between groups.

Several accounts suggest that, beyond the amount of time spent online, we should consider young people's ability to maintain control over their online behaviour.

> *What seems most problematic to me is not just the number of hours spent on one's phone, but the fact of sometimes using it out of habit, without even really wanting to.*
>
> **Sergei, 17**

Others stress the importance of preserving opportunities to meet in person and of offering attractive offline activities.

> *Rather than trying to limit social media, I think it would be worthwhile to give young people more reasons to spend time together in real life.*
>
> **Sam, 17**

Strengthening support and protection

In the questionnaire, platforms were identified by 68% of respondents as the main actors that should take action before any others to better support and protect young people. They are followed by adults/parents (40%), the State (37%), children and young people themselves (35.2%) and schools (9%). These results express the priorities perceived by respondents; they do not constitute an exhaustive assessment of the respective responsibilities of these actors.

The testimonies explore this question further and reveal a range of sensitivities.

> *I think young people are not necessarily asking to be kept away from social media, but rather to be better supported in using it.*
>
> **Nadia, 16**

> *Ultimately, it seems to me that while raising children's awareness of digital use is essential, raising parents' awareness of how to supervise access to screens and social media is even more so.*
>
> **Eléonore, 16**

Understanding and changing the way platforms operate

The responses to the questionnaire also show that young people question the very features of digital services. When asked what changes they would like to see, the first expectation expressed concerns mechanisms that prolong use, such as infinite scrolling or recommendations (32%), the second being content filtering (15%). Measures relating to minimum age, safety settings and algorithmic transparency are cited less frequently.

These concerns are echoed in several individual testimonies.

> *It is also important for platforms to take greater responsibility by strengthening the protection of users, especially the youngest ones.*
>
> **Maya, 17**

> *The Council of Europe could propose a common transparency framework requiring platforms to explain, in language accessible to young people, why certain content is recommended to them.*
>
> **Mariia, 18**

> *I would like to establish a principle for a 'digital duty of vigilance', requiring major platforms to put in place prevention mechanisms when they detect repeated behaviour or exposure that may signal a situation of vulnerability, even if this could be detrimental to the platform.*
>
> **Zoé, 17**

Promoting information and democratic participation

In the questionnaire, 72% of respondents said that they use social media as a source of information. This use increases sharply with age, being cited by around half of those aged 11 and under, compared with more than 85% of those aged 15 and over.

The place of information in young people's use of social media heightens the importance of issues relating to the reliability of content, the diversity of sources and the development of critical thinking.

The testimonies gathered show that young people themselves identify both the opportunities and the limitations of these new spaces for information and participation.

> *This ease of access does not necessarily mean that we are better informed or that we participate more in democratic life.*
>
> **Gabriel, 16**

> *Democracy does not rest solely on voting; it also requires being able to inform oneself, to debate and to participate in community life.*
>
> **Margaux, 17**

> *It is this balance between safety, freedom of expression and privacy that can enable social media to strengthen democracy.*
>
> **Aleksandr, 17**

3.2. From testimonies to ways forward for discussion

Beyond the diversity of their experiences and points of view, the contributions of children and young people in Monaco point to several concrete avenues concerning their digital use, the support they receive, the way platforms operate and their participation in community life. The proposals presented below are drawn exclusively from the views expressed by young people in the course of the processes described in this part. They are listed below for information purposes only and do not constitute either collectively adopted recommendations or measures whose relevance or feasibility has been established. Whether or not they are taken into account is at the discretion of the various stakeholders concerned, in accordance with their respective areas of competence and individual circumstances.

Ways forward suggested by young people from Monaco

Better managing use and preserving social relationships

- Encouraging better control over time spent online, in particular through reminders, breaks, tools for managing notifications and screen time, and greater possibilities to select the content followed.
- Encouraging in-person meetings and offline activities, by offering accessible sporting, cultural and group activities that match the expectations expressed by young people, and by involving them in choosing these activities.

Strengthening support and protection

- Better supporting children and young people in their digital use, without relying exclusively on access restrictions.
- Raising awareness among parents and supporting them in supervising access to screens and social media.
- Strengthening information and prevention for young people, in particular through schools, age-appropriate interventions and awareness-raising about cyberbullying and making it easier to identify sources of help.
- Strengthening the protection of minors against inappropriate contacts and messages.

Understanding and changing the way platforms operate

- Limiting features likely to prolong platform use excessively, in particular infinite scrolling and certain recommendation mechanisms.
- Making recommender systems more transparent, by explaining to young people, in accessible language, why certain content is suggested to them, and by considering mechanisms for independent verification of how these systems operate.
- Better labelling heavily edited images and examining the regulation of certain filters likely to perpetuate misleading representations of physical appearance, particularly among minors.
- Facilitating the reporting and rapid removal of harmful content, in particular manipulated images or images shared without consent, and strengthening responses to cyberbullying, threats and the unlawful dissemination of content.
- Strengthening the protection of personal data and the confidentiality of communications, by distinguishing between the moderation of public spaces and the protection of private conversations.
- Promoting greater diversity of recommended content, particularly educational, cultural, scientific and informative content, so as to enable the discovery of different topics and points of view.

Promoting information and democratic participation

- Developing skills in verifying information, comparing sources and distinguishing between facts and opinions.
- Helping young people to better understand the influence of recommender systems, advertising and influencers on the content to which they are exposed and on their choices.
- Raising greater awareness of forms of disinformation, in particular manipulated images, content created or altered using artificial intelligence and videos taken out of context.
- Preserving opportunities for expression, creativity and participation in public debate, in an environment that respects differing opinions, where disagreement can be expressed without insults, harassment or intimidation.

In summary, these contributions reveal a wide range of expectations: better managing use, receiving appropriate support, strengthening the protection of children and young people, changing the way platforms operate and preserving opportunities for information, expression and participation. They do not reflect a uniform position on which responses should be prioritised. Their value lies precisely in the diversity of the experiences and proposals expressed, which demonstrates young people's ability to identify the difficulties they face and to envisage avenues for improvement. They also show that young people's voices can help not only to better understand digital use, but also to inform discussion on the policies that concern them, in terms of both issues and responses.

Conclusion

Continuing the dialogue and advancing children's rights

The Thematic dialogue and its follow-up have made it possible to bring together scientific knowledge, public health, human rights, the experiences and expectations of children and young people, and digital governance.

Starting from an initial reflection on social media and children's mental health, this collective work now helps to shed light on a broader question: the conditions in which children grow up, develop and exercise their rights in a constantly evolving digital environment.

The lessons learned recall that no single response can suffice. Protecting children and young people requires an approach involving the various stakeholders, a rigorous understanding of risks, an assessment of the effects and possible limitations of the measures envisaged, a clear allocation of responsibilities and the capacity to adapt policies as knowledge and practices evolve.

The perspectives outlined call for these requirements to be translated into proportionate public policies. They show the importance of pursuing lasting co-operation between public institutions, professionals, families, children and young people, giving the latter a genuine place in the debate and in the search for solutions. Finally, they underline the value of an ongoing dialogue between national initiatives and international approaches.

The work stemming from the dialogue is not intended to be an end point. It is one stage in a collective discussion that is set to continue.

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This publication will be presented at a follow-up session to the Thematic dialogue, to be held on 27 November 2026 at the Council of Europe in the framework of the 14th plenary meeting of the CDENF, in the presence of Mr Christophe Robino, Minister of Health and Social Affairs of Monaco.

It brings together contributions from Mr Alain Berset, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Christophe Robino, Minister of Health and Social Affairs of Monaco, Mr Michael O'Flaherty, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, and the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe), represented by Dr Natasha Azzopardi-Muscat, Director of Health Systems.

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The session of 27 November 2026, at which this publication will be presented, will also include a contribution from young professionals, resulting from an initiative co-ordinated by Ms Logane Rolland, trainee at the Permanent Representation of Monaco to the Council of Europe, with the participation of trainees from other permanent representations. This initiative further extends the place given to young people's voices in the reflections undertaken since the Thematic dialogue of 4 June 2026. These young people were invited to contribute in their personal capacity, as professionals, without any political or state affiliation. The young professionals who took part in this initiative are listed below in alphabetical order: Tessa ter Avest, Mila Edwards, Arina Fisher, Ingela Gustafsson, Riccarda Heepen, Vanesa Rábarová, Emilia Zyman.

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