

Social Media and Children's Mental Health

Taking stock and examining responses

Strasbourg, 4th June 2026

Thematic Dialogue

Organised by 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)

*under the auspices of the Presidency of Monaco
of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe
(May-November 2026)*

Draft concept note

Social media play a powerful role in shaping children's worldviews and their attitudes as participants in a democratic society. The ways in which social media platforms curate, amplify, and monetise content can influence how children understand social norms, public debate, and decision-making, while also exposing them to risks such as harmful content, misinformation, polarisation, and negative impacts on mental health and well-being.

This thematic dialogue will take stock of current evidence on these effects and risks and explore policy responses to mitigate them, in the context of the New Democratic Pact for Europe. While focusing on social media's impact on children's mental health, the event will tackle issues related to prevention and education, regulation, age-appropriate and rights-respecting design of digital services, as well as identification and support mechanisms. The event is grounded in a child-rights-based approach, informed by available evidence, and seeks to balance the effective protection of children with the promotion of children's participation and rights.

■ **Context and Objectives**

Children's social, cultural and emotional lives are increasingly shaped in the digital environment, and particularly on social media. In over two decades, these platforms have

become important spaces for children to communicate and interact, learn, build their identity and participate in public life.¹ They provide children with numerous opportunities to exercise their human rights, notably freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association,² and in facilitating access to information. Yet, these platforms raise significant protection concerns, particularly with regard to respect for private life and exposure to harmful content or interactions.

Initially designed as tools for social interaction among friends or close contacts, current social media platforms are largely based on advertising-based business models that incorporate recommendation algorithms to maximise user engagement, and rely on automated features, notably using artificial intelligence.

This evolution of social media platforms engenders increased exposure to harmful content, cyberbullying, intrusive data and profiling practices, or to disinformation. In addition, prolonged uses may become problematic or create dependency.

At the same time, a deterioration in the mental health of children and adolescents has been observed, attracting growing attention from public authorities. Scientific research examines possible — complex and heterogeneous — links between exposure to and use of social media and the psychological well-being of children.

As a result, member states are seeking appropriate responses to better protect children in the digital environment. Several approaches coexist, ranging from age-based regulatory or restrictive measures to awareness-raising, prevention and education policies targeting children and those around them. At the same time, these responses raise fundamental questions as to how they can be articulated within a comprehensive approach that respects the rights and best interests of the child.

The objective of this thematic dialogue is therefore to clarify the terms of the debate, identify areas of convergence and points of attention, and to outline possible courses of action compatible with a child-rights-based approach. It also aims, where appropriate, to contribute to the policies of member States as well as the work of the Council of Europe.

■ [Structure and perspectives](#)

In this context, the thematic dialogue is structured around two strands/sessions:

- **Session 1 –Taking stock:** Identify the potential effects and risks to the mental health of children and adolescents associated with the use of social media, incorporating the perspectives of professionals and those of children and/or young people.
- **Session 2 – Possible responses:** Present and critically examine response options aimed at mitigating these risks, protecting children's health, and ensuring the safe use of social media and, more broadly, digital tools, in full respect of their human rights.

¹ [Full Report: How's Life for Children in the Digital Age? | OECD](#)

² See in particular Articles 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In order to provide concrete input to the second session, it is envisaged to open the floor to member states, enabling them to briefly present national measures or practices that have been implemented or are under consideration.

Following the event, a summary of the main takeaways will be prepared, with a view to informing public policies and, where appropriate, the work of the Council of Europe.

■ Practical information on the event

The event will take place on **4 June 2026**, alongside the plenary meetings of the CDENF and CDBIO, in **Strasbourg** (Palais de l'Europe, Room 9). This **technical-level thematic** dialogue is organised by the CDENF, in cooperation with the CDBIO, under the auspices of the Monegasque Presidency of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers (May–November 2026). Mr Christophe ROBINO, Government Councillor-Minister of Social Affairs and Health of Monaco, will open the event.

In addition to the two organising committees, the event will involve other Council of Europe entities, to support a coordinated cross-sectoral discussion.

It will provide a **platform for exchange** among member States, policymakers, representatives of international organisations and civil society, and experts in children's rights, digital policy, mental health and education, while taking into account the perspectives of children and/or young people.

Around 150 representatives of member states, international organisations, NGOs, experts and young people are expected to attend in person, and online participation/broadcasting is being considered.

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