

THEMATIC SEMINAR

“Digital Environments: Risks, Harms and Opportunities for Children and Youth”

2-3 June 2026

Vienna, Austria / online

The pervasive influence of digital technologies in the lives of children and young people presents both significant opportunities and complex challenges. Digital environments—combining digital devices, Internet, social media platforms and new emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) or Metaverse—are reshaping the way children and young people learn, access information, communicate and engage with entertainment, enabling new opportunities for learning, creativity, participation, and social interaction.

At the same time, digital environments can expose children and youth to harmful screen and technology use, unsafe online interactions, misinformation, cyberbullying and other forms of harmful behaviours, privacy breaches and other threats, which may contribute to the development of addictions and have adverse effects on mental health, well-being, and development. Furthermore, these developments have been associated with increased victimisation, as well as facilitating engagement in criminal and other problematic behaviours. Therefore, a regulated digital space is essential—not only to ensure safety, accountability, and effective safeguards, but also to promote mental wellbeing and healthy digital habits, foster digital and health literacy, support education and personal development, build resilience, encourage safe social interaction, community engagement and democratic participation.

This **thematic seminar** convenes experts and decision-makers from the Council of Europe International Cooperation Group on Drugs and Addictions ([Pompidou Group](#)), and other Council of Europe member States, representatives of international organisations and civil society to examine and exchange views on the multifaceted nexus between digital environments and the mental health of children and youth. These discussions will focus on identifying risks and harms, whilst also considering the enabling and protective potential of digital technologies. Particular attention will be paid to current trends and emerging challenges in digital environments, as well as to effective strategies and practices—including prevention and awareness, treatment, legal and policy interventions—to foster safer and healthier digital experiences for children and youth.

By recognising both the risks and opportunities inherent in today's digital environments, the thematic seminar aims to foster ongoing dialogue among the Pompidou Group member States on efficient policy responses and interventions to reduce risks and harms of online and digital addictions among children and youth, while inform the work of the newly created Council of Europe Drafting Committee on Risks and Harms of Online and Digital Addictions ([BIO-ALN](#)).

Programme – Day 1

Tuesday, 2 June 2026

(14:00 – 17:30)

14:00–14:15	Opening Statements
	• Franz PIETSCH, Chair of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the Pompidou Group (Austrian Presidency) • Rafael BENITEZ, Director of Social Rights, Health and Environment, Council of Europe
14:15–14:45	Keynote Speech <i>The keynote speech will take stock of the Pompidou Group's work on online addictions, from the findings of its earlier research on the risks and harms associated with online gambling and gaming and the resulting policy guidance to recent cooperation activities promoting the mental health of children and youth. Looking ahead, it will reflect on future research priorities that may require the Group's attention in the years to come, with a view to supporting effective responses and informing the development of new Council of Europe standards on online and digital addictions.</i>
	• Julius BURKAUSKAS, Pompidou Group international consultant
14:45–15:45	Session 1: Games and Interactive Platforms—Risks and Opportunities <i>This session will provide an overview of the latest evidence and trends on gaming and its gambling features among children and young people, drawing on findings from population and school surveys. Experts will explore the latest research on online gaming and related gambling behaviours, including how platform design, features and personalised user experiences shape engagement. The discussion will also explore recent developments in screening tools and treatment interventions for addictive gaming behaviours and related disorders.</i>
	<i>Moderator:</i> Leila ZHDANOVA, Pompidou Group Secreteriat • Martin BUSCH and Alexandra PUHM, Competence Center of Addiction (Austria) • Anja BUSSE, WHO (<i>online</i>) • Orsolya KIRÁLY, Pompidou Group international consultant • Markus MESCHIK, St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences (Austria) Q&A
15:45–16:15	Coffee break

16:15–17:15	Session 2: Social Media and Online Communication <i>The session will explore how children and young people engage with social media and online communication platforms, drawing on recent European research and survey data. Experts will discuss emerging trends and key challenges, including harmful content, cyberbullying, online harassment, hate speech, algorithmic bias and concerns around child safety, while examining the role of platform design, content moderation and other measures aimed at creating safer and more empowering digital spaces.</i>
	<i>Moderator:</i> Orsolya KIRÁLY, Pompidou Group international consultant • Janusz SIEROŚLAWSKI, Permanent Correspondent of Poland to the Pompidou Group • Sara SIGHINOLFI, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) • Sára SOLÁROVÁ, Kempelen Institute of Intelligent Technologies • Moirá PATTERSON, IEEE Standards Association (<i>online</i>) Q&A
17:15–17:30	Day 1 Wrap-up
	• Franz PIETSCH, Chair of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the Pompidou Group (Austrian Presidency) • Christiane SCHIMECK, Executive Secretary of the Pompidou Group

Programme – Day 2

Wednesday, 3 June 2026
(9:30 – 13:00)

9:30–9:45	Opening of Day 2
	• Franz PIETSCH, Chair of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the Pompidou Group (Austrian Presidency) • Christiane SCHIMECK, Executive Secretary of the Pompidou Group
9:45–11:00	Session 3: Digital Technology and Mental Health <i>The session will explore the complex relationship between digital technology use and the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, drawing on recent research and practical experience. Experts will examine problematic smartphone use, its links with mental health conditions and other vulnerabilities, and discuss when digital engagement may become harmful. It will also consider emerging technologies, the potential of digital tools to support mental health, and strategies for fostering healthier digital environments and habits.</i>
	<i>Moderator:</i> Julius BURKAUSKAS, Pompidou Group international consultant

	• Jan ROSENLEITNER and Isabella FUCHS-LEITNER, Johannes Kepler University Linz (Austria) / World Association on Dual Disorders • Laura ANIOT, National Media and Infocommunications Authority • Kenneth CARSWELL, WHO (<i>online</i>) • Oliver SCHEIBENBOGEN, “Handyexperiment” (Austria) • Nurlan MAMMADLI, Council of Europe CDNET Committee (<i>online</i>) Q&A
11:00–11:30	Coffee break
11:30–12:30	Session 4: Building Digital Resilience: Role of Families, Communities and Policies <i>The session will explore how families, communities, as well as targeted public policy interventions can strengthen children’s and young people’s resilience in digital environments. Drawing on research, practical experiences and policy initiatives, experts will discuss digital literacy and skills development, and the roles of parents, educators and policymakers in supporting safer and healthier online experiences. The discussion will also showcase effective practices and technological solutions, while examining the contribution of national practices and international cooperation to building protective and empowering digital environments.</i>
	<i>Moderator:</i> Lisa BRUNNER, Institute for Addiction Prevention (Austria) • Roman GABRHELIK, Charles University / General University Hospital (Czechia) • Carlota MAURA JAMES, Europol (<i>online</i>) • Alex COONEY, CyberSafeKids Q&A
12:30–12:45	Presentation of the new Council of Europe Drafting Committee on Risks and Harms of Online and Digital Addictions (BIO-ALN)
	• Leila ZHDANOVA, Pompidou Group Secreteriat
12:45–13:00	Concluding Session
	• Franz PIETSCH, Chair of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the Pompidou Group (Austrian Presidency) • Christiane SCHIMECK, Executive Secretary of the Pompidou Group