ITRE
Fact Sheet

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The question of AI and young people's behaviour in cyberspace – Fact-File

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Introduction

In recent years, technology has become progressively more significant and present in every aspect of life. Huge leaps are being made every single day. With this, along with great possibilities, the world is facing unprecedented challenges. It is the task of this committee to create a resolution attempting to tackle these impending challenges. This fact sheet will give you an overview of the many aspects of European digitalization as well as some of the difficulties it may cause.

We encourage you to research the provided links and sources, enabling you to construct a personal factsheet, fitted to your style of working. Do not hesitate to search for broader information and facts on this subject, as there are many elements of the topic, which are way beyond the scope of this fact sheet.

Key terms

AI: Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems that can perform tasks requiring human intelligence, such as understanding language, recognizing patterns, and making decisions. AI can range from narrow AI, designed for specific tasks, to general AI, aiming to replicate human-level capabilities.

AI bias: Instances where AI algorithms produce biased outcomes due to skewed training data or design flaws.

Algorithm: An AI algorithm is a sequence of instructions that allows a machine to learn from data, identify patterns, and make predictions or decisions.

Social media algorithms: AI-driven rules and calculations that determine the content users see on social media platforms.

Algorithmic accountability: Ensuring that AI systems are transparent and can be held responsible for their decisions and impact.

Echo chamber: A phenomenon where algorithms on social media reinforce existing beliefs and opinions, which can affect young people's perceptions. Often referred to in relation to radicalization.

Deepfakes: AI-generated content, such as videos or images, that can convincingly mimic real people and events, potentially spreading misinformation.

Cognitive bias: Human biases that can influence AI models, leading to skewed results or discriminatory outcomes.

Digital well-being: The state of being healthy and balanced in relation to one's digital life, including screen time and online interactions.

The digital age

The digital age refers to the current era marked by the widespread use of digital technologies like smartphones, computers, and the internet. It has transformed communication, information sharing, business, and entertainment, impacting nearly every aspect of daily life.

Internet usage

As of 2022, 84% of EU citizens used the internet daily, and this figure appears to only increase.
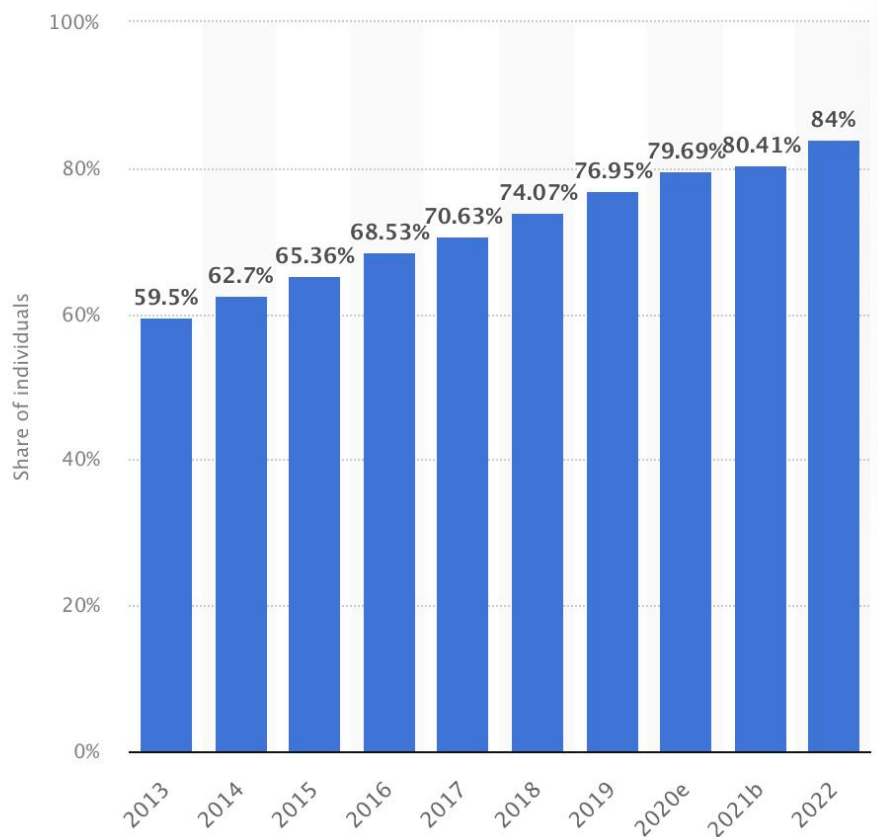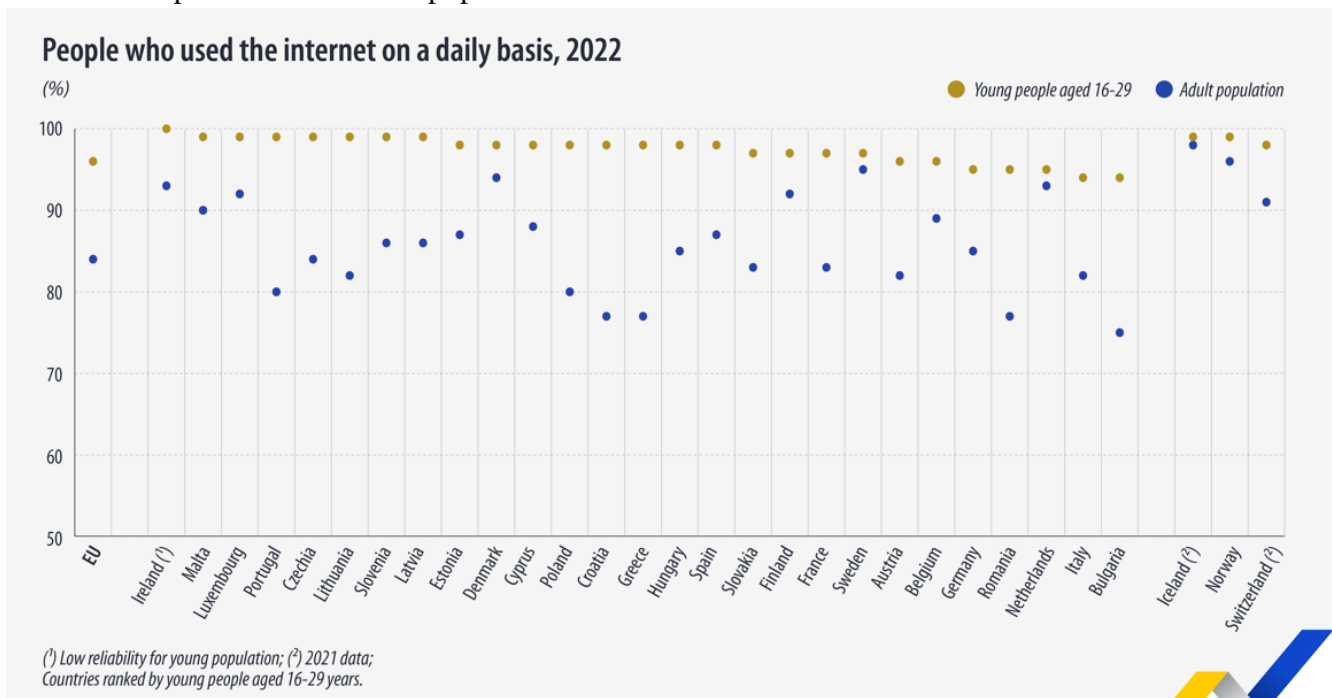
According to Eurostat, 44% of EU-citizens lack basic digital skills, and this figure varies a lot for each member state.

People with basic or above basic digital skills, 2023
(as % of people)

European Union ⌄
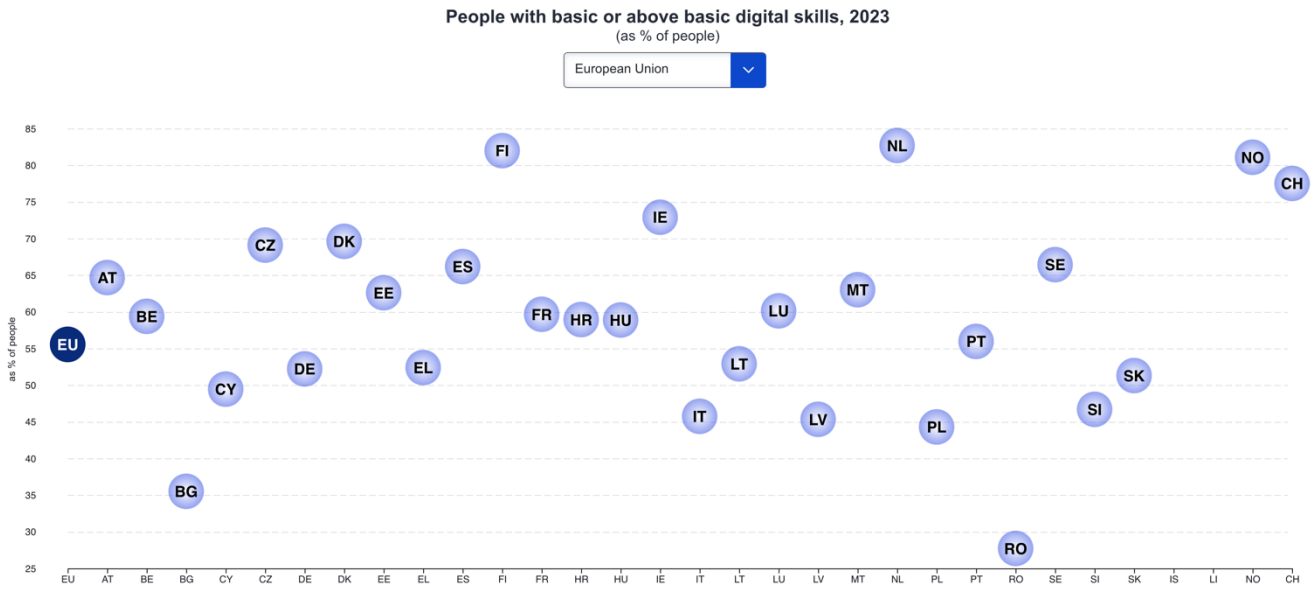
Young people
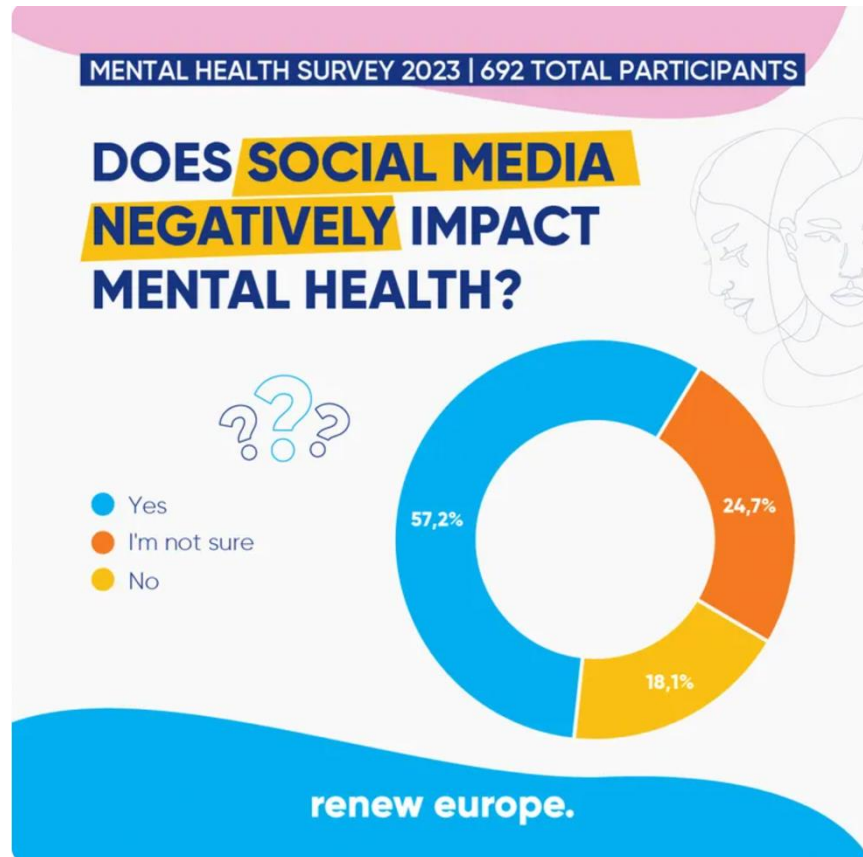
96% of EU-citizens aged 16-29 in the EU use the internet daily, with little variation between member states in comparison to the adult population.

People who used the internet on a daily basis, 2022
(%)

● Young people aged 16-29   ● Adult population

(¹) Low reliability for young population; (²) 2021 data;
Countries ranked by young people aged 16-29 years.

eurostat

Mental health

According to WHO, one in seven 10-19-year-olds experiences a mental disorder, accounting for 13% of the global burden of disease in this age group.

According to a poll from Renew Europe, 57,2% of young people within 20 member states reported that their mental health was negatively influenced by social media.

MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY 2023 | 692 TOTAL PARTICIPANTS

DOES SOCIAL MEDIA NEGATIVELY IMPACT MENTAL HEALTH?

- Yes — 57,2%
- I'm not sure — 24,7%
- No — 18,1%

renew europe.

The negative effects social media may have to young people's well-being, include but are not limited to:

Cyberbullying: Cyberbullying refers to utilizing the internet and social media to bully somebody. This is very relevant when discussing young people on social media. According to WHO around 15% of adolescents have been cyberbullied.

Body Dysmorphia: Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is a mental health condition in which a person obsessively focuses on perceived flaws in their appearance. Social media can provoke BDD by promoting unrealistic beauty standards and encouraging comparison, leading to more distress and repetitive behaviors like excessive mirror checking or seeking reassurance online.

Addiction: Some young people may develop an unhealthy attachment to social media, spending excessive time online and neglecting real-life relationships and responsibilities. As previously stated, 96% of young people use the internet daily.

Privacy and Safety Risks: Sharing personal information on social media can expose young people to privacy risks and potential harm from predators. The broad access to social media also makes targeting young people for scams easier than ever.

Echo chambers: Parts of social media algorithms tend to favor showing content similar to previously liked content. This can create a bubble, where a user is not presented to multiple sides of a story, thus

promoting radicalization. The dynamics of this are quite complex, so we recommend looking into this further to explore the concrete effects on youth opinions.

The internet of things

The internet is in many ways hard to avoid in modern European life.
In 2022, 72% of internet users in the EU used internet-connected devices or systems. Of these:

• 64% used smart home entertainment solutions such as internet-connected TV, game consoles, home audio systems and smart speakers

• 29% were wearing a smartwatch, a fitness band or a similar wearable

• 11% used smart metres for gas, electricity and smart lights for energy management in the home

• 10% used smart home appliances such as robot vacuums, fridges, ovens and coffee machines

• nearly 10% used internet-connected home alarm systems and other safety and security solutions for their home.

Across the EU countries, the proportion of internet users making use of IoT (Internet of Things) solutions ranged from 44% in Bulgaria and 52% in Romania to 92% in Malta and 95% in the Netherlands.

AI

AI is evolving rapidly and is already integrated in many aspects of living.

Ai has tremendous benefits, since it is able to adapt and act according to circumstances more than traditional software. However, it is much less transparent, making it difficult to understand the exact factors in play, which lead to a decision made by AI. This may not be a problem at small scales, but as more and more of society begins to rely on AI, this could potentially lead to many challenges.

Although 61% of Europeans look favorably at AI and robots, 88% say these technologies require careful management. (Eurobarometer 2017, EU-28)

"Black box" model
Many AI methods today function like a "black box" model, where we understand the input and output but lack insight into the inner workings. This makes human oversight challenging in real-world use cases, and thus makes legislation difficult.

Current measures and solutions by the EU

A European approach to trust in AI
Building trustworthy AI will create a safe and innovation-friendly environment for users, developers and deployers.
The Commission has proposed 3 inter-related legal initiatives that will contribute to building trustworthy AI:

1. a **European legal framework for AI that upholds fundamental rights and addresses safety risks** specific to the AI systems;

2. a **civil liability framework - adapting liability rules to the digital age and AI**;

3. a revision of sectoral safety legislation (**e.g. Machinery Regulation, General Product Safety Directive**).

AI Act
The legal framework, known as the "AI Act" is the first-ever legal framework on AI, which addresses the risks of AI and positions Europe to play a leading role globally.
The proposed rules will:
- address risks specifically created by AI applications;
- prohibit AI practices that pose unacceptable risks;
- determine a list of high-risk applications;
- set clear requirements for AI systems for high-risk applications;
- define specific obligations deployers and providers of high-risk AI applications;
- require a conformity assessment before a given AI system is put into service or placed on the market;
- put enforcement in place after a given AI system is placed into the market;
- establish a governance structure at European and national level.

DSA (Digital Services Act)
According to the EU commission:
The DSA protects consumers and their fundamental rights online by setting clear and proportionate rules. It fosters innovation, growth, and competitiveness, and facilitates the scaling up of smaller

platforms, SMEs and start-ups. The roles of users, platforms, and public authorities are rebalanced according to European values, placing citizens at the centre.

For citizens

– better protection of fundamental rights

– more control and choice

– stronger protection of children online

– less exposure to illegal content

For providers of digital services

– legal certainty

– a single set of rules across the EU

– easier to start-up and scale-up in Europe

For business users of digital services

– access to EU-wide markets through platforms

– level-playing field against providers of illegal content

For society at large

– greater democratic control and oversight over systemic platforms

– mitigation of systemic risks, such as manipulation or disinformation

DMA (Digital Markets Act)
According to the European parliament:

> 10,000

Number of online platforms operating in the EU. More than 90% of these are small and medium-sized enterprises

The purpose of the Digital Markets Act is to ensure a level playing field for all digital companies, regardless of their size. The regulation will lay down clear rules for big platforms - a list of "dos" and "don'ts" - which aim to stop them from imposing unfair conditions on businesses and consumers.

Such practices include ranking services and products offered by the gatekeeper itself higher than similar services or products offered by third parties on the gatekeeper's platform or not giving users the possibility of uninstalling any pre-installed software or app.

Interoperability between messaging platforms will improve - users of small or big platforms will be able to exchange messages, send files or make video calls across messaging apps.

The rules should boost innovation, growth and competitiveness and will help smaller companies and start-ups compete with very large players.

Sources and links for further reading

This fact sheet will have provided a broad overview of the topic at hand, but we suggest to go more in-depth using the links below.

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/digitalisation-2024

https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/european-approach-artificial-intelligence

https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/regulatory-framework-ai

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

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2023/733110/IPOL_ATA(2023)733110_EN.pdf

https://youth.europa.eu/get-involved/your-rights-and-inclusion/how-much-do-you-know-about-mental-health_en

https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act/europe-fit-digital-age-new-online-rules-platforms_en#small-online-platform-scaling-up-in-the-eu

https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health

https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/27-03-2024-one-in-six-school-aged-children-experiences-cyberbullying--finds-new-who-europe-study

https://www.eur-lex.com/