Better Internet for Kids

REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2023

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FOREWORD by the European Commission

As we reflect on the past year, 2023 stands out as a year of challenges and change. As recent geopolitical developments have shown, with conflicts at Europe's doorstep and an associated rise in disinformation, it is crucial for the EU to insist on full respect of fundamental rights and values, offline as online.

2023 was a turning point for rebalancing powers between the digital industry and its users. The Digital Services Act (DSA) entered into force for the Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) and Very Large Online Search Engines (VLOSEs) with more than 45 million users. This marked a big leap forward for child protection online, with changes visible already for many under 18s on platforms including Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok. It should be noted that the European Commission is responsible for ensuring that these largest firms follow the new rules.

The extensive experience and expertise of the Safer Internet Centres in the Member States and the unique resources of the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) platform as the EU's hub on child online safety, are as important and relevant as ever to ensure that children, carers and educators are well aware of their rights under the DSA and of the practical impact of the new rules. By Safer Internet

Day 2024, a *booklet explaining the protection of minors under the DSA* will be available in all official EU languages.

However, the digital citizens of tomorrow need more than protection. Ensuring all young people have the necessary skills, from technical knowledge to digital literacy, and the confidence to fully participate in digital life, is also essential.

I was very impressed by the insights and enthusiasm of the BIK youth panellists and other young participants at the Safer Internet Forum in November 2023. Appropriately for the European Year of Skills, at this conference stakeholders from all over Europe and beyond discussed how to provide young people with the skills needed for the digital decade and the future.

This proved a very timely discussion, considering the fast pace of technological and political developments. 2023 saw significant developments in both AI (artificial intelligence) and virtual worlds, with both offering new opportunities and challenges for the EU in terms of competitiveness in line with our core values.

In late 2023 the EU co-legislators reached political agreement on the *EU's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act*, the first-ever comprehensive legal framework on AI worldwide. Earlier last year, the Commission

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adopted a strategy on Web 4.0 and virtual worlds. Both texts aim to nurture an innovative, trustworthy, inclusive digital environment in the EU, in line with the *European Declaration on digital rights and principles*, published in January.

Looking ahead, from mid–February 2024, the DSA will apply to all platforms accessible to young users – regardless of size – which will have to ensure a high level of minors' privacy, security and safety.

Under the DSA and BIK+, we will continue working on age assurance and age verification. The first child-led review of the BIK+ strategy is due. We will also start preparing for the new Commission. And let us not forget to vote in the European elections in June that will bring in a new Parliament!

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BACKGROUND TO BETTER INTERNET FOR KIDS

Building on a succession of Safer Internet programmes, Better Internet for Kids (BIK) is a European Commission initiative which aims to create a better internet for Europe's children and youth, funded under the Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL). This report provides an insight into some of the key achievements and areas of focus during 2023.

The Better Internet for Kids (BIK) platform and related activities is managed on behalf of the European Commission by European Schoolnet (EUN), which coordinates the Insafe network of awareness centres, helplines and youth participation actions, in partnership with INHOPE (the International Association of Internet Hotlines), dedicated to the removal of illegal online content. These combined strands are commonly referred to as *Safer Internet Centres (SICs)*, typically operating in EU Member States, plus Iceland and Norway, in the drive to keep children and young people safe online.

13.69 MILLION EURO IN 2023

With EU co-funding to the level of 13.69 million euro in 2023 for this programme of work – representing service contracts (for coordination of BIK services) and grant agreements with Safer Internet Centres on a pro-rata basis (for Safer Internet Centres in EU Member States and EEA countries) – this work is of strategic importance to the European Commission.

What is a Safer Internet Centre?

Insafe and INHOPE work together through a network of Safer Internet Centres across Europe, typically comprising an awareness centre, helpline, hotline and youth participation actions.

National awareness centres focus on raising awareness and understanding of safer internet issues and emerging trends. They run campaigns to empower children, young people, parents, caregivers and teachers with the skills, knowledge and strategies to stay safe online and take advantage of the opportunities that the internet and mobile technologies provide.

Helplines provide information, advice and assistance to children, young people, and those who care for them on how to deal with harmful content, harmful contact (such as grooming), harmful conduct (such as cyberbullying or sexting) and contract issues (where the child is a consumer in the online space). Helplines can be accessed via a variety of means such as by telephone, email, web forms, and online chat services.

Hotlines exist to allow members of the public to report illegal content anonymously. Reports are then passed on to the appropriate body for action (for example, an internet service provider (ISP) or law enforcement agency (LEA) in the country, or the corresponding INHOPE hotline).

Youth participation activities allow young people to express their views and exchange knowledge and experiences concerning their use of online technologies, as well as tips on how to stay safe. They also advise on internet safety and empowerment strategies, help create innovative resources, and disseminate online safety messages to their peers.

Find out more about the work of European Safer Internet Centres on the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) platform at www.betterinternetforkids.eu.

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Jointly, European Schoolnet and INHOPE support Safer Internet Centres in responding to the latest online issues, helping to promote the many opportunities the online world offers, while also addressing the challenges. And while Europe's children and youth are the main benefactors of this work, the Better Internet for Kids initiative also reaches out to, and collaborates with, a range of other stakeholders – parents and caregivers, teachers and educators, researchers, industry, civil society, decision-makers, and law enforcement – reflecting the fact that we all have a role to play in creating a better internet.

Additionally, the actions conducted in the framework of Better Internet for Kids frequently reach beyond Europe, impacting upon safer and better internet approaches right across the globe.

Safer Internet Centre+ programme: sharing good practice beyond Europe

The Safer Internet Centre+ (SIC+) programme is a collaboration between the European network of Safer Internet Centres and like-minded organisations around the world focused on keeping children and young people safe online. It takes the form of a supportive framework, offering opportunities to a number of organisations from neighbouring and/or third countries to take part in European safer and better internet activities, complemented by a range of online meetings and webinars to support capacity building and exchange of ideas and experiences.

Overall, the programme has three objectives:

▶ To foster knowledge sharing and capacity building on successful initiatives on online safety for children and young people.

▶ To promote the development and implementation of innovative actions to increase the participation of third-country organisations in online safety initiatives and best practices.

▶ To address common challenges in the field of online safety for children and young people by promoting cooperation with the Insafe-INHOPE network.

The initial piloting phase of the SIC+ programme (2020-21) included organisations from Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Serbia and Ukraine. Following on from the success of the pilot phase, the SIC+ programme was extended during a second phase in 2022-23 with additional members from Albania, Ghana, Moldova, South Africa and Turkey joining the programme. As 2023 drew to a close, a further phase was initiated which will support SIC+ members working in small clusters to tackle the digital safety issues most pertinent to them.

Increasingly throughout 2023, SIC+ members have collaborated with colleagues in the European network of Safer Internet Centres to benefit from their experiences.

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Discover more about the SIC+ programme on the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) platform.

Discover more about some highlights of the year in the interactive timeline and articles which follow.

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2023 IN REVIEW

2023

| FEBRUARY | MAY | JUNE | SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER |

The European Year of Skills

First anniversary of the European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+)

Digital Services Act Stakeholder event

#Back2School

Internet Governance Forum (IGF)

Safer Internet Day (SID) 2023

BIK Policy Map

The BIK bulletin

Safer Internet Forum (SIF) 2023

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2023: The European Year of Skills

2023 was designated as the European Year of Skills. This year of focus and celebration, which commenced on 9 May 2023 and will run for a full 12 months through to May 2024, aims to address skills gaps in the European Union and help reskill people, with a particular focus on digital and green technology skills.

The key focus is on helping people develop the right skills for quality jobs, while also helping companies – and especially small and medium sized enterprises – by highlighting national efforts, alongside existing and new EU initiatives and funding opportunities. Consequently, skills-related events and activities are taking place across Europe throughout the entire campaign's duration.

2023 marked the launch of the European Year of Skills

During the European Year of Skills, various stakeholders, including the European Commission, the European Parliament, Member States, social partners, public and private employment services, chambers of commerce and industry, education and training providers, as well as workers and businesses, are working together to promote skills development.

Children and young people have always been at the very core of Better Internet for Kids actions. As we unite across Europe, and beyond, to provide a safer and better internet for them, and seek to equip and empower them with the skills, knowledge and support to benefit from all of the wonderful opportunities that the online world has to offer. Children and young people are, ultimately, the main beneficiaries of work delivered under the Better Internet for Kids programme but, essentially, they are key stakeholders in influencing and shaping the digital world – and work programmes – of the future. As such, the theme of skills development was very prevalent throughout actions during 2023.

In the next pages, you will discover more about the importance of youth skills in creating a safer and better digital world, and the wider focus areas of the Better Internet for Kids initiative.

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Safer Internet Day 2023: 20th edition (February 2023)

On Tuesday 7 February 2023, Safer Internet Day (SID) took place under the continuing campaign slogan of "Together for a better internet". This annual celebration aims to raise awareness of the importance of both a safer and a better internet, where everyone is empowered to use technology responsibly, respectfully, critically and creatively.

The 20th edition of Safer Internet Day was celebrated on Tuesday 7 February 2023 in more than 180 countries and territories around the world

This edition was particularly special as it marked the 20th anniversary. It served as an opportunity to reflect upon the impact of this observance over the last two decades, and to highlight the recent important developments in EU legislation aimed at creating a better and safer internet since the previous edition. This included the publication of a new European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+ strategy) (in May 2022), the entering into force of the Digital Services Act (DSA) (in November 2022), and the joint signing of the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (in December 2022).

Through a diverse array of actions, across Europe and the globe, the Safer Internet Day campaign aims to reach a wide range of benefactors and stakeholders – children and young people, parents and caregivers, teachers, educators and social workers, as well as industry, decision-makers and politicians – with a call to action to encourage everyone to play their part in creating a better internet.

Organised within the framework of Better Internet for Kids activities by the Insafe network (coordinated by European Schoolnet) and INHOPE (the International Association of Internet Hotlines), on behalf of the European Commission, Safer Internet Day 2023 was celebrated in more than 180 countries and territories worldwide. Through a distributed model – including Safer Internet Centres in Europe, Safer Internet Day Committees across the globe, and many international organisational and industry supporters – a range of exciting events, activities and resources were delivered to promote the safe and positive use of digital technologies.

In the next pages, you will find a few of the highlights of the Safer Internet Day celebrations in 2023.

Commissioners' greetings to kick off the day

Vice-President Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner for Democracy and Demography and Thierry Breton, Commissioner for the Internal Market both acknowledged the day with dedicated posts on social media, along with video messages addressing children's digital rights and habits, online opportunities and risks, and the importance of media literacy skills. Through their addresses, they urged policymakers, young people themselves, and all other stakeholders involved to gather and continue discussions around how to concretely make the online world a better place for children.

Click on the images to view the posts and watch the videoclips

Safer Internet Day promotional video

An updated celebratory video was launched to coincide with the 20th edition of Safer Internet Day, gathering over 2,500 views on YouTube alone, and over 20,000 views through dissemination on social media channels over the course of just one day.
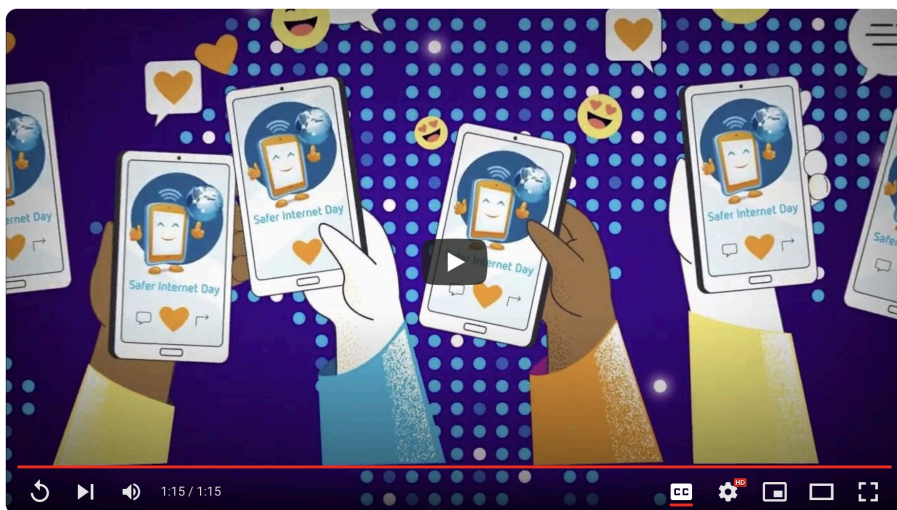
Click on the image to watch the promotional Safer Internet Day promotional video on YouTube

The launch of a new BIK Teacher corner

On the day, a new BIK Teacher corner was launched as a special section of the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) platform. This resource, designed for teachers, educators and other adults working with children and young people, provides free information, advice, and suggested resources to help to educate and support youth to navigate their digital world safely and positively. These resources are split into two key types – learning modules and deep dives – and have been regularly updated since launch to reflect emerging issues, and offer appropriate support to teachers and educators.
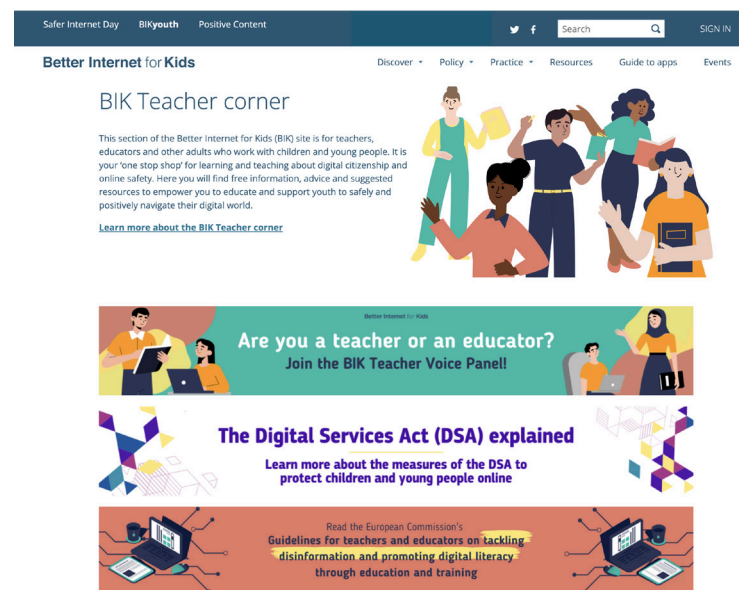
The new BIK Teacher corner, launched as part of Safer Internet Day 2023 celebrations, provides a 'one stop shop' for learning and teaching about digital citizenship and online safety

Explore the BIK Teacher corner at www.betterinternetforkids.eu/teacher-corner.

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The voices of YOUth on Safer Internet Day: A series of short videos with young people

Also on the occasion of Safer Internet Day 2023, Better Internet for Kids Youth Ambassadors and youth panellists from different countries in Europe were featured in three short videos where they exchanged views on their opportunities online and their perspectives on what would make their digital experiences safer.

More specifically, young people reflected on key questions, including:

► What is the internet?

► What can we do on the internet?

► What makes the digital experience safer?

The resulting video clips provide constructive insights into youth views on the opportunities, challenges and improvements needed in the online world.

Discover more about the work of BIK Youth at *www.betterinternetforkids.eu/youth*.

Safer Internet Day 2023 — For me the internet is...

Safer Internet Day 2023 — On the internet I can...

Safer Internet Day 2023 — My digital experience would be better with...

Click on the images to watch the videos on YouTube

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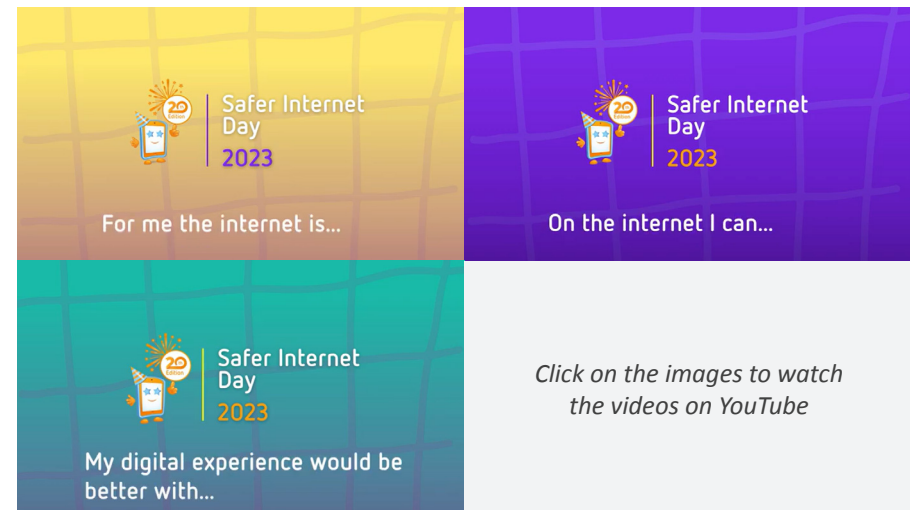
Spotlighting topical issues on Safer Internet Day… and beyond

As every year, the network of Safer Internet Centres across Europe celebrated Safer Internet Day in many ways, covering a variety of topics which impact children and young people when they connect online.

Equally, as with much of the work delivered under the Better Internet for Kids strategy, children and young people were often at the heart of country-led Safer Internet Day celebrations.

Some examples include:

▶ Focusing activities on **online challenges**, the *Croatian Safer Internet Centre* organised for Safer Internet Day 2023 various activities for experts, parents, and children regarding safer internet use. An estimated 56,000 people took part, with many more accessing the recordings and materials beyond the day.

▶ Safer Internet Day in Denmark focused on **algorithms and their consequences for young people's well-being and communities**. In the first of a series of three webinars, several young people were invited to attend a seminar in Copenhagen exploring how algorithms are increasingly shaping the way we see the world. Beyond Safer Internet Day, the webinars were taken 'on the road' to allow the *Danish Safer Internet Centre* to raise awareness of these issues with young people right across the country.

▶ In *Finland*, Safer Internet Day is traditionally celebrated as part of the annual Media Literacy Week (MLW). The week aims to advance the **media literacy skills** of children, young people, and adults, as well as to support professional educators, guardians, and other adults in their important media education tasks. The 2023 edition was carried out together with 58 partner organisations from all sectors of society, with 2,300 professionals registering for the week with the aim of promoting media skills in their own fields, even after the campaign week, reaching thousands of children, young people, adults, and senior citizens.

▶ More than 30,000 students, from all educational levels, participated in the Safer Internet Day festivities organised by the *Greek Safer Internet Centre* in 2023, with many schools additionally organising their own small celebrations in their classrooms. The main goal of the day was to raise awareness of **safer online experiences for all** through a multitude of **fun and entertaining activities created by children themselves**, such as storytelling for the youngest ones and gaming for the older ones. The topic of **misinformation** was at the forefront of many Greek actions.

▶ 2023 marked the biggest-ever celebration of Safer Internet Day **in Ireland** with almost 200,000 children and young people taking part in activities to mark the occasion, across hundreds of events organised all over the country. The *Irish Safer Internet Centre*'s main event explored the theme of **building empathy and respect online**.

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► The *Portuguese Safer Internet Centre* focused on the **metaverse** to celebrate Safer Internet Day 2023. Most people have heard of the metaverse, but how many people really understand what it is? A key event titled "Safer internet: metaverse vs. reality" aimed to demystify the topic.

Celebrations beyond Europe, facilitated by Safer Internet Day Committees and other supporters right across the globe were equally vibrant and varied, again amplifying the voices of youth and showcasing the excellent work in this field, oftentimes building on the work originating from Europe.

Discover more about Safer Internet Day 2023 in the full public campaign report*, or learn more about Safer Internet Day more generally at* www.saferinternetday.org*.*

Connect with your national Safer Internet Centre at www.betterinternetforkids.eu/sic*.*

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Placing a focus on hotline issues

As part of its Safer Internet Day 2023 actions, **INHOPE** launched a monthly mini-series to extend and amplify the importance and impact of its work related to child sexual abuse and exploitation online. Unpacking the campaign tagline of "Together for a better internet", the series highlighted current online safety challenges and calls for collective action.

The series commenced with an exploration of *the rise of non-consensual intimate images (NCII)*. Delving into the causes, risks, and consequences, the article emphasised the urgent need for global efforts to reduce and prevent NCII. Special attention was given to educating and raising awareness among young people about the dangers of sharing intimate content online.

Focusing on the *vulnerability of girls to online exploitation*, the next article in the series highlighted the need for open conversations about gender equality and healthy sexual development. Empowering girls and deconstructing harmful gender stereotypes emerged as key strategies for creating a safer online environment.

Child sexual abuse and exploitation take many shapes, requiring multifaceted approaches to be stopped. In observance of National Child Abuse Prevention Month, *preventative measures along the CSAM chain* were outlined alongside advocacy for societal-level interventions.

Moving forward, a broader perspective on child exploitation was presented, focusing on *child labour and commercial sexual exploitation facilitated by the digital environment*. This article explored various preventive measures, such as collective efforts involving education, staff training, and community-based care.

September's article recognised National Gaming Day as an opportunity to talk about the *risks associated with online gaming popularity, focusing on bullying and grooming*. To address these concerns and foster a safer online environment for children, this article outlined various components that contribute to effective safety measures.

To mark the International Day of the Girl Child, *the importance of promoting girls' empowerment* was reinforced, covering challenges such as gender-based discrimination, cyberbullying, online harassment and CSAM, while advocating for collective action. Every girl should be equipped with essential digital literacy skills to make informed decisions and navigate online responsibly.

The last article of the series addressed *the issue of CSAM distribution, particularly on platforms designed for everyday communication for all age groups*. The circulation of explicit and illegal material is a global reality that requires the intervention of several parties. This article focused on the role of online platforms in enabling features that facilitate reporting, support healing, and prevent revictimisation.

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Read more about the mini-series on the INHOPE website.

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First anniversary of the European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+) (May 2023)

In May 2022, the European Commission adopted a new *European strategy for a better internet for kids*. **Known as the BIK+ strategy, its aim is to improve age-appropriate digital services and to ensure that every child is protected, empowered, and respected online.**

Ten years after the publication of the first BIK strategy (in May 2012), BIK+ strives to spotlight the voices and opinions of European youth, aiming for accessible, age-appropriate and informative online content and services that are in children's best interests. The strategy was developed following extensive consultation with children and young people, complemented by targeted consultations with parents, teachers, Member States, technology and media industries, civil society, academics, and international organisations.

Moreover, the BIK+ strategy aims to complement and support the practical implementation of existing legal frameworks and measures to protect children online, develop children's skills, and empower them to safely enjoy and shape their life online.

The vision for a Digital Decade for children and youth set out in EU policy contemplates "*age-appropriate digital services, with no one left behind and with every child in Europe protected, empowered and respected online*". As such, the BIK+ strategy proposes three main pillars to achieve this vision:

▶ **Ensuring safe digital experiences**: protecting children and young people from harmful and online content, conduct, and online risks and improving their well-being in an age-appropriate digital environment.

▶ **Digital empowerment**: children and young people must acquire the necessary skills and competences to make informed choices and express themselves in the digital environment safely and responsibly.

▶ **Active participation**: children and young people must be respected by having a say in the digital environment, through more child-led activities to foster innovative and creative safe digital experiences.

To celebrate the first anniversary of the launch of the BIK+ strategy, a fourth edition of the BIK Policy Map was launched, providing a regular review of the implementation and achievements of policy in this area, also at Member State level.

Read more about the BIK+ strategy here and read on to discover more about mapping of BIK policy across Europe.

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Responding to online risks to children and young people in vulnerable groups

The BIK+ strategy emphasises the need to pay careful attention to children with special or specific needs, or from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds. In the strategy, the European Commission sets out clear priorities for young people with a range of vulnerabilities, with the overarching aim to ensure that no one is left behind, and that all children and young people have a voice when it comes to matters in the digital sphere.

During 2023, an initial mapping of Safer Internet Centre initiatives targeting vulnerable children and young people was conducted in order to start pinpointing existing provision and highlight areas for further development.

The survey aimed to collect more information on how Safer Internet Centres are addressing the needs of specific target groups in the digital sphere. Furthermore, an *Insafe Training meeting in April 2023* – a regular opportunity for networking and capacity building across the network – provided an occasion for Safer Internet Centre representatives to meet and further discuss concepts relating to child vulnerability, as well as exploring common ground and opportunities for closer working between awareness raising, helpline, and youth participation strands.

The mapping exercise identified the tremendous work that has already been carried out by Safer Internet Centres in Europe in developing varied initiatives addressing children and young people in vulnerable situations, such as workshops, online videos, youth centre platforms, and gaming groups, to name just a few. A few such examples follow:

▶ The *Belgian Safer Internet Centre* has significantly invested in targeting children in disadvantaged settings in recent years. Among other initiatives, the Centre has developed *training for parents living in lower socio-economic status*. The training discusses "peer-to-peer" with other parents on how they manage the online lives of their children. Secondly, the *Jungle Web* game was created for parents and their children living in poverty, specifically focusing on online safety issues.

▶ The *Czech Safer Internet Centre* hosts seminars with Romani children in schools and children's homes. The seminars target all members of the institutions from the youngest children (in the first and second grades of elementary schools) and older children, to teachers and educators. The topics discussed focus on risky behaviour on the internet and today's challenges in the digital world. Simultaneously, several awareness-raising and educational events are conducted in regions where there are large Romani communities (often in structurally impaired areas, also). Additionally, schools and children's homes with a large community of Romani children and young people have significant educational programmes specifically targeted at this population, supported by the Czech Safer Internet Centre alongside other NGOs.

▶ The *Dutch Safer Internet Centre* updated its helpline website to become more inclusive and digitally accessible, in collaboration with *Swink*, an organisation helping to increase digital accessibility. It includes content addressing issues for LGBTQIA+ children, children from minority ethnic backgrounds, children with disabilities, and

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children with religious and gender diversity. The content is written in an easy-to-read format and is gender neutral. Thanks to the input of Swink colleagues with autism, the website also better connects with this target group and people with functional disabilities more generally.

▶ The *Estonian Safer Internet Centre* created a self-testing online event for students with special educational needs (SEND). The event targeted students aged 11 to 16 (fourth to ninth grades) and took place in Estonian and Russian. In collaboration with the Estonian Ministry of Defence and participating schools, the test enabled students to demonstrate knowledge of digital safety behaviour, technical knowledge, and competences, as well as how to resolve various cases. Taking part in the survey allowed students to understand how to assess their skills and competence, which in turn helps them to better address any challenging issues. Recommendations for schools were then drawn up based on the test's results.

▶ Recognising the particular challenges for those displaced by the war, the *German Safer Internet Centre* has created a helpline specifically for Ukrainian families in Germany called *Helpline Ukraine*.

▶ The *Greek Safer Internet Centre* has created an informational video about excessive internet use specifically for users with hearing impairments. In collaboration with the Hellenic Institute of Sign Language (*Bridges of Communication*), the video targets children and young people aged 10 to 25+. Important information about the risks and consequences of spending too much time online is discussed in the video, and subtitles are provided. The video tackles topics such as the potential negative effects of excessive internet use on mental health, social life, and academic performance. It also encourages viewers to practice healthy digital habits, such as setting limits on screen time and taking breaks. One of the key challenges was to ensure the video was accessible, understandable, and relevant to the hearing-impaired audience, and it has been met with a very positive response.

▶ The *Maltese Safer Internet Centre* has organised sessions with children with both physical and mental disabilities in group and one-to-one settings. The team collaborated with *Agenzija Sapport*, a national agency focusing on providing professional and innovative services to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities. The main challenge of this initiative was to support children in overcoming their naivety about dangerous people online. However, their openness towards using and experimenting with technology allows them to express themselves without having to disclose their disability. The team gave the young people advice on ways to be safe and showed them, in real-time, certain things to avoid.

▶ The *Swedish Safer Internet Centre*, in collaboration with three other public organisations and fifteen NGOs, organised and hosted three webinars in Swedish with the aim of preventing racism and LGBTQIA-phobia. The webinars, delivered in April 2023, focused on education, awareness raising and collaboration with youth as successful methods in preventing the normalisation of racism.

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The above examples provide a mere snapshot of some of the existing initiatives throughout Europe, and many more are in development. This ongoing work also complements previous Better Internet for Kids good practice guides *Children and young people with disabilities in an online world* (published in March 2021), which addresses specific benefits, challenges and aspects of online safety with regards to children and young people with disabilities, and *Classifying and responding to online risk to children* (published in February 2023), which explains in detail the different types of risks children face online based on the *4Cs model of online risks: content, contact, conduct and contract*.

Additionally, the issue of responding to online risks for children and young people in vulnerable groups was further explored in the *June 2023 edition of the BIK bulletin*.

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BIK Policy Map (May 2023)

The Better Internet for Kids (BIK) Policy Map is a series of studies that began in 2014. The initiative was created to compare and exchange knowledge on policy making and implementation in EU Member States on the themes and recommendations of BIK and the BIK+ strategy.

A first report was published in 2015, while a second report was published in March 2018 to review progress made. A third iteration, published in November 2020, examined the further implementation of the BIK strategy in 30 European countries, including – at that time – all EU Member States, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom.

The fourth report of the series was released in May 2023 to mark the one-year anniversary of the publication of the BIK+ strategy. Importantly, it was the first BIK Policy Map to report on developments in the 27 EU Member States, Iceland and Norway since the adoption of the new BIK+ strategy in the previous year.

In its fourth edition, the BIK Policy Map provides an insightful snapshot during a time of significant policy change, with the adoption of the BIK+ strategy and the coming into effect of the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) as just two examples of recent developments. It presents findings on the policy frameworks and policy-making processes across Europe, and maps national activities around the three pillars of the BIK+ strategy: safe digital experiences, digital empowerment, and active participation. The report was compiled using contributions and data collected with the support of a network of national contacts comprising representatives of the *Expert Group on Safer Internet for Children* and *Safer Internet Centres in the Member States*.

Read more on the BIK Policy Map on the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) platform, or *download the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) Policy Map report (Fourth edition)*.

As a precursor to the publication of the full BIK Policy Map report, a series of country impact case studies were published as part of the *March 2023 edition of the BIK bulletin*, providing insights from a national perspective rather than from the point of view of implementing EU strategy. Four countries were chosen as subjects for the case studies: Ireland, Finland, Malta and Germany.

Using the collective impact model as an analytical framework, desk research and qualitative interviews were carried out with country experts to identify various features, including policy coordination and design, formal cooperation mechanisms, and the active participation of children and young people in the policy cycle, among others.

Read the BIK Policy Map: Country impact case studies report in full on the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) platform.

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Digital Services Act Stakeholder event (June 2023)

In November 2022, the Digital Services Act (DSA) package entered into force: a set of rules for the providers of online platform aiming to create a safer digital space for all users, where fundamental rights are respected and protected. Some rules in the package are especially designed to protect minors online.

The DSA sets out clear obligations for online platforms and other online intermediaries. For example, under the new rules, any user will be able to flag illegal content, and will also have a clear means of contesting platforms' content moderation decisions, both to the platform and through out-of-court mechanisms in their country. You can *access the full text of the DSA here* (in all official EU languages).

A first Digital Services Act Stakeholder event took place on 27 June 2023, in Brussels and online. The event provided a valuable opportunity for stakeholders to engage with the European Commission and contribute their insights for the implementation of the DSA, which is a flagship set of rules for shaping the future of digital services in the European Union.

Following a series of high-level introductions, a programme of parallel sessions formed the core of the event, providing attendees with the opportunity to delve into specific aspects related to the DSA. Workshops covered a wide range of topics reflecting the diverse challenges and opportunities associated with digital services, including gender-based violence, online marketplaces, mental well-being, privacy, data science, countering hate and extremism, intellectual property rights, dark patterns and advertising, among others. One of the parallel sessions was dedicated to discussion on protecting minors online. Two BIK Youth Ambassadors, Daria from Romania and George from Malta, were present to share their views.

In brief, the DSA obliges platforms to take appropriate and proportionate measures to ensure high levels of privacy, safety and security of minors. It also bans providers of online platforms from presenting advertisements to minors based on profiling when they are aware with reasonable certainty that the recipient of the service is a minor. Additionally, it requires providers of Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) to assess the risk that the design of their services may have on minors and adopt adequate risk mitigating measures including, possibly, age verification and parental control measures.

During the session, the BIK Youth Ambassadors shared some insights of their experiences online. Daria expressed frustration with constantly asked to agree to **unnecessary posts and conditions**. George appreciated the DSA's differentiation between VLOPs and start-ups, but also recognised the devastating impact of **data breaches and disinformation**, especially in small communities where everyone knows each other.

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BIK Youth Ambassadors, Daria and George, shared their views at the European Commission's Digital Services Act Stakeholder event in June 2023

Other experts contributed to the discussion, highlighting the importance of responsible digital parenting, consumer concerns affecting children and young people in the digital world, and the emergence of new risks in the digital space, recognising that many platforms – and especially smaller digital service providers – need fast and concrete guidance to inform child protection policies.

In terms of outcomes, the session concluded that a holistic approach to child protection online is necessary, encompassing both protective and empowering measures. It is important to strike a balance between safeguarding children and considering their positive rights. As such, emphasis should be placed on designing platforms and services that prioritise child safety without compromising other fundamental rights. Equally, protection of children's personal data should be a key consideration, and risk assessment and transparency should be integrated into the implementation of the DSA.

Read more about the DSA stakeholder event on the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) platform.

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Digital Services Act: provisions for minors

In 2023, a small booklet explaining – in simple words – the measures of the Digital Services Act (DSA) aiming at the protection of children and young people online, was made available online in English, French and German.

The booklet was launched at the 2023 edition of the *Safer Internet Forum* and is available on the *website of the Publications Office of the European Union* and on the *Europa website*.

The booklet will be made available in all EU official languages on Safer Internet Day 2024.

Throughout 2023, the BIK+ strategy has continued to drive forward the ambition of creating high-quality online content, services and experiences for all children and young people. Publications such as this aim to help all stakeholders to better understand their rights when using online platforms and services.

The Digital Services Act explained outlines the new measures to protect children and young people online

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#Back2School (September 2023)

As is traditional, the Better Internet for Kids initiative always kicks off the new school year with a #Back2School campaign. Targeted at teachers and educators – and indeed anyone working with children and young people – its aim is to support education for safer, better internet experiences, and raise awareness of key online safety topics in the classroom.

The 2023 campaign ran from Friday 8 September (International Literacy Day) until mid-October across a range of Better Internet for Kids (BIK) communication channels, including the BIK platform and social media. It covered a range of online safety topics including online gaming, mis- and disinformation, artificial intelligence (AI), algorithms on social media, and digital mental health, among others. Alongside promoting platform resources – such as the *BIK resource gallery* and the *BIK guide to apps* – it also highlighted various resources from Safer Internet Centres. These included:

▶ The *Austrian Safer Internet Centre* prepared two articles specifically for the #Back2School campaign, one focusing on *when is it an appropriate time to buy your child their first smartphone*, and one providing a *collection of helpful apps for the everyday school life* of children and young people.

▶ The *German Safer Internet Centre* published two articles for the start of the school year: one for teachers, highlighting some of the Centre's materials that can be used in the classroom throughout the school year (available in *German* and in *English* (machine translation)). The second article was aimed at parents who are considering a smartphone or smartwatch as a gift for their child for the new school year (also available in *German* and *English* (machine translation)).

▶ The *Greek Safer Internet Centre* created and shared new digital educational material for students of all grade levels. The material consists of valuable tools that can be used in the classroom and for independent learning at home. *Read more about it here*.

▶ The *Italian Safer Internet Centre* organised an event at the Ministry of Education to kick off the new school year, packed with webinars and other activities for young people. *Read more here*, or *rewatch the stream on YouTube*.

▶ To contribute to the fight against hate speech, the BEE SECURE initiative in *Luxembourg* ran the #NOHATEONLINE campaign to raise awareness. *Learn more about the campaign here*.

▶ The *Swedish Safer Internet Centre* arranged a seminar as part of Almedalen Week (an annual week focusing on democratic participation). On this occasion, youth involvement was the key to success with high school student Huda (who was also the moderator of the seminar) stressing the importance of giving children and young people concrete opportunities to be heard. *Read the article here*.

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The #Back2School campaign also provided a good opportunity to promote the new BIK Teacher corner. Several fresh *deep dive articles* were added to reflect the most pertinent topics impacting classrooms today.

Additionally, to mark the end of the 2023 #Back2School campaign, a BIK Teacher corner webinar was organised on Thursday 19 October. The first in a planned series of online events which will continue into 2024, this webinar provided an opportunity to explore the BIK Teacher corner in depth, with discussion on how the resources can best be used in classroom settings. A special focus was also placed on the emerging issues relating to generative AI and persuasive design.

Read more on the #Back2school campaign here.

Explore the BIK Teacher corner at www.betterinternetforkids.eu/teacher–corner.

> A key feature of the BIK+ strategy is to ensure that large-scale awareness-raising campaigns on key online safety issues target children, young people, and those that support them (such as parents, caregivers and educators).

> As such, a number of new campaigns will be organised under the Better Internet for Kids initiative during 2024, focusing on topics such as child and youth consumer protection and media literacy.

The BIK bulletin

The Better Internet for Kids (BIK) bulletin is a quarterly electronic newsletter which aims to keep readers informed on online safety issues and opportunities. Each edition provides a topical focus article looking at the latest trends in online life, with features from youth, industry, and the research community, along with a mix of news and resources from key stakeholders in the field, including the European network of Safer Internet Centres, operating under the banner of Insafe and INHOPE.

Read past editions of the BIK bulletin – and subscribe to receive future editions – at www.betterinternetforkids.eu/bik-bulletin.

The **March 2023** edition previewed the fourth edition of the **Better Internet for Kids Policy Map** report with a series of country impact case studies – Ireland, Finland, Malta and Germany. It also explored the successes of the celebration of **Safer Internet Day 2023** from Safer Internet Centres and beyond, and provided updates on many new resources which were launched to mark the day.

The **June 2023** edition provided an insight into some of the challenges in defining and identifying vulnerability, alongside a snapshot of some of the excellent initiatives already being implemented by Safer Internet Centres across Europe to protect vulnerable young people in the online space.

The **September 2023** edition of the BIK bulletin focussed on putting "skills centre-stage", highlighting the importance of equipping children and young people with the competences they need to succeed in an increasingly digitised world.

The **December 2023** edition reflected back on the impact of the Digital Services Act (DSA) to date, on the youth-led edition of the Safer Internet Forum 2023 and other activities to amplify young voices, and provided some seasonal tips for staying safe online during the winter holidays.

> Under the BIK+ strategy, work has progressed on placing a spotlight on child and youth consumer protection in digital markets. The work will continue in 2024.

Internet Governance Forum (IGF) (October 2023)

The annual Internet Governance Forum (IGF) serves to bring people from various stakeholder groups together, as equals, in discussions on public policy issues relating to the internet. This year's edition – the 18th annual IGF meeting – was hosted by the Government of Japan in Kyoto from 8 to 12 October 2023. The Forum's overarching theme was *The internet we want – Empowering all people.*

As in previous years, an Insafe delegation was in attendance to promote the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) agenda in Europe on behalf of the European Commission. In addition, Insafe contributed with a workshop event focusing on youth empowerment and participation, including how to involve children and young people from vulnerable backgrounds.

In today's world, children are vulnerable for many reasons: poverty, disability, mental health issues, abuse or neglect, family breakdown, homelessness, discrimination, and social exclusion, not to mention migration and war. Several programmes have been designed to help social groups from diverse backgrounds, including those who are vulnerable. While these groups face different challenges, they also share the common need for online safety education and support in an increasingly complex social environment.

The session was therefore organised in collaboration with the Portuguese, Belgian, Maltese, and Polish Safer Internet Centres. The delegation shared best practices on youth participation, including how to effectively engage young people in co-creation activities and the development of new initiatives and resources. Moreover, the different Centres explained

An Insafe network delegation shared best practice examples for youth participation at the 2023 Internet Governance Forum

how they collaborate with young people in developing successful awareness campaigns to reach key target groups, including those in vulnerable situations. Providing an example of youth participation in itself, BIK Youth Ambassador João moderated the session, which was attended by a diverse audience, including many young people.

Presented initiatives ranged from CyberSquad, a peer-to-peer online platform in Belgium giving young people a safe space to discuss relationship issues, digital friendships, and online safety, to the Polish

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Digital Youth Forum, held yearly in hybrid form to allow participation from both Poland and Ukraine. Organised by young people for young people, the Forum focuses on sharing online experiences and empowering young people to take the lead in online safety initiatives.

A booth at the 2023 Internet Governance Forum promoted the Better Internet for Kids initiative and the annual, global Safer Internet Day campaign

Find out more about network participation at the Internet Governance Forum on the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) platform, including an article on best youth participation practices from the Insafe network, insights from IGF 2023 from BIK Youth Ambassador João, and a view from the Insafe booth at IGF.

Portuguese BIK Youth Ambassador, João, contributed to several discussions at the Internet Governance Forum to represent the voice of Europe's young people

The BIK+ strategy aims to ensure that all children and young people are protected, empowered and respected online, irrespective of their personal circumstances or vulnerabilities.

To support ALL children, the digital environment must be diverse, inclusive, non-discriminatory and free of stereotypes.

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Safer Internet Forum 2023: Empowering YOUth with skills for the Digital Decade (November 2023)

The Safer Internet Forum (SIF) is a key annual international conference in Europe where policy makers, researchers, law enforcement bodies, youth, parents and caregivers, teachers, NGOs, industry representatives, experts and other relevant actors come together to discuss the latest trends, opportunities, risks, and solutions related to child online safety and making the internet a better place. This year's edition took place in a hybrid format in Brussels, Belgium and online on Thursday, 23 November 2023 with a theme of _Empowering YOUth with skills for the Digital Decade._

The event was organised in a youth-led manner, with 41 young people from 23 European countries playing an active role in planning, preparing and delivering the Forum through the Safer Internet Forum Youth Advisory Group (SIF YAG) and the BIK Youth Panel. More than 150 participants joined the event in person, with an additional 700 registering to participate online, jointly representing 93 countries across the globe.

As noted previously in this annual review, the European Union designated 2023 as the European Year of Skills: a year which "_puts skills centre-stage_", highlighting the critical importance of equipping people with the competences they need to succeed in an increasingly digitised world, supporting the EU's ambitious Digital Decade plans for 80 per cent of all adults to have basic digital skills by 2030. The subsequent European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade set out a specific priority that "_Children and young people should be protected and empowered online_". As part of this communication, the European institutions commit to "_providing opportunities to all children to acquire the necessary skills and competences to navigate the online environment actively, safely and make informed choices when online._"

Safer Internet Forum 2023 focused on Empowering YOUth with skills for the Digital Decade

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Within the framework of these and other current policy provisions, the 2023 edition of the Safer Internet Forum specifically focused on pillars two and three of the BIK+ strategy, exploring digital empowerment and active participation as it relates to children and young people.

Video addresses by Vice-President Dubravka Šuica, Commissioner for Democracy and Demography and Thierry Breton, Commissioner for the Internal Market set the scene for the day.

Throughout the day, participants heard from many young people and experts alike about the skills needed to thrive in today's online world, and the most effective way to foster digital skills. The morning included a keynote session by Professor Amanda Third, considering some of the key challenges and solutions of life online today, followed by a series of panel discussions including European Commission representatives, BIK Youth representatives, Safer Internet Centre representatives, and young influencers Kate Grant and Bianca Adam, as well as the customary interactive BIK Youth session.

The afternoon deep dive sessions encouraged fruitful conversations among the stakeholder groups present with discussions around the skills that children and young people need to thrive online and how to foster digital skills effectively in different learning settings. Discussions focused on mental health and well-being, new and emerging technologies such as the metaverse, immersive environments, and generative AI (artificial intelligence), and content creation. Conversations also explored the whole range of stakeholders who can help to support skills development.

Find further information on *Safer Internet Forum 2023* on the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) platform, including presentations, recordings of many of the sessions, and a summary report.
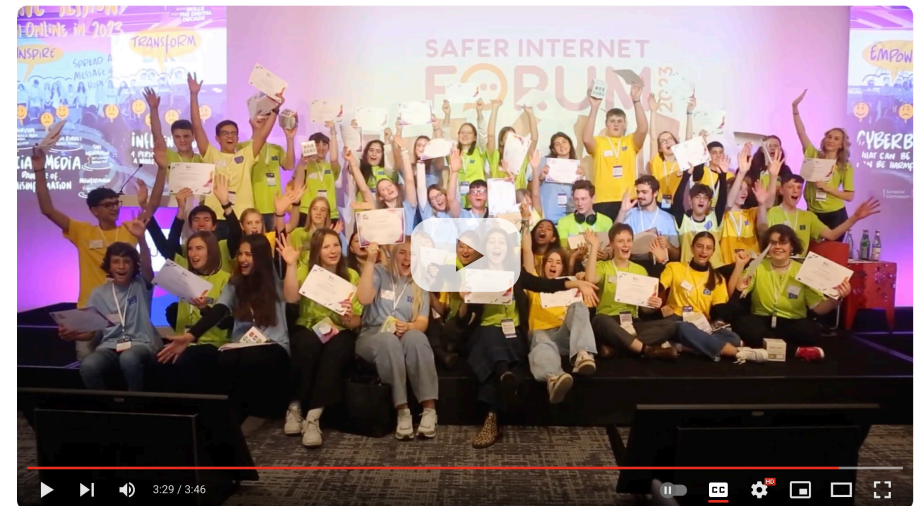
Watch the wrap-up video from Safer Internet Forum 2023 on YouTube

SIF Youth Advisory Group

Following the successful work of the first Safer Internet Forum Youth Advisory Group (SIF YAG) in SIF 2022 in leading the event in a youth-centred manner, it was decided to establish a new SIF YAG to support the organisation of Safer Internet Forum 2023. Accordingly, a group was formed of ten experienced BIK Youth Ambassadors who have been actively contributing to the BIK Youth programme and activities over recent years.

Starting in June 2023, the SIF YAG members came together in nine scheduled online meetings and several ad-hoc meetings. During these meetings, the SIF YAG contributed to the design of Safer Internet Forum 2023 by voicing their opinions and recommendations on the title, the agenda, and the structure of the interventions during the various sessions. Moreover, the SIF YAG had an important role in deciding which influencers to invite to deliver speeches and join the panel debates during the event, by proposing and short-listing several candidates which they believed to be suitable for the focus on youth empowerment and digital skills.

As the agenda took shape, the SIF YAG also decided on their own roles as moderators and co-hosts during the event, working in pairs to plan, adapt and refine the agenda to provide an informative and stimulating experience for both speakers and participants.

The SIF YAG meetings took place alongside the BIK Youth Panel meetings (see below), with each group progressively updating the other on their plans. Moreover, the two groups met together twice online in June and November 2023 to introduce themselves and to achieve cohesion in

their respective preparations. The two groups also joined together in person in Brussels just in advance of the Forum to work together and to prepare the final details for the event.

SIF YAG members not only hosted all the sessions at SIF and moderated the deep-dive table discussions, but also opened and closed the event and chaired important high-level panels.

SIF Youth Advisory Group members Ingeborg (Norway) and Selma (Czech Republic) chaired a high-level discussion at Safer Internet Forum 2023

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BIK Youth Panel

Within the framework of the Better Internet for Kids initiative, it is customary that an annual BIK Youth Panel is convened before and during the Safer Internet Forum. This initiative empowers a group of young panellists to articulate not only their individual perspectives and concerns on internet safety and improvement, but also to advocate for the views of their peers on a European scale.

A total of 31 young individuals from 23 countries participated in a series of eleven preparatory online meetings. During these sessions, they acquainted themselves with online safety awareness topics and emerging concerns, deliberated on a slogan for the event, and commenced the planning of their session at the Forum. Additionally, during the course of these meetings, BIK Youth Panellists began refining the specifics of their live theatrical performance and identified the subjects to be addressed in table discussions during deep dive sessions.

In the days just prior to SIF 2023, they met in Brussels to rehearse and finalise their planned interventions. Reflecting on the Forum's theme of *Empowering YOUth with skills for the Digital Decade*, the BIK Youth Panel developed a live performance, split into three acts, each of which focused on one of the words of their slogan: Empower, Inspire, Transform.

Young participants led the sessions at Safer Internet Forum 2023

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The panellists scripted and rehearsed their live performances which aimed to convey the general messages of empowering young people to be more resilient against online threats, making them capable of distinguishing between positive and negative influences on the internet, and helping them transform themselves and their peers into resilient online citizens, better equipped to cope with problems online while also taking advantage of new technologies to the fullest extent.

At the Forum, the youth panellists led table discussions on cyberbullying, consumer rights, age verification, and non-consensual image sharing, among other topics.

A 'behind the scenes' video gives a flavour of the extensive youth participation which contributed to the success of Safer Internet Forum 2023.

Watch the 'behind the scenes' video on youth participation at Safer Internet Forum 2023

> The implementation of the BIK+ strategy places an expanding focus on BIK Youth Ambassadors and BIK Youth Panels to support peer-to-peer activities at national, regional and local level.

> The first child-led evaluation of the BIK+ strategy is scheduled to take place in 2024.

Find out more about the BIK Youth programme generally at
www.betterinternetforkids.eu/youth.

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2023 IN FIGURES

Safer Internet Day

On Safer Internet Day 2023, over **28,000 schools** were reached and nearly **4,500 other organisations** were involved across Europe alone. Many more were reached across the globe, with more than **180 countries and territories** participating in celebrations in some way.

BIK Youth

More than **960 events** involved youth participation throughout 2023.

Resources

Throughout the year, over **30 million EU citizens** were reached, providing them with almost **1,500 new resources**.

Network resources continue to respond to various online opportunities and challenges, including topics such as **algorithms**, **artificial intelligence**, **promoting respect and empathy in online communities**, **democracy online**, **violence in the digital environment**, **digital literacy**, and the **lure of quick money online**, alongside many others.

Reporting*

In 2023, a total of **785,322 content URLs** were processed in ICCAM** by INHOPE hotlines from which **88 per cent were seen for the first time**. From all these content URLs, a total of **69 per cent were determined to be illegal** and, subsequently, national law enforcement agencies (LEAs) were informed and a notice and takedown was issued to the hosting internet service provider (ISP).

* These figures represent all INHOPE member hotlines, not just those which are EU funded.

** ICCAM is INHOPE's secure software solution to collect, exchange and categorise reports on child sexual abuse material (CSAM), funded by the EU. ICCAM is used by INHOPE hotlines in different jurisdictions (countries) and INTERPOL. The name ICCAM is derived from the phrase *"I see child abuse material"*.

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WHAT'S IN STORE FOR 2024?

This report is launched on Safer Internet Day (SID) 2024, when stakeholders across the globe will once again join "Together for a better internet", highlighting the importance of a truly multifaceted approach to creating a safer and better internet.

While Safer Internet Day provides a point of focus for our work, it also allows us to look towards the future priorities for driving the Better Internet for Kids agenda forward and, especially, continuing to implement the actions of the BIK+ strategy, while supporting the implementation of the Digital Services Act. Throughout this report, we have highlighted just a few of the planned actions embedded within this work, many of which will continue to evolve across the course of the coming year. Just a few examples follow…

As 2024 progresses, a number of large-scale awareness-raising campaigns will start to roll out. Commencing on Safer Internet Day 2024 and running into March, a new **child and youth consumer protection campaign** will launch. Campaign activities will build on evidence-based analysis of marketing practices, with the launch of a research report on (manipulative) digital marketing practices targeted at children and youth, leading into a range of public-facing campaign activities. This initiative aims to both raise awareness about the online targeting of young consumers and shed light on the responsibilities of companies and online platforms to safeguard young consumers from online influences. Throughout the campaign, various materials and resources will be made available, along with the organisation of an online event to mark World Consumer Day in mid-March.

Following that, attention will turn to raising awareness of **media literacy**. Building on the momentum of the European Digital & Media Literacy Conference Week (27 February to 1 March 2024, organised within the framework of the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council), a new **media literacy campaign** will launch. Starting with some piloting activities in a number of European countries between March and April 2024, again based on an evidence-based mapping of existing initiatives, it will be further developed into an EU-wide campaign later in 2024.

Importantly, all campaign activities developed under BIK activity lines will build on the services and resources provided by Safer Internet Centres while, at the same time, promoting the provisions of various European laws and regulations to protect users in the online space. Equally, the campaigns will seek to maximise the efforts and activities of other stakeholders involved in supporting practice, developing policy, and carrying out research into online safety issues, including NGOs, government agencies and industry.

Significantly, BIK campaign activities will seek to target a range of beneficiaries, including children and young people, parents and caregivers, teachers, educators and other professionals with a responsibility for supporting children, including those with different needs and vulnerabilities.

At the time of writing, a whole host of additional activity lines are being scoped and planned. For example, the drive to create an EU **Code of conduct for the age-appropriate design of digital products and services** will continue during 2024, and new **evidence-based toolkits to support age assurance and age verification on online platforms** will be developed.

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New content and services will be created, with a new **BIK Parent corner** in development to mirror last year's launch of the BIK Teacher corner. Specifically for educators, a new MOOC (massive open online course) is in preparation, focusing on supporting learners to have more positive online experiences. Registration will open on Safer Internet Day, with the course commencing in mid-March for a duration of approximately six weeks.

Looking more towards policy development, a new round of the **BIK policy mapping exercise** is in the planning stage, with an updated report – the **BIK Policy monitor** – due in the second part of the year. To showcase this important work and monitoring the impact of the digital transformation on children's well-being, a new **BIK Knowledge hub** will be created as part of a **refreshed Better Internet for Kids platform**, firmly embedded within the Europa domain.

Shortly, we will also start planning for the 2024 edition of the **Safer Internet Forum**, again taking place towards the end of the year. Building on previous successes, we again expect this to be a fully youth-led event, putting young people at the very centre of policy discussions and plans. Bringing a new dimension for 2024, we also hope to convene an **international youth panel** for this edition, ensuring that youth voices are heard from right across the globe.

Significantly, a **youth-led review of the BIK+ strategy** will commence in 2024 to ensure that all the above contributes to the overall BIK vision.

This is just a taster of what's to come for Better Internet for Kids in 2024. We hope that you will join us in our continuing journey of supporting EU citizens – and especially children, young people, parents, caregivers, teachers and educators – to become empowered and responsible digital users.

We encourage you to stay tuned to the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) platform, the quarterly BIK bulletin, and our Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and LinkedIn profiles for the latest news and developments across all our areas of activity, and for opportunities to get involved.

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Better Internet for Kids

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