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Skills Upload Jr

Ipsos

CONNECTED CHILDHOOD

The State of Digital Wellbeing and Resilience for Children and Young People in Europe

FULL REPORT

This report has been written by Viraj Rajdev, Caroline Paskell, Maya Bozhikova, Diana Vasileva and Rosie Castle (Ipsos) together with Jeffrey DeMarco and Daniela Ritz (Save the Children UK).

The findings presented in this report reflect associations observed in the data and should not be interpreted as evidence of causality.

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FOREWORD

Lisa Felton
Managing Director, Vodafone Foundation

I am proud to introduce this inaugural Connected Childhood report, developed through the continued partnership between Vodafone Foundation and Save the Children. As young people across Europe navigate an increasingly complex digital world, our joint commitment is clear: to ensure that every child is not only connected, but also safe, supported and empowered online.

Today's generation of children and young people is more connected than any before it. Yet, as this report shows, access does not automatically translate into wellbeing. While most young people have strong online safety knowledge, only one in four report positive digital wellbeing. Many struggle with persistent pressures, stress, sleep disruption and the challenge of balancing their online and offline lives. True digital wellbeing requires a holistic, rights-based approach that recognises children's agency, strengthens their resilience and ensures the environments they inhabit are designed with their needs in mind.

The findings presented here come at a pivotal time. Across Europe, policymakers are grappling with how to regulate social media, respond to emerging AI driven risks and ensure children's rights are upheld in digital spaces. This report contributes vital evidence to these debates. It provides governments, educators, industry and civil society with evidence to understand where young people are thriving and where support is urgently needed. The insights are timely: they highlight meaningful progress in safety awareness, but also reveal gaps in digital balance, mental wellbeing and critical digital literacy that require system wide action.

At Vodafone Foundation, our mission is to connect for good using technology to improve lives, foster inclusion and support those who may otherwise be left behind. By working with Save the Children, we are strengthening our shared ambition to ensure that every young person has the skills, confidence and support to thrive in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. With the expansion of the Skills Upload Junior programme and the development of new educational resources dedicated to digital wellbeing, we are acting on the findings of this report and scaling solutions where they can make the greatest difference.

We are grateful to the thousands of young people who contributed their voices to this study. Their experiences, insights and realities are the heart of this work. As we look ahead, we remain committed to ensuring their perspectives guide the next generation of digital education, policy and safeguarding efforts. Only by listening to young people, and acting with them, can we build a digital world that enables every child to not only feel safe and included, but also to thrive.

Uju Aderemi
Director of Partnerships for Impact, Save the Children UK

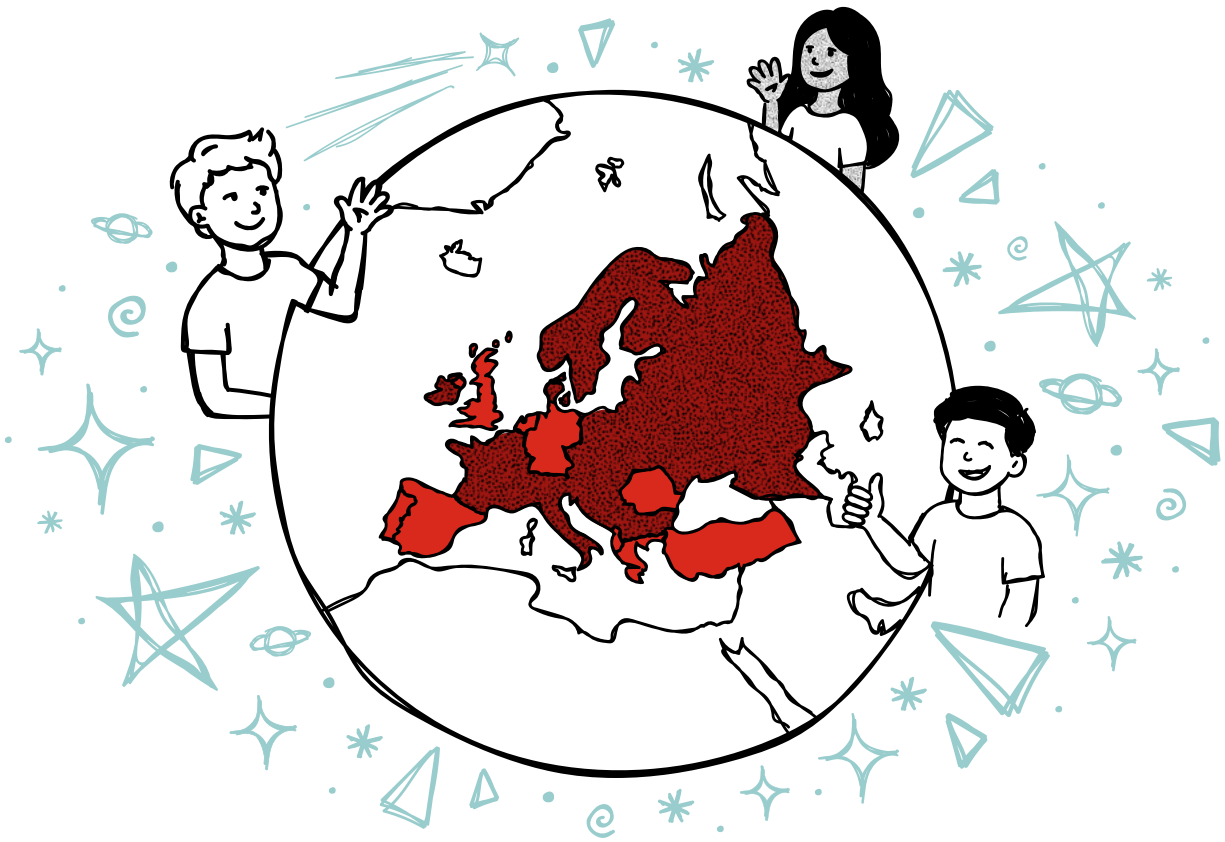
Children have the right not only to be safe online, but to truly thrive there. This Index shows that while young people across Europe are more connected than ever and often find real joy and opportunity online, too many are also experiencing stress, disrupted sleep, and the pressures of an always-on digital world.

It is a powerful reminder that access alone is not enough. We must equip children with the skills, confidence, and support they need to navigate digital spaces in ways that protect their wellbeing and enable them to flourish. By holding platforms to account, embedding digital wellbeing into education, and meaningfully listening to children and young people, especially those facing additional barriers, we can help create online environments that empower rather than harm. In a connected world, no child should be left behind.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Europe's children and young people are growing up in an era of unprecedented connectivity but also unprecedented digital risks and impacts. The Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index (the Index) reveals a concerning state with only one in four children and young people across nine European countries rating their digital wellbeing as good, while three in four seem to be struggling with disrupted sleep, high levels of stress or challenges balancing their online and offline lives. Despite being the most connected generation in history, today's children and young people are not thriving online as much as society might hope. This report highlights the urgent findings of the Index and suggests a path for moving forward with a more holistic, public health approach and protection to bolster digital wellbeing. It serves as both a warning and a call to action and one that policymakers, educators, diverse technology companies and trusted adults must engage with to ensure Europe's next generation can truly thrive in the digital world.

The Index measures multiple dimensions of children and young people's digital lives to create a composite indicator that describes a holistic picture of their online experience. Save the Children and Vodafone Foundation worked closely with Ipsos to deliver this research, drawing on their independent methodological expertise and analysis. This report then applies a child rights and public health lens to the findings so responsibility for the agenda-setting recommendations sits with Save the Children and Vodafone Foundation.



The Index survey was conducted with 7,755 children and young people aged 13-18 across nine countries (Albania, Greece, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Türkiye and the United Kingdom(UK)). It asked about seven aspects of digital activity and impacts: the five domains of the core Index (Security, Management, Identity, Literacy, and Empathy) and two indicators of Engagement and Digital Wellbeing. It was commissioned by Save the Children and Vodafone Foundation and run by Ipsos in December 2025/January 2026.

Key findings

Children and young people are connected but not necessarily protected. Most have their own smartphone, plus use of other devices, and go online at home and elsewhere daily. Half scored 'high' on the Enablement indicator, showing strong connectivity. Most report having basic online safety knowledge, and the Security domain scores are high across countries. Yet digital access and familiarity is not translating into high levels of wellbeing. Greater connectivity can increase exposure to pressures and harms. Knowing about privacy settings and how to avoid strangers, for example, is good but offers little against subtler threats such as social media anxiety, or the daily information overload, or wider harms such as cyberbullying. The survey data details the gap between being connected and feeling healthy and safe online.

Self-regulation is a major area of challenge and is compounded by design features of the platforms themselves. The majority of children and young people cannot easily switch off or ignore their notifications, with implications for them getting enough sleep and maintaining a healthy digital balance. This pattern is surprisingly consistent across the countries, even in highly connected societies, which indicates a much wider, systemic issue. In a society that never truly disconnects, the Management domain showed that children and young people are struggling to do so too, and the survey indicates their wellbeing is suffering as a result.

Subjective digital wellbeing is low or moderate for three-quarters of children and young people, with only one in 30 scoring 'high' on the Digital Wellbeing indicator. There are encouraging aspects: most know when to seek support from a trusted adult, feel balance in their online/offline lives and feel connected to friends and family by being online. However, the emotional impact of being online is negative and the data makes it clear that very few have consistently positive experiences.

Online engagement appears to be taking a particular toll on mental health for many. A third of children and young people often feel stressed or upset after being online and two in five do not feel calm or positive. Almost half worry about missing out when they are not online. Concerns about cyberbullying is a worry for two-fifths of children and young people – adding to wider evidence that online challenges such as exposure to harmful content and constant social comparison are compromising younger generations' confidence and peace of mind.

Subjective digital wellbeing is low or moderate for three quarters of children and young people, with only one in 30 scoring 'high' on the Digital Wellbeing indicator.

However, being online is fundamental for children and young people and can be an essential personal resource. Social connection and entertainment are key drivers for going online, with additional priorities being to get support or feel better, or to express their identity. Wider research shows that some minoritised groups may be at higher risk of harm while using online spaces to explore their identity and curiosity. The survey data provides evidence of this, but most children and young people feel they can be themselves online without being judged, manage online relationships effectively and feel safe from harassment or hate in their usual online spaces. Encouragingly, the survey indicates broad endorsement and knowledge of pro-social online behaviours, with sizeable majorities stating that they would support a friend and know how to help others being targeted online – although it is clear that good intentions and core knowledge do not readily transfer into action.

Despite having grown up with technology, the younger generation has not fully developed certain skills to thrive online, and inbuilt systems can hamper their efforts. Most can use technology but far fewer have learned to critically evaluate online content or actively curb its negative influences. Only two-thirds claim to understand how their content is affected by algorithms or to check if information is from a trustworthy source before sharing, indicating that many are vulnerable to misinformation. Likewise, around half state that they have taken action to keep online spaces kind. Managing time online and maintaining digital balance stand out as substantial challenges for children and young people, linked to the systems they occupy. Strengthening digital literacy and durable measures to facilitate management and digital balance are essential to improve wellbeing.

The Index also highlights differences in access, use and impacts as well as a greater level of challenges experienced by some groups of children and young people. Those who reported having food insecurity, disabilities or functional difficulties, or regular experiences of anxiety or depression, and non-heterosexual children and young people have lower scores on multiple domains and on the overall Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index. These patterns of divergence suggest that offline structural and societal disadvantage is mirrored online, and in some cases amplified. Groups who reported more negative impacts from engaging online are often those who also face challenges with digital access, are more likely to be seeking support online than connecting with friends and family, and spend more time online. These disparities require further attention and inclusive responses, as all children and young people regardless of their characteristics or situation, deserve systems and environments that support their wellbeing and do not systematically undermine it.

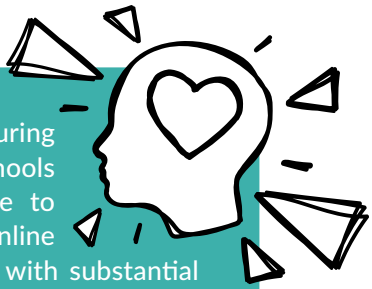
Comparing Index data across the nine countries shows that a country's wealth or digital provision does not guarantee better wellbeing. In some less digitally advanced countries, children and young people's outcomes are notably higher than the nine-country average – such as in achieving online/offline balance. The survey adds to the evidence that technology can amplify risk if not paired with the right support. This indicates that policy and culture matter and the importance of proactive measures like effective school programmes or awareness campaigns can influence how digital life affects children and young people. Every nation has room for improvement and can learn from each other's successes (and challenges).

Recommendations

The Index is a wake-up call but it also points to solutions, in particular calling for multisectoral systemic change. Children and young people cannot be held predominantly responsible for a healthier digital life – it requires effort from other actors, so a public health approach is needed. A coordinated effort from platforms, policymakers, educators, parents/carers and children and young people themselves is needed to achieve change. Six key recommendations have been identified by Save the Children and Vodafone Foundation to reduce the gap between connectivity and wellbeing:

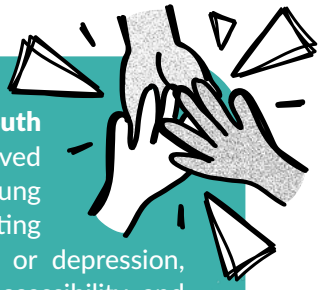
1. Embed wellbeing-by-design and hold technology platforms accountable by enforcing stronger safety- and wellbeing-by-design standards for social media and online platforms. The survey highlights a clear gap between connectivity and wellbeing, and shows that self-regulation is a major challenge for many children and young people. Regulators should require child and youth-friendly defaults, including high privacy and safety settings for children, alongside measures that reduce overuse pressures (for example, limiting addictive design features and strengthening controls that support breaks, sleep-friendly settings and notification management).

2. Integrate digital wellbeing into education by embedding wellbeing, self-regulation, empathy and critical digital literacy into mainstream curricula and teacher training. The findings suggest that basic safety knowledge is not enough on its own: children and young people also need practical, scenario-based learning on managing stress, navigating conflict and supporting others online, including how to respond if witnessing harm, cyberbullying or misinformation. Treat digital wellbeing as a fundamental literacy of modern life.

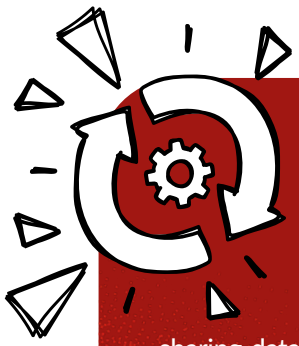


3. Strengthen mental health support in the digital age by ensuring accessible, child and youth-friendly pathways for support in schools and communities, including when online experiences contribute to stress, anxiety or fear of missing out. The survey suggests that online engagement is taking a toll for many children and young people, with substantial proportions reporting stress or difficulty feeling calm and positive after being online. Funding and strengthening access for support services, counselling, and trusted helplines should be protected and scaled, so support is available early and without stigma. This should happen across schools and communities and be considered within wider national health standards.

4. Empower educators and parents/carers with the confidence, knowledge and practical tools to guide children and young people online and shape healthier norms around digital balance without shaming connection. Trusted adults need accessible resources that keep pace with platform trends and equip them to have open, non-judgemental conversations, set healthy routines, and support children and young people to manage notifications, sleep disruption and online pressures.



5. Guarantee equity and inclusion, and institutionalise child and youth participation so no group is left behind and solutions reflect lived experiences. The Index highlights lower scores among children and young people facing disadvantage or vulnerability (including those reporting disability or functional difficulties, food insecurity, regular anxiety or depression, and non-heterosexual young people). Policies should strengthen accessibility and targeted support and involve diverse children and young people through structured and unstructured participatory mechanisms so that platforms, services and education responses are inclusive, effective and accountable.



6. Build multi-stakeholder coalitions and commit to ongoing measurement and learning so action is coordinated and progress can be tracked over time. Digital wellbeing requires joined-up responsibility across platforms, policymakers, educators, health actors, civil society, donors and funders, parents/carers and children and young people themselves. Regularly updating the Index, tracking emerging issues (including AI-enabled risks), and sharing data and best practice across sectors and countries will support accountability and keep policy and practice responsive as technology evolves.

1 INTRODUCTION

Children's digital wellbeing has emerged as a critical area of focus across Europe, as they grow up inhabiting networks, identities and activities that span online and offline spaces. Digital engagement offers crucial opportunities for learning, connection, and self-expression. It also introduces a complex set of challenges, ranging from exposure to harmful content and online harassment to concerns around screen time, mental health, and identity development. Both the opportunities and the challenges highlight the need to understand how children and young people's wellbeing is influenced by their digital engagement, and to assess how they are developing digital skills and resilience to benefit most effectively from this reality.

In 2025, Vodafone Foundation and Save the Children launched a landmark partnership to deliver a Europe-wide digital skills and resilience programme for children aged 9–16 years. This initiative aims to go beyond basic digital literacy by equipping children with the tools to navigate online spaces safely, ethically, and confidently. Combining Vodafone Foundation's expertise in inclusive digital education with Save the Children's leadership in child protection, wellbeing, and promoting children's voices, the programme addresses key issues such as online safety, digital rights, and responsible digital behaviour.

As part of this partnership, the SMILE framework was developed. An integrated blueprint for promoting children's digital resilience and wellbeing, SMILE comprises five interconnected domains:

Security

Recognising that protecting children's personal data and private digital information is a prerequisite for their ability to safely navigate and make informed choices online

Management

Shifting the conversation from screen time limits to evidence-based self-regulation strategies that help children balance their blended online and offline lives

Identity

Supporting children and young people to explore their identities through curating authentic online selves and their online relationships

Literacy

Equipping children with the skills to critically understand the wider digital ecosystems they navigate

Empathy

Ensuring digital spaces are not just safe but also prosocial, embedding kindness and respect into peer norms

The partnership also produced the Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index (the Index), a scalable, inclusive tool grounded in the SMILE framework which can be measured across European contexts. The Index is designed to provide a structured snapshot of children and young people's digital lives across countries and key domains. It captures composite patterns of their self-reported access, behaviour, capabilities, challenges and wellbeing outcomes, rather than individual harms, creating a set of holistic indicators to show where systems are supporting children and young people and where they are not. The Index can help schools, programmes, and policymakers to track change, target support, and compare outcomes across different settings and populations.

This report presents the findings from the inaugural Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index Survey, a large-scale study conducted across nine European countries: Albania, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom. The survey was answered by 7,755 children and young people aged 13 to 18 years in December 2025 and early January 2026.[1]

The primary purpose of this Index and the survey which supports it is to understand the reality of children and young people's digital lives – identifying areas of strength and existing support as well as priorities for additional focus – and provide evidence to inform decision-makers, programming and curriculum development for digital skills and resilience initiatives. The findings will enable schools, programmes, and policymakers to identify children and young people's needs and design meaningful initiatives to improve their digital wellbeing. Additionally, these insights will support advocacy efforts to influence policy on technology accountability, AI governance, and ensure that the diverse voices of children and young people are represented in decisions that affect their digital engagement and online/offline lives.

[1]Data collection for all online countries (Germany, Greece, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom) was conducted during December 2025, while Albania, where data collection was conducted face-to-face, was finalised on 12 January 2026.

2 KEY FINDINGS

2.1 Overview

The key findings are structured around use, enablement, digital wellbeing and the Index domains. **Use** outlines technology access and usage covering device ownership, internet connectivity, time spent online, online activities, and motivations for going online. **Enablement** explores how well-resourced children and young people are for digital engagement. **Digital Wellbeing** assesses how children and young people feel about being online. Both are facilitating indicators for the overall Index. **Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index** measures the skills, knowledge, and behaviours that support positive digital participation among children and young people. Findings are set out across each of its five sub-domains of **Security, Management, Identity, Literacy** and **Empathy.**

Throughout, significant findings are disaggregated by country and key demographics to identify patterns and show where support may be most needed. For ease of reference, the headline findings are presented for all nine countries combined, then demographic differences are outlined and lastly cross-country comparisons are discussed.

Three distinct measures

- The **Degree of Enablement** Indicator measures whether children and young people have the foundational resources needed for meaningful digital participation, including device access, reliable connectivity, and accessibility tools. This indicator sits outside the core index and provides context on access and inclusion.
- The **Digital Wellbeing** Indicator measures children and young people's subjective experiences of their digital lives, including feelings of calm, balance, sleep quality, and stress related to being online. This indicator also sits outside the core index and captures how young people feel about their digital engagement.
- **The Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index** (DWRI) is the core measure comprising five SMILE domains: Security and Safety, Management, Identity and Relationships, Digital Literacy, and Empathy and Protection. This index measures the skills, knowledge, and behaviours that support positive digital participation.

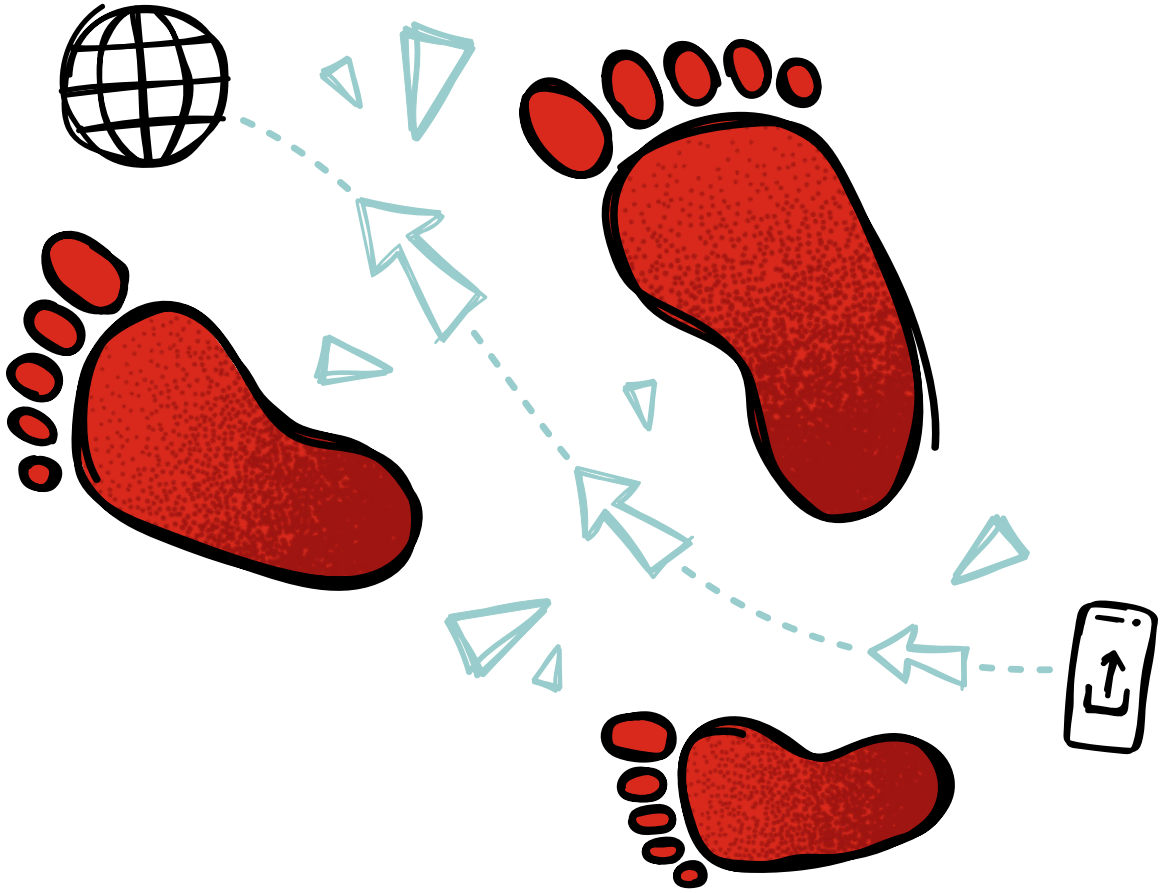
Note: Indicator = Degree of Enablement or Digital Wellbeing;
Index = Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index (and its five SMILE domains)

Demographic differences: The survey asked children and young people about their characteristics, such as functional difficulties or disabilities, experiences of anxiety or depression, food insecurity, sexual orientation and identity, and ethnic identity. Where such characteristics are associated with lower outcomes, this should be understood as reflecting systemic barriers, such as inaccessible digital design, socioeconomic disadvantage, lack of tailored support, discriminatory environments or societal processes of marginalisation, rather than as inherent to the individuals.

Intersecting identities: Demographic characteristics explored in the survey will intersect for many – a young person may, for example, experience functional difficulties and live in a household facing food insecurity, or identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual while also experiencing regular anxiety. Due to sample size constraints, findings are given for single rather than intersecting characteristics – but in fact intersecting identities may create or compound barriers to positive digital participation. Children and young people with multiple marginalised identities may face greater challenges than are reported for any single category, and this should be considered when interpreting the findings.

2.2 Digital technology access and use

The survey heard from children and young people about their digital technology access and habits, including internet connectivity and device ownership, time spent online and the activities they do, their motivations for going online, and aspects of offline life they sometimes miss by being online.



2.2.1 Device access and usage

Teenagers have access to a least one connected device, so this is rarely a barrier to their digital participation. Most children and young people (83%) own their own smartphone and another 11% share one. Many also use other devices at least weekly: 56% use a Smart TV or streaming device; 53% use a laptop, MacBook, or Chromebook; 44% use a tablet; 40% use gaming consoles; and 32% desktop computers. Smartwatches or fitness trackers are used by a quarter (25%) of children and young people. Feature phones (non-smartphones) are used by just 9% (but note that some schools now only allow feature phones).

Device use varied across groups. Smartphone ownership was higher among older teens (16–18) (86% compared to 80% of 13–15-year-olds) as was use of laptops (56% vs 50%); younger teens were more likely to use gaming consoles (46% vs 34%). Gaming saw a notable gender difference, with young males almost twice as likely to use consoles (51%) than girls (27%), and young females more likely to use tablets (49% vs 40%). Children and young people at risk of food insecurity had notably lower smartphone ownership (70% compared to 85% of food-secure children and young people), as socio-economic factors can still create barriers to device access.

Comparing across countries showed that Germany (86%) and Romania (86%) had the highest rates of youth smartphone ownership (but even the lowest rate of 78% in Greece and Türkiye was high). Gaming console use was more common in the UK (52%), Germany (51%) and Spain (51%) compared to Greece (31%), Romania (32%), and Türkiye (29%). These variations likely reflect a combination of factors including digital leisure preferences, socioeconomic conditions, and policy environments such as varying age requirements and digital access regulations across the countries.

Implication: High device ownership means children and young people can participate in online life, but as digital engagement is effectively universal, so wellbeing, safety and balance have to be built into systems rather than targeted to at-risk users. These findings reinforce the need for a wider, public health approach to digital wellbeing.

2.2.2 Internet access and connectivity

Home is the main place that children and young people go online, with 90% usually going online at home (highest in Albania at 97% and the UK at 96% and lowest in Greece at 87%). Even most (86%) of those who go online in multiple locations identified home as where they most often go online.

Around a third of children and young people (32%) also go online at school, college, or university, with the highest rates in Romania (42%) and the lowest in Türkiye (21%), Greece (19%) and Albania (15%). Just under half (45%) use mobile data while out and about, though this ranged from 32% in the Netherlands to 53% in Romania. Only 9% regularly go online at a library or community centre.

Home broadband or Wi-Fi was the main internet connection for 70% of children and young people, with 16% primarily using mobile data from their own plan, and 11% relying on a family or guardian's mobile data; only 3% primarily depended on public Wi-Fi. Patterns of connectivity varied by nation. Home broadband was nearly universal in Albania (89%) and prevalent in the UK (83%) and Germany (78%), but less common in Romania (56%) and Portugal (59%) where mobile data use was higher. In Romania, 24% of respondents mainly use their own mobile data, the highest of the nine countries.

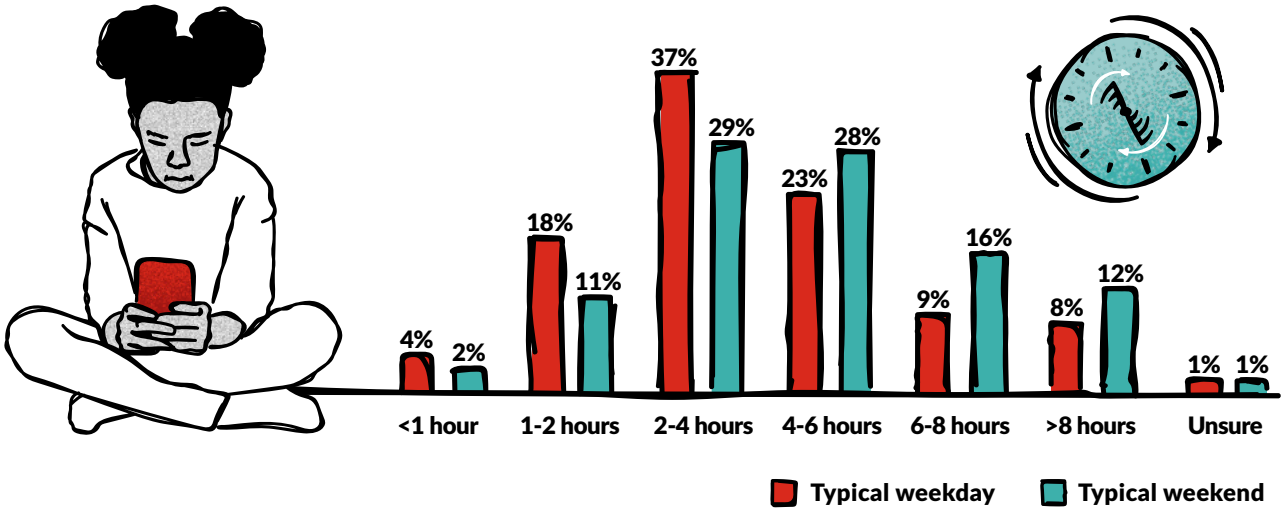
Access differed with demographics, showing that public spaces and Wi-Fi play an important role in extending access for children and young people who may be experiencing disadvantage. Those who experience regular anxiety or depression were less likely to go online at home (88% vs 93% experiencing this rarely or never). Those at risk of food insecurity were notably less likely to go online at home (78% go online here most often compared to 93% of those who are food-secure) and more likely to use libraries or community centres (13% vs 9%). Similarly, children and young people of minoritised ethnicity went online at home less often (85% go online most often at home vs 93% from the national majority ethnic) and more used public Wi-Fi (6% vs 2%). Reasons for these variations should be explored further so that forms of access can be bolstered to meet the needs of these groups.

Implication: Access is high overall but not evenly distributed. Children and young people who report food insecurity, regular anxiety or depression or are from minoritised ethnicities are less likely to go online primarily at home and more reliant on public access. This matters, as limited or unstable access is exclusionary in itself, may bring other connectivity challenges and can also leave children and young people with less protection and support in their digital participation.

2.2.3 Time spent online

Daily screentime is steady throughout the week, increasing at weekends. Most children and young people (59%) spend under four hours online on weekdays but this shifts at weekends as most (56%) spend four or more hours online, including 28% who spend over 6 hours (see Figure 2.1). Very few children and young people spend under an hour online (4% on weekdays, 2% on weekends). Time spent online includes any digital activities, whether for leisure or education.

Figure 2.1: Time spent online on a typical weekday and a typical weekend



Time online varies a little with age and gender, but more with other characteristics or experiences. Older teens spent more time online (13% of 16–18 year olds spent eight or more hours at weekends compared to 11% of 13–15 year olds), and young males were slightly more likely to report heavy use (13% of young males were online 8 or more hours at weekends compared to 11% of young females). Children and young people who identified as having disabilities or functional difficulties were online longer than their peers: at weekends, 13% with disabilities/functional difficulties spent eight or more hours online compared to 9% of those without. Similarly, screen time was higher for youth who reported experiencing regular anxiety or depression, with 14% spending eight or more hours online at weekends compared to 9% of those who rarely or never experienced this.

Countries varied in how long children and young people were online. The heaviest use was in the UK, both on weekdays (14% spent eight or more hours online) and at weekends. Türkiye, Portugal and Romania also saw particularly high weekend usage (14–16% spent eight or more hours online). As online and offline activities are so intertwined for children and young people, screentime can be a blunt metric of how they are coping with digital engagement. It can be interpreted alongside data on how they manage their use, and how readily they can disengage. The Index Management domain (set out at 4.7 below) indicates that time online becomes more concerning if children and young people experience challenges taking breaks, dealing with notifications or winding down after use. This is why groups spending similar hours online can see differences in wellbeing outcomes.

Implication: Screentime on its own is not inherently negative but extended time online can pose a risk for children and young people's wellbeing when they face challenges with management. Children and young people can be supported to use management strategies and develop balance but should not hold sole responsibility for managing screentime and disengaging.

2.2.4 Online activities

Communication, social connection and entertainment dominate the wide range of online activities children and young people engage in. Education is common but creative or civic activities are rare. The most frequent daily activities were:

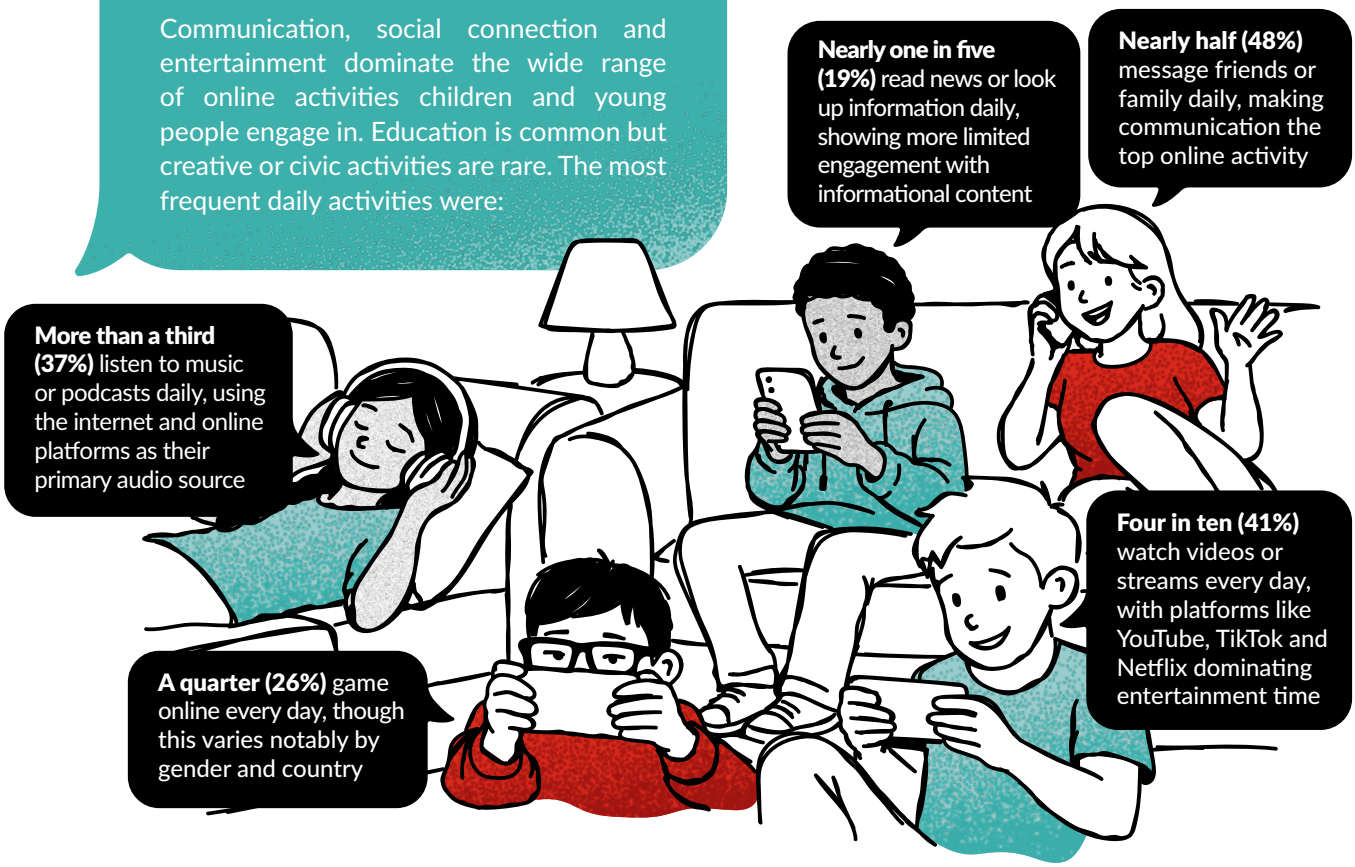
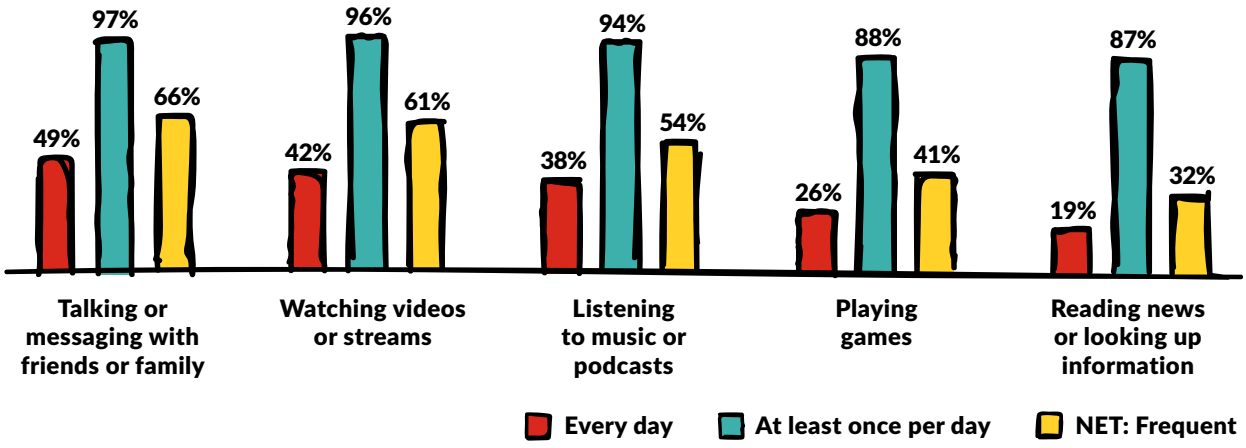


Figure 2.2: Online activity types by frequency



Learning online is relatively common with 20% doing online schoolwork or e-learning daily (another 21% do so most days of the week). However, one in ten (12%) never use the internet for education, revealing a possible gap. Creative, health or civic activities are much less common. For example, only 8% create or post content daily (and 35% never do so). Using health or wellbeing apps is rare (7% daily; 48% never). Civic engagement (such as signing petitions or following campaigns) was the least common of the activities: three in five (61%) never participate in these types of activities online.

Activity patterns varied by age, gender, and other characteristics. Young males were significantly more likely than females to game daily (31% compared to 20%), while females were more likely to use the internet for schoolwork every day (22% vs 18%). Younger teens (13–15) were more likely to game daily (29% vs 23%) and use the internet frequently for schoolwork (45% vs 36%), while older teens were more likely to read news or look up information daily (24% vs 15%). Those experiencing regular anxiety or depression were significantly more likely to engage in creative and civic activities online, with 20% creating or posting content frequently compared to 14% of those rarely or never experiencing anxiety or depression.

Cross-country differences were evident and insightful, specifically around creating content or gaming. Daily content creation was highest in Türkiye (12% create or post content every day) and Romania (11%), roughly double the rate seen in Portugal, Spain and the UK (all around 5%). Daily gaming saw a starker difference with Albania (45%) at roughly three times the rate in Spain (15%) and Greece (18%); Romania (28%) and the UK (29%) also had relatively high daily gaming levels.

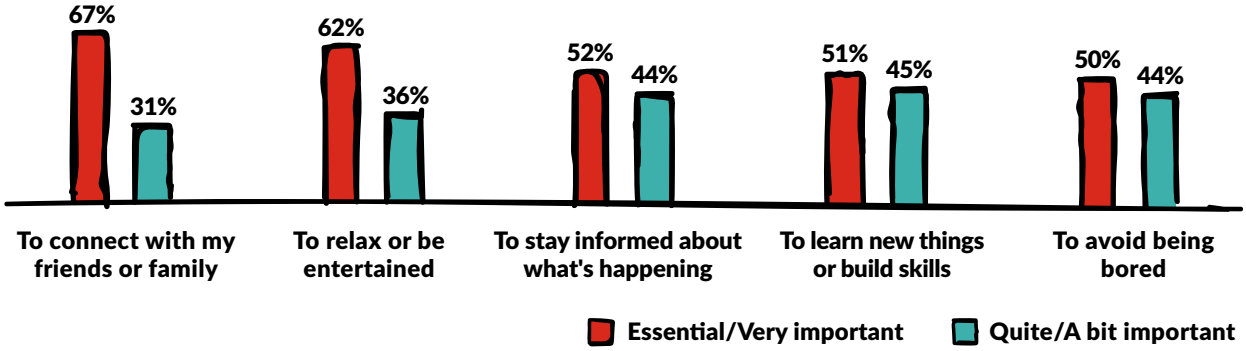
Implication: The clear dominance of social connection and entertainment show where children and young people's time is actually spent; efforts to support them should focus on the platforms and features shaping their daily use, not only on online safety and high-risk behaviours.

2.2.5 Motivations for going online

It is important to understand why children and young people go online. This study indicates a variety of reasons, again showing social connection and entertainment as being most important:

- About two-thirds (67%) of children and young people say that connecting with friends or family is a very important reason to go online
- Nearly two-thirds (62%) go online primarily to relax and be entertained, highlighting the role of digital environments as a leisure space
- Just over half (52%) consider staying informed about current events an essential motivation for their internet use
- Just over half (52%) are drawn online simply because their friends are there, showing the power of peer presence in digital spaces
- About half (51%) value the internet as a vital tool for learning new things and building skills
- Half (50%) turn to the internet to avoid boredom, making it their default activity when unoccupied

Figure 2.3: Motivations for going online



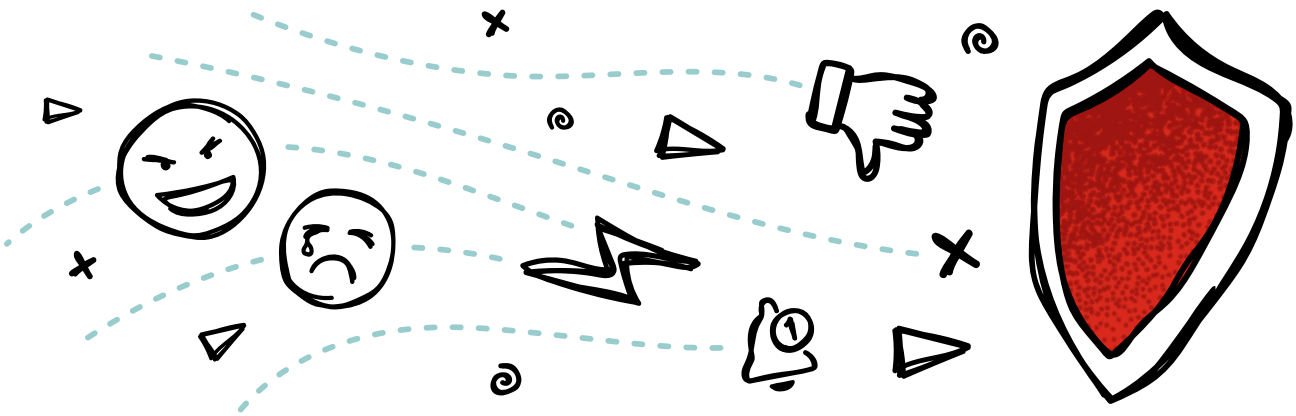
Less common reasons included expressing their identity (essential/very important for 40%), for support or to feel better (39%), and building or creating something online (36%). Notably, a third (35%) prioritise keeping up streaks on an app; this significant proportion perhaps highlighting the compulsive nature of apps designed to encourage habitual use.

Motivations varied by demographic characteristics. Younger teens (13–15) were motivated by avoiding boredom more than older teens (54% vs 47%). Children and young people at risk of food insecurity were significantly less likely to prioritise connecting with friends and family (57% compared to 68% of those who are food secure), but more likely to prioritise getting support or feeling better (47% vs 37%). Similarly, those experiencing regular anxiety or depression were more likely to go online for support (43% vs 34%) and to express their identity (43% vs 36%). Children and young people with disabilities/functional difficulties were significantly more likely to go online to avoid being bored (53% compared to 46% of those without difficulties), but less likely to prioritise connecting with friends and family (66% vs 70%) or learning new things (50% vs 55%).

These findings emphasise the need for protective digital environments, so children and young people who look to online spaces for support, connection or help (in particular if offline support or opportunity is limited) can have their needs met under conditions that protect their wellbeing.

Comparing countries, children and young people in Albania rated nearly all motivations as more important than those elsewhere, with Romania and Türkiye also showing strong motivation in many areas, while those in the Netherlands expressed low rates of motivation. In Albania, 88% rated connecting with friends and family as essential or very important (56% in the Netherlands), and 70% prioritised learning new things (32% in the Netherlands). In Türkiye, 53% prioritised expressing identity (24% in the Netherlands) and 52% building or creating something online (20% in the Netherlands). These patterns may reflect cultural differences in how children and young people perceive and use digital spaces, and need to be considered for engagement and wellbeing.

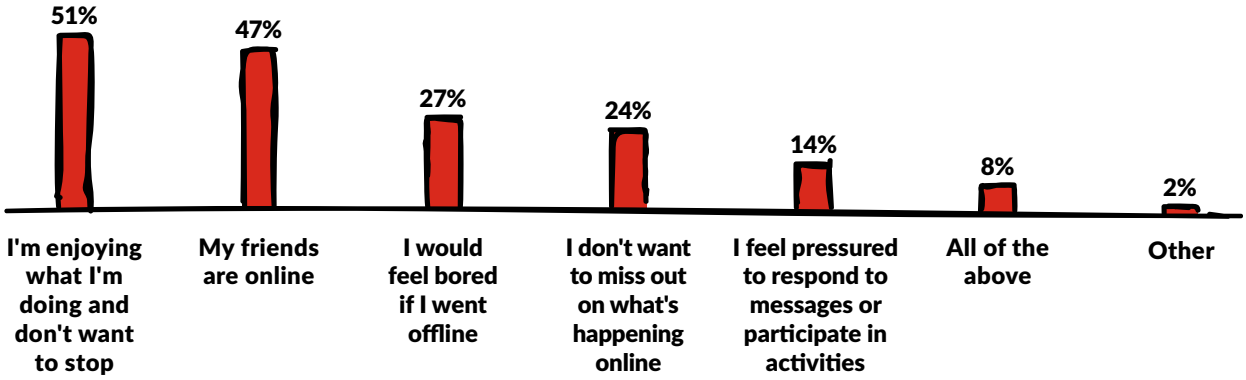
Implication: Children and young people go online for connection, identity and enjoyment and for some groups, digital spaces may also offer a layer of support which means policy and platform design must protect wellbeing without cutting off the benefits of participation.



2.2.6 Staying online longer than planned

When teens lose track of time online, the primary reason is positive engagement: over half (51%) say they often stay online longer than intended because they are enjoying what they are doing and do not want to stop. Social factors were also key, with just under half (47%) saying they stay online longer because their friends are online. Other less common reasons included fear of boredom if they disconnect (27%), fear of missing out (FOMO) online (24%) and feeling pressured to respond to messages or participate in activities (14%). While this suggests children and young people find genuine enjoyment in their online activities, it becomes concerning when it interferes with sleep, offline relationships, or other important activities – Issues explored again in the wellbeing findings.

Figure 2.4: Reasons for staying online longer than planned



Younger teens (13–15 years) were significantly more likely to stay online because their friends are online (52% compared to 40% of older teens). Children and young people at risk of food insecurity were notably more likely to feel pressured to respond to messages (25% compared to 12% of those who are food-secure). Those experiencing regular anxiety or depression, compared to those that aren't, were more likely to stay online due to fear of boredom (33% vs 21%) and social pressure to respond (19% vs 10%) and were less likely to say this situation never happens to them (4% vs 11%).

Türkiye saw the highest proportion of children and young people citing social pressure to respond (31%), twice the rate in other countries. Very few children and young people avoid these issues entirely; only 7% said this never happens to them (higher in Germany and the Netherlands at 11%).

Implication: Overuse is not only about individual volition or poor decision-making by children and young people. It is also shaped by digital design features that reward continued engagement and make stopping harder. This shifts responsibility toward design and suitable default settings and strengthens the case for wellbeing-by-design expectations and smarter defaults for under-18s.

2.2.7 What children and young people miss about being offline

Even while they are immersed in the digital world, many children and young people do miss aspects of life offline. The most cited aspects were:

Views of what they were missing varied with children and young people's characteristics. Those at risk of food insecurity were significantly more likely than their food-secure peers to miss out on better sleeping (34% vs 25%) and focusing on one thing (27% vs 20%). Children and young people experiencing regular anxiety or depression were also more likely to miss sleeping better (32% vs 21% of those who experienced this rarely or never) and focusing without distractions (26% vs 17%). Children and young people with disabilities/functional difficulties were significantly more likely to miss sleeping better (29% vs 20%), focusing on one thing (24% vs 15%), and relaxing without digital stimulation (22% vs 15%) compared to those who did not report difficulties. A significant share of young people and children recognise the value of screen-free time, whether they see it as helping them to be more involved with family or to improve their sleep and concentration.

That said, not everyone feels they are missing out, with 17% saying they do not miss anything about being offline. Notably, children and young people who rarely or never experience anxiety or depression were significantly more likely to say they do not miss anything about being offline (24% compared to 11% experiencing these challenges regularly). This proportion was much larger in some countries than others – a third in Albania (33%) and a fifth to a quarter in Germany (25%), the UK (23%) and the Netherlands (22%) but one in ten or fewer in Portugal (10%) and Türkiye (5%).

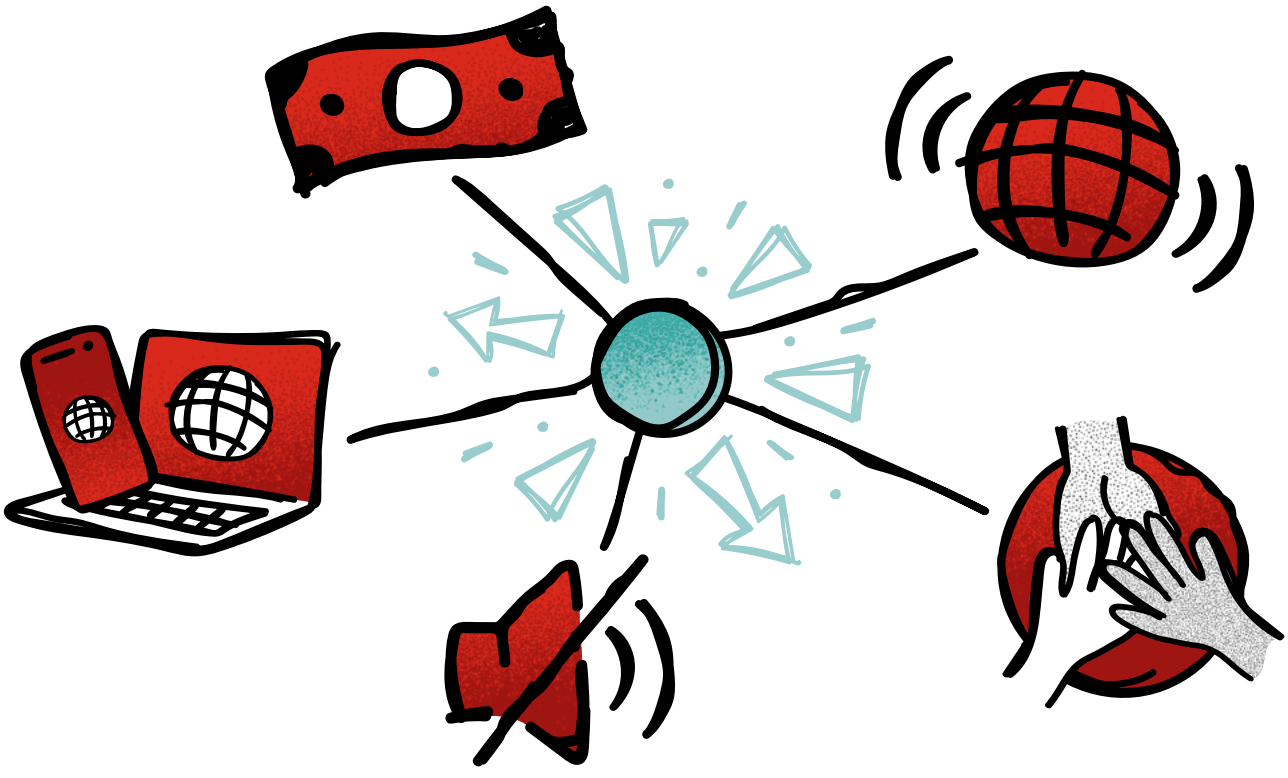
Children and young people in Türkiye were most likely to report missing offline activities including spending time with family (46%), being outside (39%), sleeping better (38%), focusing without distractions (34%) and talking in person without constant interruptions (31%). This contrast of 5% of Turkish teens saying they miss nothing about offline life compared to 33% in Albania shows how cultural differences may shape what children and young people feel they miss by being online.

Implication: While not all children and young people feel they miss out by being online, the data shows that for many there is a trade-off that can have wellbeing impacts. Children and young people consistently reporting missing sleep, attention and focus, feeling calm or quality time offline, points to a measurable wellbeing impact pathway which reinforces that digital wellbeing should be treated as a public health and education issue, not just an online safety issue.

2.3 Enablement indicator

The Enablement (access and inclusion) indicator measures whether children and young people have the foundational resources needed for meaningful digital participation, including regular access to devices, reliable internet connectivity, affordability of data, a quiet space for online learning, and the availability of accessibility tools where needed.

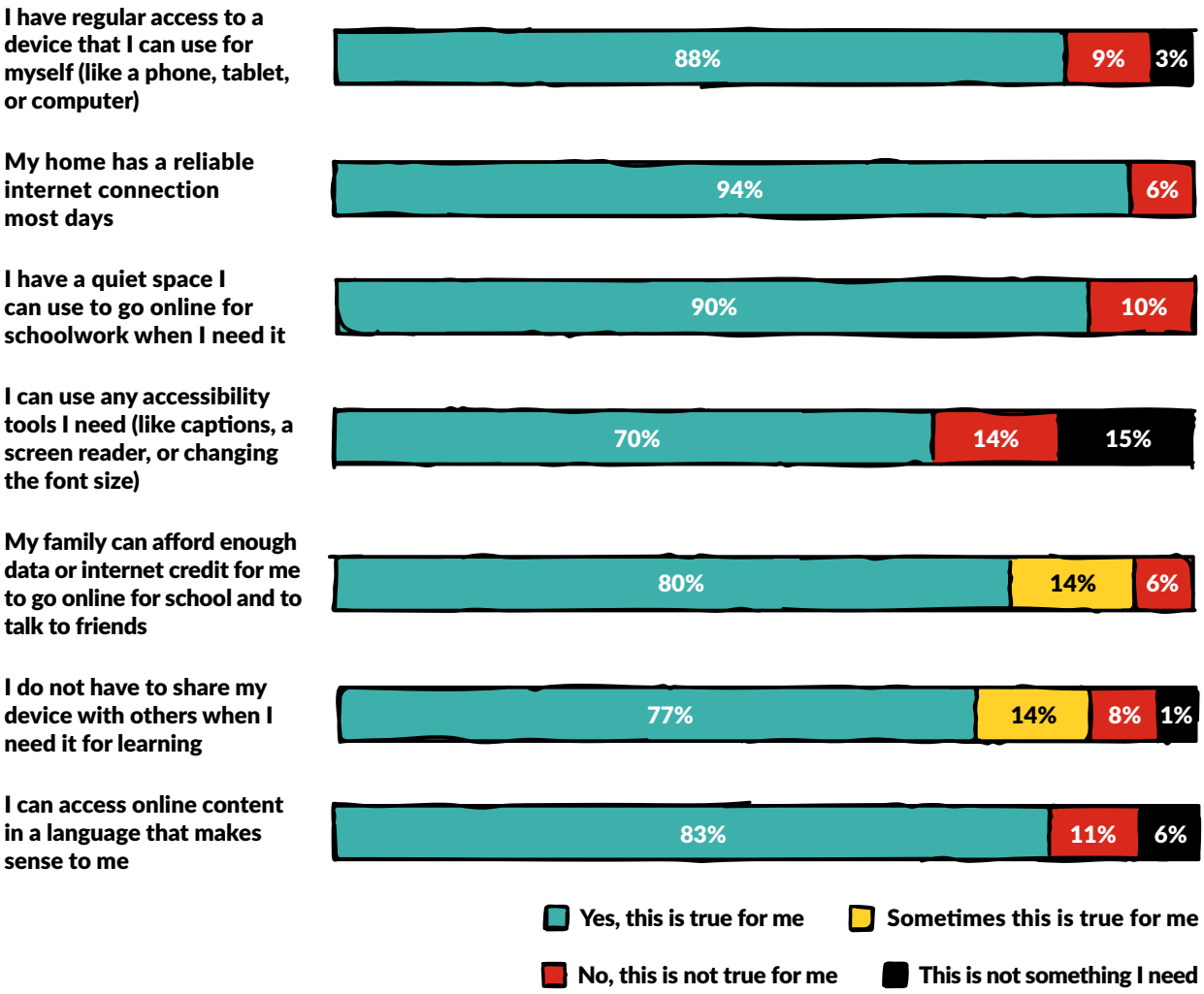
This indicator does not contribute to the overall Index score but is used as a measurement tool to identify differences between groups with varying levels of access to digital tools.



2.3.1 Specific components

The Enablement indicator was measured through seven statements about access to digital resources. Figure 2.5 shows the responses to each statement.

Figure 2.5: Enablement indicator individual item scores[2]



Responses were most positive for basic connectivity – nearly all children and young people (94%) reported having a reliable home internet connection most days, and 90% have a quiet space for schoolwork when needed. Personal device access was also high at 88%, and few had to share it.

However, gaps emerged in other areas. Only 70% confirmed they can access the accessibility tools they need (such as captions, screen readers, or font size adjustments), although 15% indicated this was not something they required. Affordability showed some strain, with 81% saying their family can afford enough data or internet credit, but 14% saying this was only 'sometimes' true, indicating inconsistent access for one in seven. Similarly, 77% reported not having to share their device for learning, while 14% said this was only sometimes the case.

These findings suggest that while basic connectivity is near-universal, the conditions for consistent, uninterrupted, and accessible digital participation are not equally met for all children and young people. Gaps in affordability, device sharing, and accessibility tools highlight areas where targeted support could improve enablement for those currently facing barriers.

[2]**Technical note:** This indicator was scored differently to the SMILE domains. Two statements – having regular access to a personal device (E1) and having a reliable home internet connection (E2) – were treated as prerequisites: respondents answering 'No' or 'This is not something I need' to either of these were classified as 'not enabled' regardless of other responses. The remaining statements were scored and used to derive the degree of enablement (low, medium, high) among those meeting the prerequisites. For statements with a 'Sometimes' option (affordability and device sharing), partial scores were assigned. The language accessibility statement (E7) was only asked of respondents who speak a language other than the national language at home (n=221).

2.3.2 Overall findings

Half (50%) of children and young people scored 'high' on access to digital resources, while very few (8%) had 'medium' access. However, 27% scored 'low' and a substantial minority had very limited access with 16% 'not enabled', meaning they face significant barriers to getting online. Together this means that 43% of children and young people lack standard-level digital access and inclusion.

Table 2.1: Enablement indicator score

Category	 Not Enabled	 Low Enablement	 Medium Enablement	 High Enablement
Total	**16%**	**27%**	**8%**	**50%**

2.3.3 Demographic differences

Age and gender differences were minimal, but more substantial across other characteristics. Children and young people at risk of food insecurity faced significantly greater barriers to digital access, with a third (33%) falling into the 'not enabled' category compared to just 12% of food-secure children and young people, and only 29% achieving 'high' enablement compared to 54% of their food-secure peers.

Similarly, children and young people with disabilities/functional difficulties were significantly more likely to be 'not enabled' (18% compared to 10% of those without difficulties) and less likely to achieve 'high' access (46% vs 60%). Those experiencing regular anxiety or depression also faced access barriers, with 19% 'not enabled' compared to 12% of those rarely or never experiencing this.

Children and young people identifying as ethnic minorities were more likely to be 'not enabled' (21% compared to 12% of non-minorities) and less likely to achieve 'high' scores (46% vs 52%). Children and young people identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual were significantly more likely to be 'not enabled' (24% compared to 14% of those who identify as heterosexual) and less likely to achieve 'high' enablement (43% vs 52%). Interestingly, those speaking a language other than the national language at home were significantly more likely to achieve 'high' enablement (66% compared to 50%), though this group also had a higher proportion in the 'not enabled' category (21% vs 15%), suggesting a more polarised distribution of access within this group.

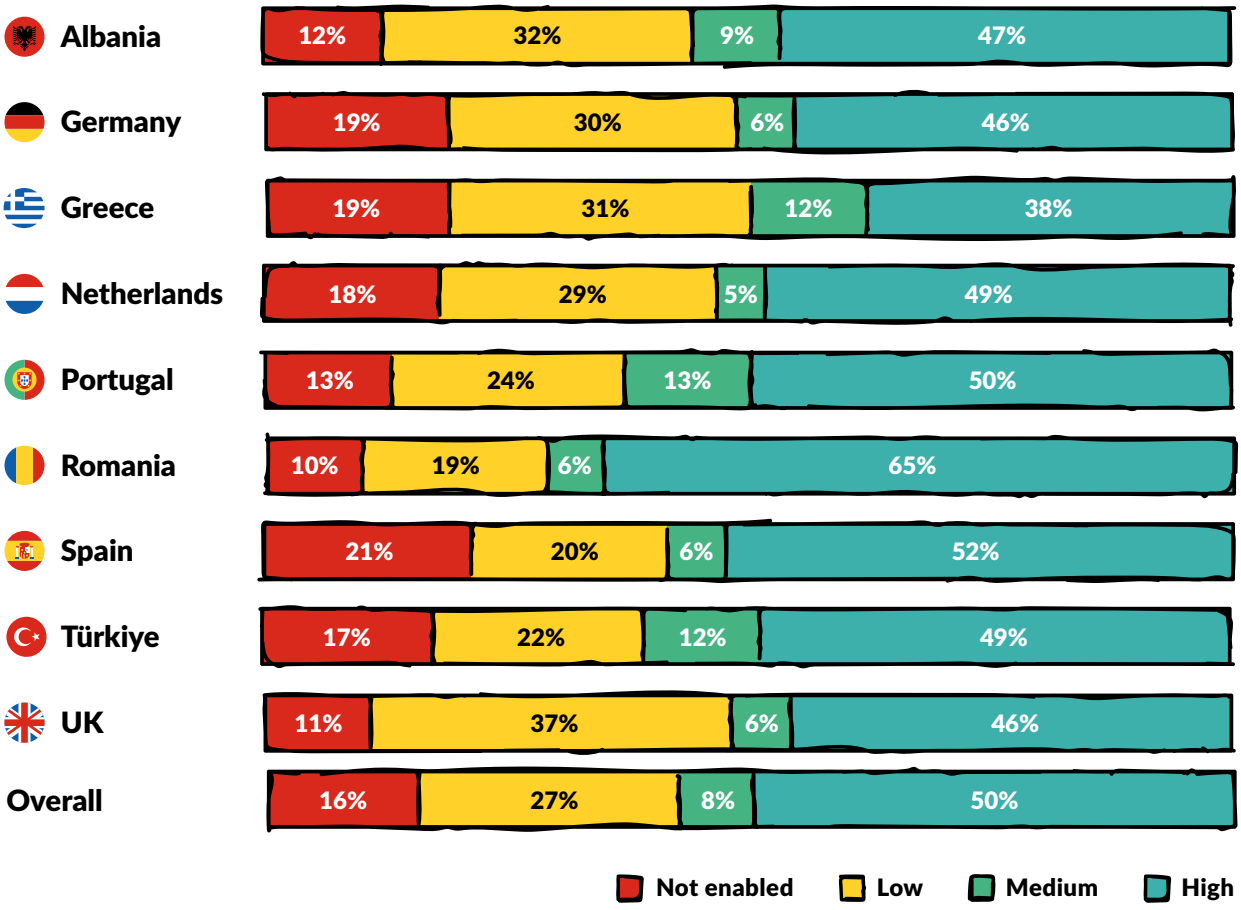
The findings indicate that while basic digital access is widespread, socioeconomic disadvantage, disability, and minority status remain associated with lesser digital inclusion. This enablement gap may therefore also be reinforcing other issues for children and young people with less opportunity for positive online participation. Any national or regional digital wellbeing strategy should include targeted enablement measures for groups facing additional barriers and disadvantage.

2.3.4 Cross-country comparisons

Access was not equal everywhere, with clear disparities in digital enablement between and within countries. In Romania, 71% of children and young people had at least moderate access (medium or high) – the highest in any country. The smallest proportion was in Greece, where it was half (50%). Countries such as Portugal (63%), Spain (58%), and Albania (56%) were in between. Romania also had largest proportion achieving 'high' scores (65%), next was Spain with 52% and the lowest was Greece with 38%. This indicates that some countries may have been more successful in ensuring digital access for their children and young people.

However, digital access also showed a polarised pattern within countries – with very few children and young people in the 'medium' category (5-13% across the countries). This suggests that young people tend to have strong digital access or face significant barriers, with little middle ground. This was seen especially in Spain (41% not enabled/low, 52% high), Germany (49% not enabled/low, 46% high) and Greece (50% not enabled/low, 38% high), all showing similar patterns of polarisation.

Figure 2.6: Enablement indicator country scores



2.4 Digital Wellbeing indicator

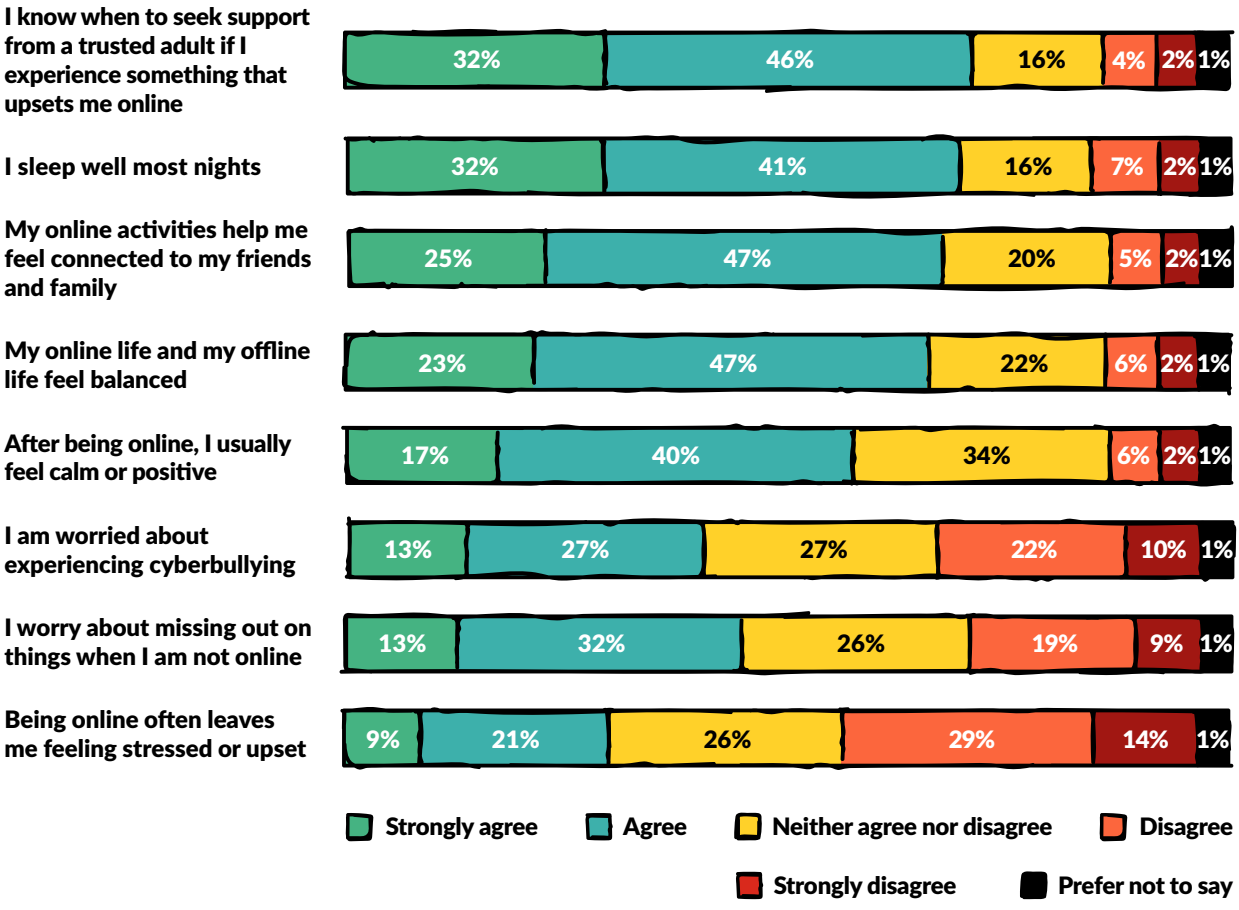
The Digital Wellbeing indicator measures children and young people's subjective digital wellbeing, including whether they feel calm and positive after being online, whether their online and offline lives feel balanced, sleep quality, feelings of stress or upset related to being online, concerns about cyberbullying, sense of connection to friends and family through online activities, and knowing when to seek support from a trusted adult.

This indicator also does not count towards the final index score but is used as a measurement tool to identify differences between groups with varying levels of digital wellbeing. It is important to note that 'moderate' digital wellbeing scores should not be interpreted as satisfactory or sufficient. A 'moderate' score indicates partial digital wellbeing; children and young people in this category may be functioning online but are not consistently experiencing positive outcomes or may cope in some areas while struggling in others. 'moderate' can therefore highlight areas for improvement.

2.4.1 Specific components

The Digital Wellbeing indicator was measured through eight statements on subjective experiences of digital life, including feelings after being online, balance, sleep, stress, connection, and knowing when to seek support. Figure 2.7 shows the responses to each statement.

Figure 2.7: Digital Wellbeing indicator individual item scores[3]



[3]**Technical note:** Two statements in this indicator were reverse-coded for scoring purposes: 'Being online often leaves me feeling stressed or upset' and 'I worry about missing out on things when I am not online' – where disagreement indicates more positive wellbeing.

Knowing where to seek support and maintaining connections had the most positive responses. Four in five children or young people (78%) agreed or strongly agreed that they know when to seek support from a trusted adult if something upsets them online, and 72% feel their online activities help them stay connected to friends and family. Sleep was also positive, with 73% reporting they sleep well most nights.

Significant challenges with digital balance and emotional wellbeing showed up in other questions. Only 57% agreed or strongly agreed that after being online, they usually feel calm or positive, so two-fifths (43%) do not consistently experience positive feelings from their digital engagement. While 70% felt their online and offline lives are balanced, almost a third experienced imbalance. Another 30% agreed or strongly agreed that being online often leaves them feeling stressed or upset, and 45% worry about missing out on things when not online, indicating that FOMO affects close to half of children and young people. Concerns about cyberbullying were also notable, with 40% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they worry about experiencing it.

Encouragingly, the data shows that children and young people know where to seek help and value the connection that online spaces provide, but the emotional experience of being online is mixed. A significant minority experience stress, FOMO, and do not feel consistently positive after digital engagement. These findings reinforce the need to move beyond online safety and access issues to address the subjective wellbeing outcomes of children and young people's digital engagement.

2.4.2 Overall findings

The Digital Wellbeing indicator emerged as having the poorest outcomes. Only about a quarter of children and young people (26%) achieved 'good' or 'high' wellbeing scores. Nearly two-thirds (64%) scored 'moderate' (i.e. partial wellbeing) and 10% fell into the 'low' range meaning the vast majority of children and young people are far from achieving full digital wellbeing.

Table 2.2: Digital Wellbeing indicator overall score

Category	Low (0-49%)	Moderate (50-69%)	Good (70-89%)	High (90-100%)
Total	**10%**	**64%**	**23%**	**3%**

2.4.3 Demographic differences

The Digital Wellbeing indicator had some of the starkest demographic disparities of any domain – although age and gender differences were modest. Older teens (16–18 years) had slightly higher scores, with 28% achieving 'good' or 'high' scores compared to 24% of 13–15 year-olds, though they also had marginally more in the 'low' category (11% vs 10%). Gender differences were minimal, with young males and females showing near-identical scores across all categories.

Table 2.3: Digital Wellbeing indicator score by age group

Category	Low	Moderate	Good	High
13–15 years	9%	67%	21%	2%
16–18 years	11%	63%	24%	3%

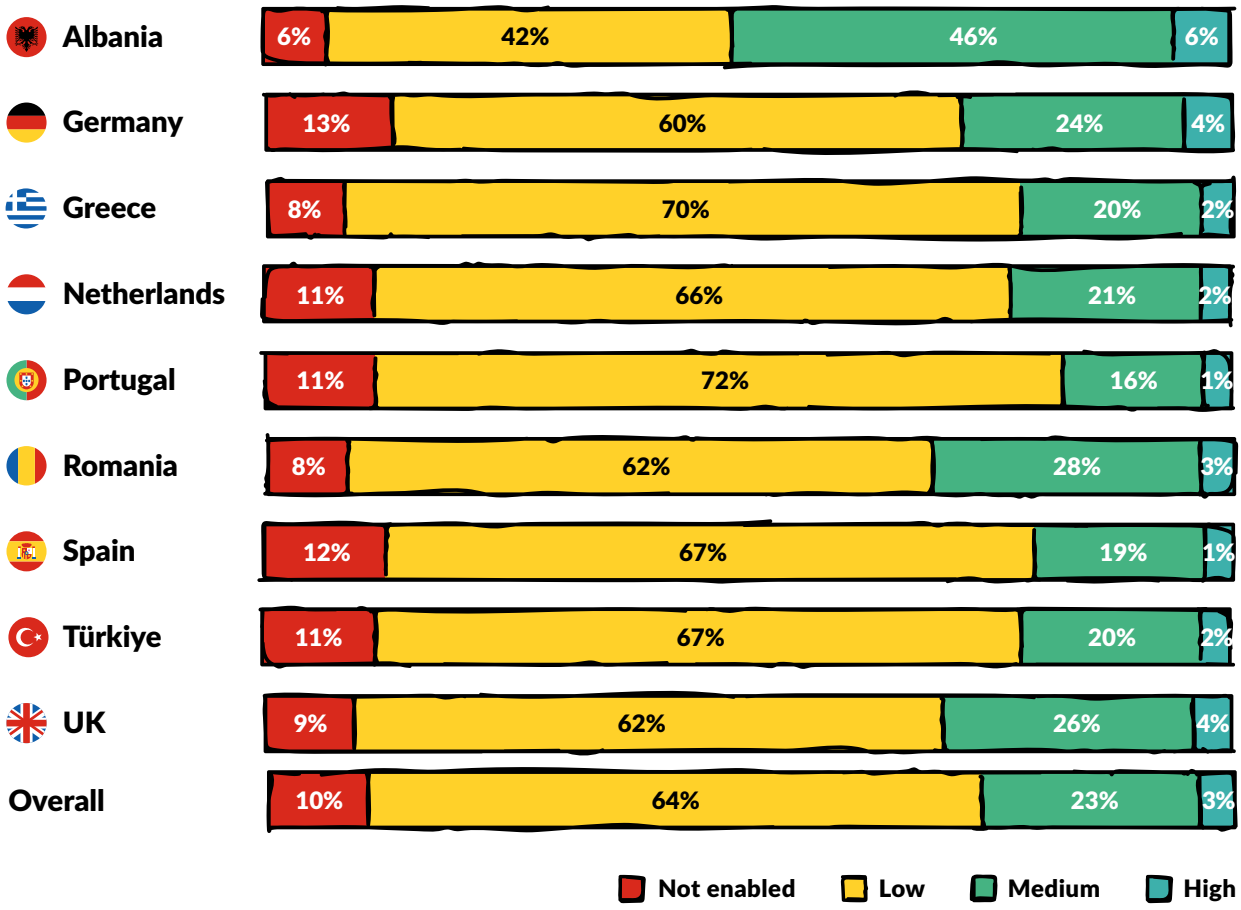
More substantial differences emerged on other demographics; children and young people with disabilities/functional difficulties were significantly more likely to fall into the 'low' category (13% compared to 5% of those without) and far less likely to achieve 'good' or 'high' scores (20% vs 39%). Those experiencing regular anxiety or depression showed stark differences: 14% scored 'low' (vs 6%) and only 18% achieved 'good' or 'high' (vs 34%). Children and young people at risk of food insecurity were over twice as likely to score 'low' (19% compared to 8% of their food-secure peers) and much less likely to achieve positive wellbeing outcomes (10% 'good' or 'high' vs 29%). Children and young people identifying as from minority ethcicities were also more likely to score 'low' (12% vs 9%) and less likely to reach 'good' or 'high' levels (20% vs 29%). Those identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual were similarly more likely to fall into the 'low' category (15% compared to 10% of those identifying as heterosexual) and less likely to achieve 'good' scores (15% vs 24%). These findings underscore that digital wellbeing challenges are not evenly distributed. Children and young people who face systemic barriers, such as inaccessible digital design, socioeconomic disadvantage, discrimination, or lack of tailored support, are disproportionately affected. These disparities reflect structural inequalities rather than characteristics inherent to the individuals themselves.

2.4.4 Cross-country comparisons

Digital Wellbeing outcomes were low across the countries, with some clear outliers. Albania was a positive exception and had the highest proportion of children and young people achieving 'good' or 'high' scores (53%) which was much higher than the closest countries, Romania (31%) and the UK (29%). This was three times the rate in Portugal (17%), which had the lowest proportion achieving 'good' or 'high' scores. Most other countries clustered in the 20–30% range, highlighting that poor digital wellbeing is a more widespread issue.

Few children and young people achieved top digital wellbeing scores anywhere: Albania had the greatest proportion with 'high' scores at 6% of respondents, and only 1% of young people in Portugal and Spain scored 'high'. The vast majority in every country were in the 'moderate' range: approximately 70% of children and young people in Portugal, Greece and Spain were in the 'moderate' range. In countries where fewer were experiencing challenges, such as Romania and Greece, approximately 8% still reported poor digital wellbeing, while Germany and Spain saw 12–13% in the low range. These patterns suggest that partial wellbeing is more standard for those responding, and that having consistently positive digital wellbeing experiences is relatively rare.

Figure 2.8: Digital Wellbeing indicator country score



Implication: Digital wellbeing is the clearest pressure point in the dataset with only 26% of young people reaching good/high, while large minorities report feeling stressed or upset, not calm or positive after being online, and worried about cyberbullying. This means most young people are coping rather than thriving, and wellbeing must be treated as a core policy outcome and not an optional add-on after access and safety.

2.5 Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index results

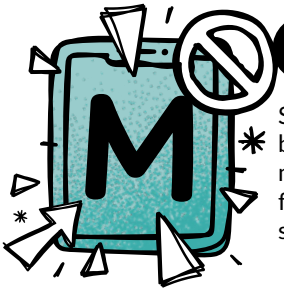
This section presents the core findings from the Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index, a comprehensive measure of children's digital resilience and wellbeing grounded in the SMILE framework. The Index comprises five domains, each capturing a distinct aspect of children's and young people's capacity to navigate the digital world safely, confidently, and positively.

2.5.1 Understanding the SMILE framework

The SMILE framework was developed as part of the partnership between Vodafone Foundation and Save the Children to provide an integrated blueprint for promoting children's digital resilience and wellbeing. The framework comprises five core domains and was used to create the items that build the index, which are supplemented by Enablement (access and inclusion) and Digital Wellbeing indicators. Under each SMILE domain the following topics are included:

Security

Knowledge and behaviours that protect personal data and online safety – privacy settings, password management, recognising scams, and reporting harmful content



Management

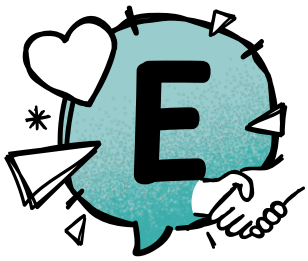
Self-regulation strategies for balancing online and offline life – managing notifications, screen-free routines, limiting infinite scrolling, and taking breaks

Identity

The ability to express oneself authentically and feel safe in online relationships – belonging to supportive communities, managing connections, and resisting pressure

Literacy

Critical understanding of digital ecosystems – recognising sponsored content, verifying information, understanding algorithms, and identifying AI-generated content

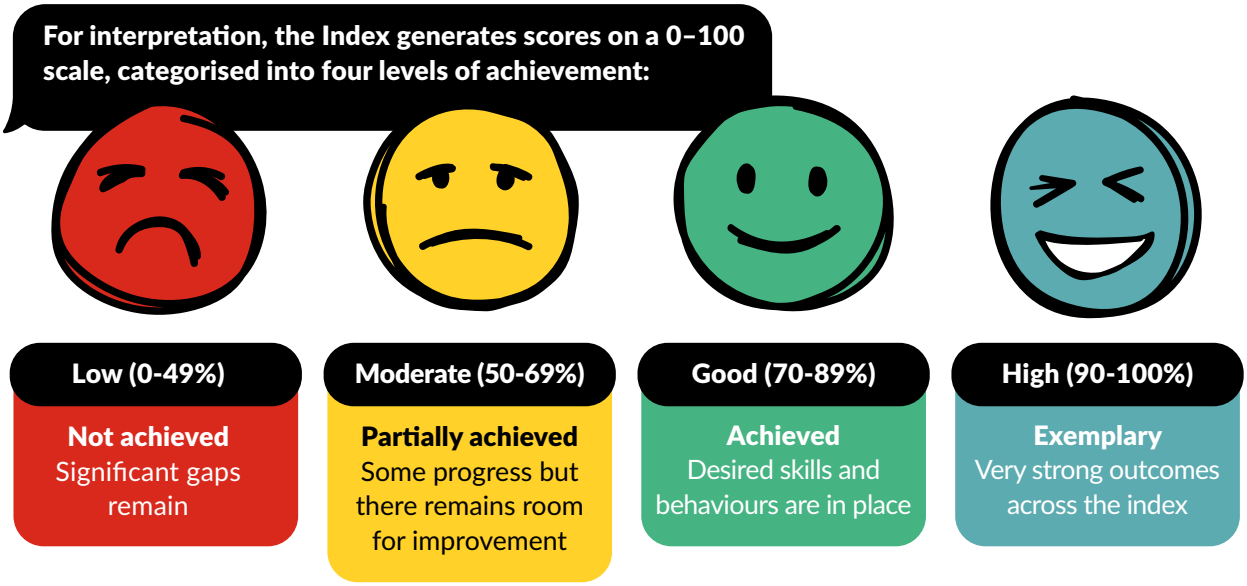


Empathy

Prosocial behaviours online – supporting others, knowing where to get help, and taking action to keep online spaces kind

As the findings will demonstrate, the Management domain emerges as the area where children and young people face the greatest challenges across countries surveyed.

Figure 2.9: SMILE framework score definition



2.5.2 Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index

About 73% of youth achieved 'good' or 'high' scores on the Index, meaning the large majority have the skills, knowledge and support for positive digital participation. Most scored in the 'good' range (63%) with a smaller group of 10% achieving 'high' scores.

However, nearly three in ten children and young people (28%) scored 'low' or 'moderate' , indicating that a substantial proportion could benefit from extra support to improve their digital wellbeing and resilience. Positively, very poor overall outcomes were rare with only 2% scoring in the 'low' category, suggesting that only one in 50 children and young people lack core competencies across all areas of their digital lives.

Table 2.4: Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index score

Category	Low (0-49%)	Moderate (50-69%)	Good (70-89%)	High (90-100%)
Total	2%	26%	63%	10%

2.5.3 Demographic differences

Age and gender differences in the overall Index were relatively modest. Older teens (16–18 years) were slightly more likely to achieve both 'good' scores (64% compared to 61% of 13–15-year-olds) and 'high' scores (11% vs, 8%). Conversely, 13–15-year-olds were more likely to achieve 'moderate' scores compared to older teens. Gender differences were minimal, with boys and girls performing almost identically across all categories.

More substantial disparities emerged across other demographic characteristics. Children and young people with disabilities or functional difficulties showed notably weaker digital wellbeing and resilience, with only 7% achieving 'high' scores compared to 16% of those without difficulties, and nearly a third (31%) falling into the 'moderate' category compared to just 16%. Overall, 68% of those with difficulties achieved 'good' or 'high' scores, compared to 82% of those without.

Those experiencing regular anxiety or depression similarly faced digital wellbeing and resilience gaps, with 30% scoring 'moderate' (compared to 22% of those rarely or never experiencing anxiety or depression) and only 7% achieving 'high' scores (versus 12%). Children and young people at risk of food insecurity were three times more likely to score 'low' (3% compared to 1% of their food-secure peers) and significantly less likely to achieve 'high' scores (6% vs 10%).

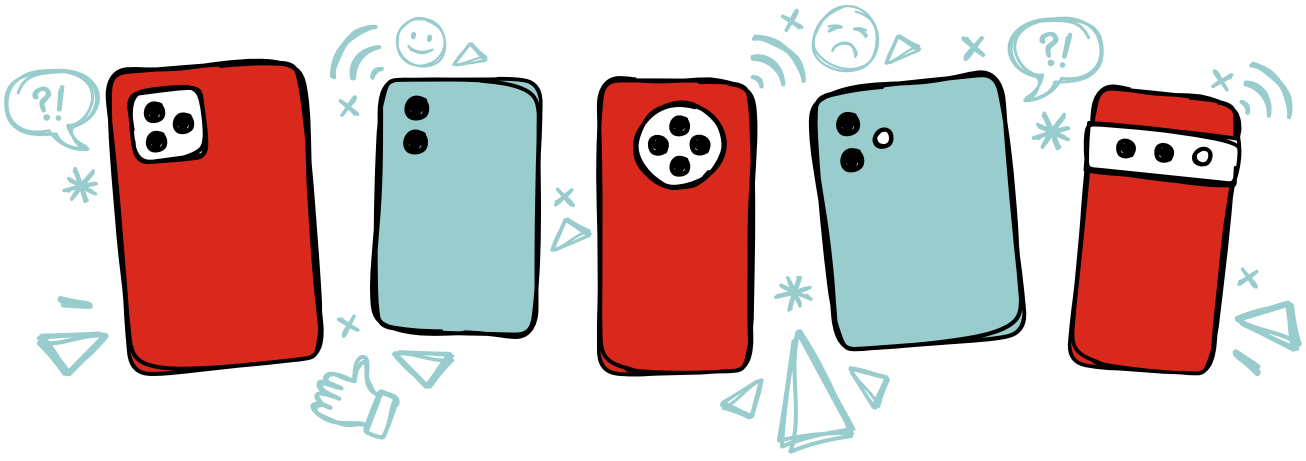
There were some differences around sexual orientation, with non-heterosexual young people less likely to achieve 'good' scores (57% compared to 63% of their heterosexual peers), though identical proportions reached 'high' scores (9% each). Minority ethnic status was associated with minimal differences in overall digital wellbeing and resilience index outcomes.

These patterns indicate that while most children and young people demonstrate positive digital wellbeing and resilience, significant disparities persist for certain groups. These gaps do not arise inherently from disability, sexual orientation, or mental health experiences themselves, but from discriminatory structures, inaccessible technologies, social stigma, and a lack of tailored support. If there is a view of the 'average' child or young person as the default assumption in programmes, products and policy then inequity is built in. Achieving equity requires addressing these systemic barriers rather than expecting individuals to adapt to systems not designed with them in mind – a priority as the evidence indicates these imbalances were a systemic pattern across domains.

2.5.4 Cross-country comparisons

Overall index scores varied across countries. Romania had the highest proportion of children and young people achieving 'Good/High' (82%), followed by Türkiye (78%), Albania (75%), and Portugal (75%). Greece and the UK both achieved 70%, while Germany reached 69%. The Netherlands had the lowest proportion achieving 'good' or 'high' scores (64%), followed by Spain (67%).

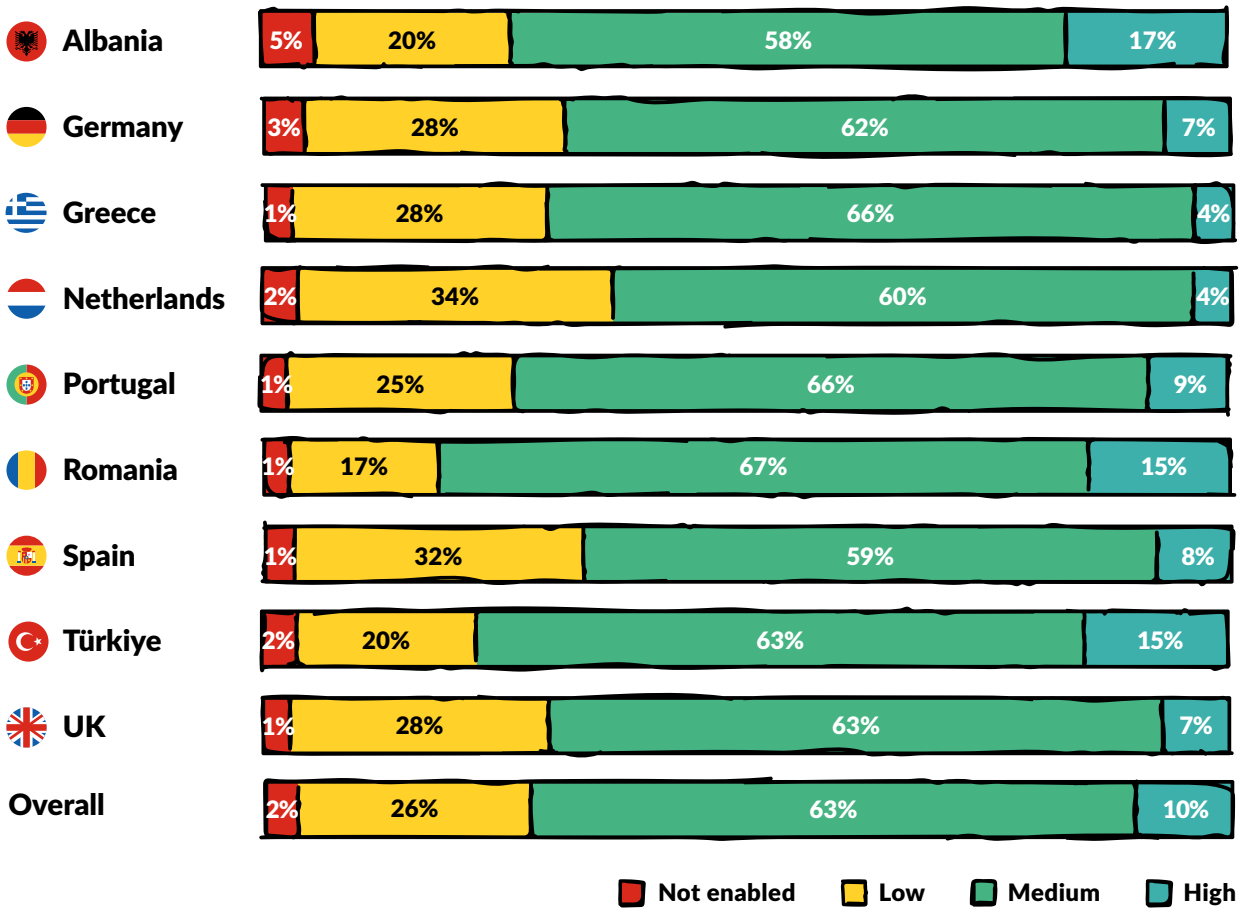
Albania stood out with the highest proportion achieving 'high' scores (17%), followed by Romania and Türkiye (both 15%). This was notably above the overall average of 10%. Portugal (9%), Spain (8%), Germany and the UK (both 7%) fell in the middle range, while Greece and the Netherlands had the lowest proportions achieving 'high' scores (4% each).



The Netherlands also had the highest proportion in the 'moderate' category (34%), followed by Spain (32%), suggesting more children and young people in these countries are experiencing partial rather than full digital wellbeing and resilience. In contrast, Romania had the lowest proportion in 'moderate' (17%), indicating clearer polarisation between those doing well and those struggling.

On a positive note, very few children and young people scored low in any country. Albania had the highest proportion at 5%, followed by Germany at 3%, Netherlands and Türkiye both had 2%, while the UK, Spain, and Romania had just 1%. Greece and Portugal had less than 1% in the 'low' category. This suggests that in all countries, outright poor digital wellbeing and resilience across all domains was uncommon and that most young people have at least moderate levels.

Figure 2.10: Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index country score



Implication: While 73% of young people score good/high on the overall Index, this can hide the reality that subjective wellbeing and self-management remain weak for many. This perceived capability-to-outcome gap suggests that being digitally skilled and connected does not automatically translate into feeling well online, so systems need to change and not just put the expectation and responsibility on children and young people.

2.6 Relationship between indicators and Index scores

While the Enablement and Digital Wellbeing indicators sit outside the core SMILE Index, analysing their relationship with the domain scores reveals important patterns about who is most likely to achieve positive digital outcomes.

2.6.1 Enablement and Index performance

Children and young people with higher levels of digital enablement consistently achieved significantly better scores across all SMILE domains. Those with 'high' enablement were far more likely to achieve 'good' or 'high' scores on the overall Index (81%) compared to those classified as 'not enabled' (48%). This pattern held across all domains, with the starkest differences in Identity (75% vs 44%) and Security (76% vs 40%). Even in Management, the weakest domain overall, those with high enablement outperformed those not enabled (38% vs 25% achieving 'good' or 'high'). These findings reinforce that digital access is not merely a prerequisite for participation but is significantly associated with better outcomes across all dimensions of digital wellbeing and resilience.

2.6.2 Wellbeing and Index performance

The relationship between the Digital Wellbeing indicator and index scores was even more pronounced. Children and young people who reported positive digital wellbeing ('good' or 'high' on the Wellbeing indicator) achieved dramatically better scores across all SMILE domains compared to those with low wellbeing. On the overall Index, 95% of those with 'high' wellbeing achieved 'good' or 'high' scores, compared to just 38% of those with 'low' wellbeing. This pattern was consistent across domains, with the largest gap in Management (79% vs 14%).

2.6.3 Interaction between indicators

The two indicators – Digital Wellbeing and Enablement – also showed a significant relationship with each other. Children and young people with positive digital wellbeing were significantly more likely to have high enablement (64% of those with 'high' wellbeing had 'high' enablement, compared to 33% of those with 'low' wellbeing). Conversely, a third (33%) of those with low wellbeing were classified as 'not enabled,' compared to just 3% of those with high wellbeing.

These patterns suggest that enablement and wellbeing function as mutually reinforcing conditions. Addressing gaps in digital access may help improve wellbeing outcomes, while supporting digital wellbeing may help children and young people make better use of the access they have. Neither can be treated in isolation.

2.7 Comparison across Index domains

Performance varied considerably across the five individual domains. Table 2.5 summarises the proportion of children and young people achieving 'good' or 'high' scores in each domain:

Table 2.5: Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index – SMILE domain scores

Domain	Low	Moderate	Good	High	Good + High
Security	6%	27%	47%	20%	67%
Management	17%	49%	31%	2%	33%
Identity	5%	29%	51%	15%	66%
Literacy	11%	34%	42%	13%	55%
Empathy	7%	32%	46%	15%	61%
The Index	2%	26%	63%	10%	73%

The Security domain, and the Identity domain were strongest, with 67% and 66% of children and young people achieving good/high in these areas. The Security domain not only had the highest overall levels, it also had the highest proportion of children and young people achieving 'high' scores (20%). This suggests that two-thirds of children and young people have well-developed online safety knowledge and self-reported security habits (and exemplary levels for one in five) and feel confident in the ability to be themselves online.

Management was the biggest area of concern. Very few children and young people excelled, with only 2% achieving 'high' and a third (33%) scoring good/high, meaning that self-regulation and balance are failing to reach a positive level for most. Two-thirds (67%) of children and young people lacked effective strategies to balance online/offline life and three-quarters (75%) were not experiencing consistently positive outcomes. Literacy also flagged attention, with just over half (55%) of children and young people achieving good/high scores. This suggests that they face challenges critically appraising digital environments and content, hampering their ability to benefit fully from these spaces and opportunities.

Implication: The domain comparison makes the story unambiguous in that Security and Identity are relatively strong, but Management is the weakest pillar with only around a third reaching good/high and overall wellbeing outcomes far behind. This points to a structural challenge where the ecosystem supports wider connection and safety knowledge more than it supports healthy disengagement and balance.

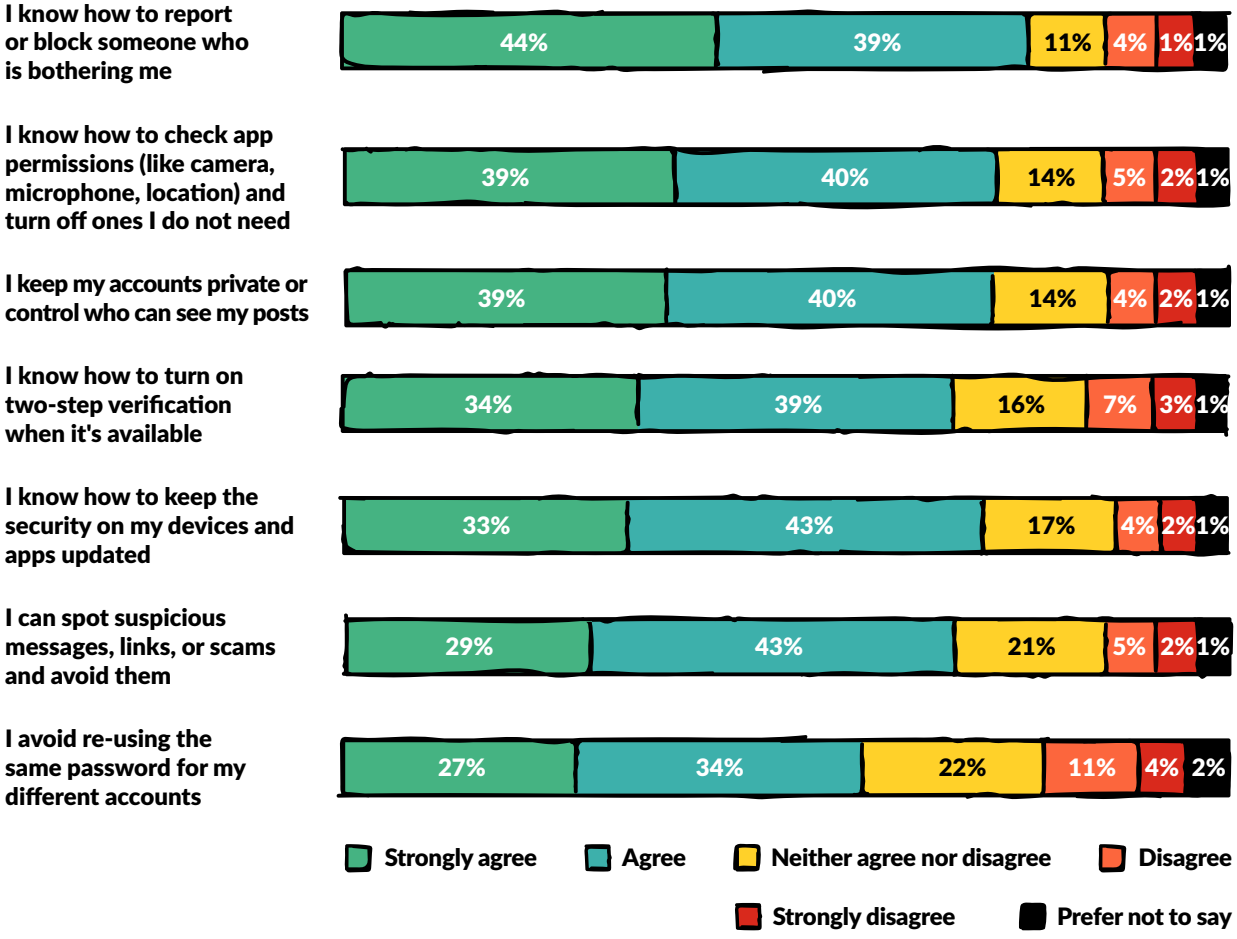
2.8 Security domain

The Security domain measures children and young people's knowledge and (self-reported) behaviours related to online safety, including awareness of privacy settings, ability to spot scams and suspicious content, password management, reporting and blocking harmful users, and keeping devices secure.

2.8.1 Specific components

The Security domain was measured through seven statements about online safety knowledge and behaviours. Figure 2.11 shows the responses to each statement.

Figure 2.11: Security domain individual item scores



Children and young people had strongest confidence in their reactive safety behaviours; 83% agreed or strongly agreed that they know how to report or block someone bothering them, and 79% keep their accounts private or control who sees their posts. Knowledge of app permissions (79%) and keeping device security updated (76%) were also relatively strong.

However, some foundational security practices were less assured. Only 61% of children and young people reported avoiding password reuse across accounts – the lowest rate across these items. This is notable as

password reuse is a common vulnerability. Additionally, while 71% felt confident spotting suspicious messages or scams, three in ten were less able to identify these threats.

Children and young people are generally confident in managing their privacy settings and knowing where to seek help but their proactive security habits (particularly passwords) require attention.

2.8.2 Overall findings

Overall, the Security domain was strong. Two-thirds of children and young people (66%) achieved 'good' or 'high' scores, showing that most have the knowledge and habits to protect themselves online. Encouragingly, one in five (20%) achieved 'high' scores, the largest proportion across all index domains, and only 6% scored in the 'low' category, so very few lack basic online safety awareness. As these behaviours are self-reported, there may be a 'say-do' gap between how consistently children and young people think they are doing the safety behaviour and how consistently they do it. This does not detract from their online safety knowledge.

Table 2.6: Security domain score

Category	Low (0-49%)	Moderate (50-69%)	Good (70-89%)	High (90-100%)
Total	**6%**	**27%**	**47%**	**20%**

2.8.3 Demographic differences

Older teens (16–18) reported having notably stronger security skills, with 70% achieving 'good' or 'high' scores compared to 63% of 13–15-year-olds. Older respondents were also significantly more likely to achieve 'high' scores (23% compared to 16%) and less likely to fall into the 'low' category (5% vs 8%). Gender differences were minimal, with boys and girls performing nearly identically across all categories.

Table 2.7: Security domain score by age

Category	Low	Moderate	Good	High
13–15 years	**7%**	**30%**	**46%**	**16%**
16–18 years	**5%**	**25%**	**48%**	**23%**

More substantial differences emerged across other demographic characteristics. Children and young people at risk of food insecurity were significantly more likely to score in the 'low' category (10% compared to 6% of their food-secure peers) and less likely to achieve 'high' scores (13% vs 21%). Children and young people with disabilities/functional difficulties showed a similar pattern, with notably fewer achieving 'high' scores (15% compared to 29% of those without difficulties) and more in the 'moderate' range (31% vs 19%). Those experiencing anxiety or depression monthly were also less likely to achieve 'high' scores (16% vs 23%) and more likely to score 'low' (8% vs 5%).

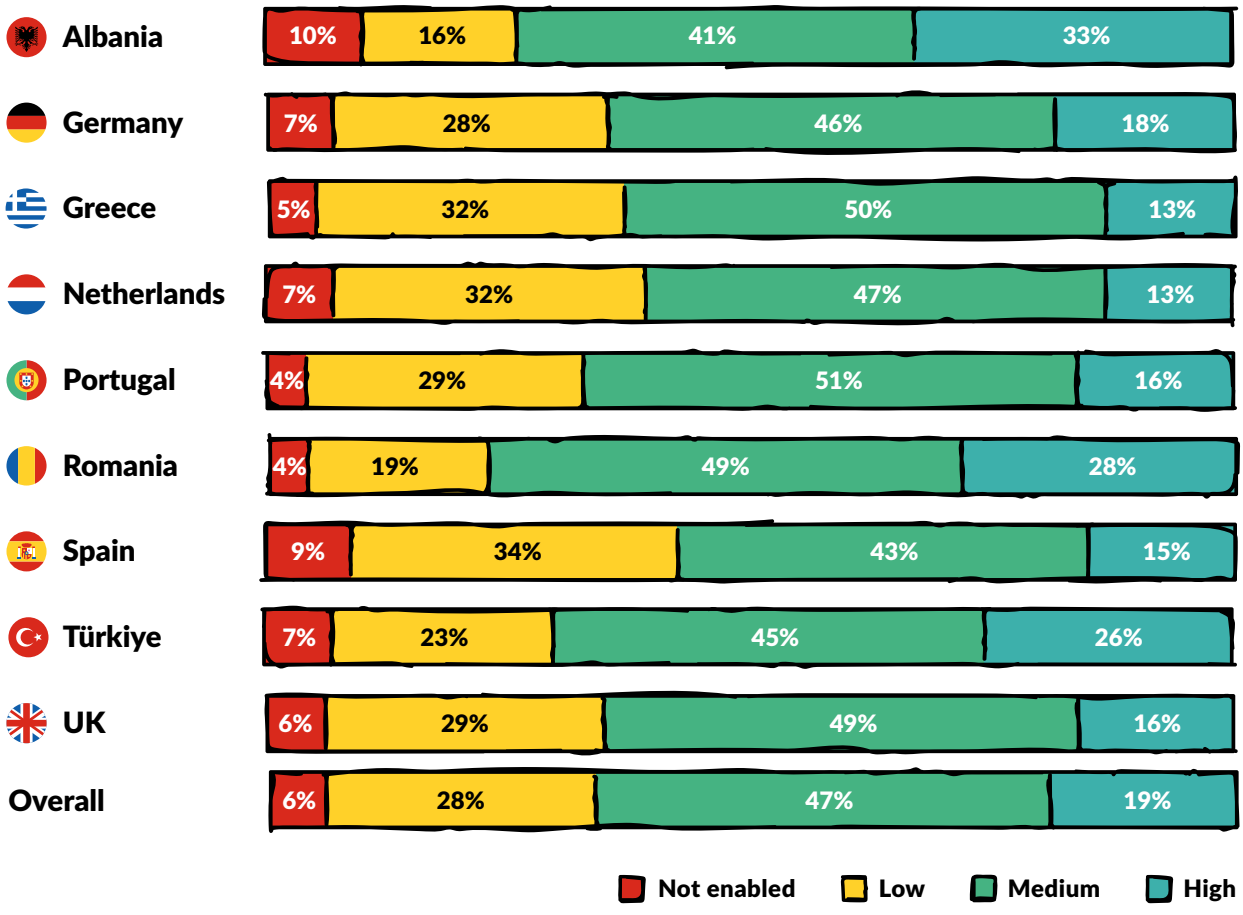
Children and young people identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual were more likely to fall into the 'low' category (10% compared to 6% of their heterosexual peers), although the proportions achieving 'high' scores were similar. These patterns suggest that while online safety knowledge is generally strong, certain groups may benefit from additional targeted support. Knowing online safety is not the same thing as being protected and depends very much on confidence, the presence of reliable support and the knowledge and ability to act. Vulnerable groups may need safer defaults and more usable systems rather than additional awareness messaging.

2.8.4 Cross-country comparisons

Security domain scores varied considerably across countries. Romania led on online safety with 77% of its teenagers scoring good/high. Türkiye also performed well with 71%, and Portugal (67%) and Greece (61%) were middle-tiered, with Spain having the lowest rate at 57%. Albania and Romania had the highest proportion of children and young people achieving 'high' scores (33% and 28%), followed by Türkiye (26%), whereas Greece and the Netherlands had 13%.

Very few children and young people in Romania and Portugal had poor security skills (3% and 4% respectively). Spain and Germany have comparatively more young people struggling with online safety basics (between 7-9%) However, even in those countries, over 90% of children and young people have at least a moderate level of security knowledge.

Figure 2.12: Security domain country scores



Implication: Security and safety is a relative strength with two-thirds reach Good/High indicating that many young people do understand the core safety behaviours. The remaining gaps such as password reuse are best dealt with through safer defaults and usable protections, not awareness messaging on its own.

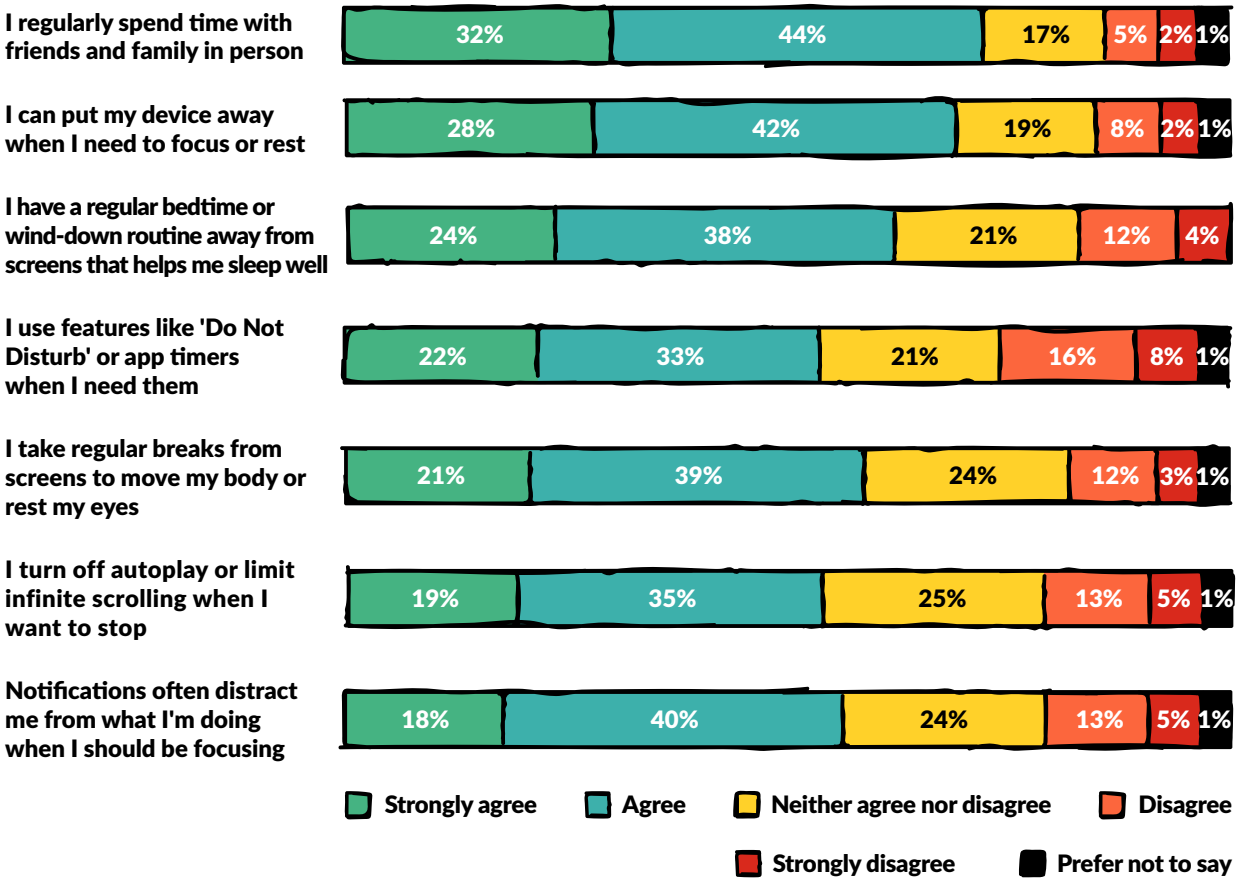
2.9 Management domain

The Management domain measures children and young people's ability to self-regulate their digital lives, including putting devices away when needed, managing notifications and distractions, maintaining screen-free routines, using features like 'Do Not Disturb' or app timers, limiting scrolling time, spending time with friends and family in person, and taking regular breaks from screens.

2.9.1 Specific components

The Management domain was measured through seven statements about self-regulation and balancing online and offline life. Figure 2.13 shows the responses to each statement.

Figure 2.13: Management domain individual item scores[4]



Children and young people showed strongest agreement on maintaining offline connections; 76% agreed or strongly agreed that they regularly spend time with friends and family in person. A similar proportion (70%) felt able to put their device away when needed to focus or rest.

However, the data reveals widespread challenges with self-regulation tools and habits. Only 54% reported using features like 'Do Not Disturb' or app timers, and just 54% said they turn off autoplay or limit infinite scrolling when they want to stop; nearly a quarter (24%) actively disagreed with this statement. Screen-free

[4]**Technical note:** One statement was reverse-coded for scoring purposes ('Notifications often distract me from what I'm doing when I should be focusing') so disagreement indicates stronger self-management. For this statement, only 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed, meaning the majority (58%) acknowledged that notifications often distract them.

bedtime routines were also a challenge, with only 62% reporting a regular wind-down routine away from screens. Taking regular breaks from screens was modest at 60%.

These patterns suggest that while children and young people value and maintain offline relationships, current tools and platform designs are not effectively supporting them to regulate their screen time. Low use of built-in device features (like app timers and autoplay controls) points to a need for improved digital literacy education and a responsibility on platforms and developers to make these features more accessible, intuitive, and defaulted for younger users.

2.9.2 Overall findings

Management was a clear area of weakness across the Index. Only a third of children and young people (34%) achieved 'good' or 'high' scores, indicating they have developed effective strategies for managing their time online. The majority are in the 'moderate' category (49%), and 17% scored 'low'. This means that two-thirds of children and young people are routinely being challenged to regulate their screen time, and the systems around them do not help.

Table 2.8: Management domain score

Category	 Low (0-49%)	 Moderate (50-69%)	 Good (70-89%)	 High (90-100%)
Total	**17%**	**49%**	**31%**	**3%**

2.9.3 Demographic differences

Management challenges were consistent across age and gender. Younger (13–15 years) and older (16–18 years) respondents had near-identical proportions across all categories, with both groups having around 17% in the 'low' category and approximately 31% achieving 'good' scores. Gender differences were similarly minimal, with males and females performing nearly identically.

However, more substantial differences emerged across other demographic characteristics. Children and young people with disabilities or functional difficulties showed notably weaker self-regulation skills, with only 27% achieving 'good' or 'high' scores compared to 47% of those without difficulties. Those with difficulties were significantly more likely to fall into the 'low' category (21% compared to just 8%) and far less likely to achieve 'high' scores (1% vs 5%).

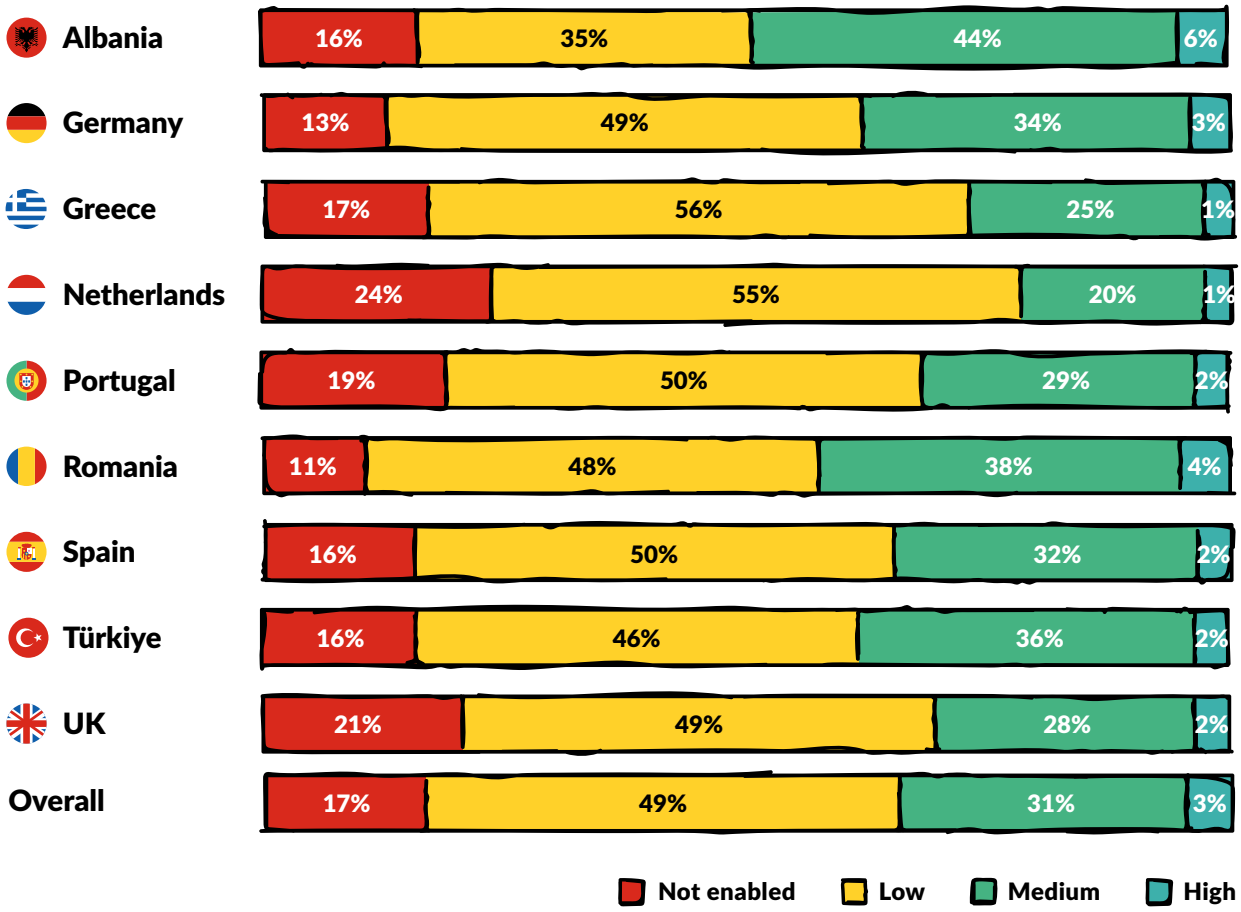
Children and young people experiencing regular anxiety or depression, compared to those who aren't, also struggled more with management, with 22% scoring 'low' (vs 12%) and only 28% reaching 'good' or 'high' (vs 40%). Those at risk of food insecurity were similarly more likely to score 'low' (21% compared to 16% of those who are food-secure) and less likely to achieve 'good' or 'high' scores (27% vs 35%).

These patterns suggest that the challenges of digital self-regulation are particularly acute for children and young people already facing other difficulties in their lives, and targeted support for these groups may be especially valuable. As previously discussed, this is the clearest case for moving responsibility away from children and young people's own decision making and onto systems. If vulnerable groups are struggling the most to switch off then design choices that are default and create friction become an equity challenge and not just a nice-to-have for wellbeing.

2.9.4 Cross-country comparisons

Management scores varied considerably across countries. Albania had the most hopeful returns, with children and young people achieving 'good' or 'high' scores (49%), followed by Romania (42%), Türkiye (38%) and Germany (37%). TheNetherlands fared the worst with just 21% of Dutch teens reaching good/high and it also had the most teens struggling with nearly 1 in 4 (24%) scoring low and when you compare this with Romania, there were approximately 11% scoring low. These figures suggest that in certain countries like the Netherlands and Greece, young people find it especially hard to limit screen time and avoid distractions in the digital places they inhabit, whereas peers in places like Albania and Romania were doing relatively better.

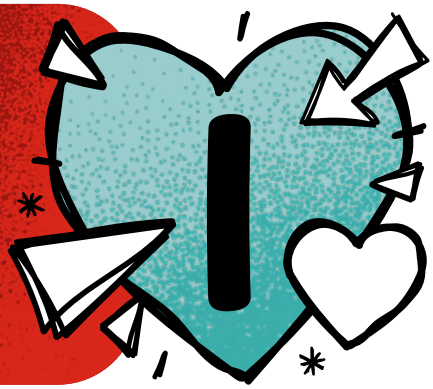
Figure 2.14: Management domain country score



Implication: Management is the clearest weak spot with only 34% reach good/high and most young people report being distracted by notifications while just over half use tools like 'Do Not Disturb' or app timers. This supports a wellbeing-by-design response as switching off is being made difficult by the environment not just by individual decisions, also highlighting that we need to do more to take the responsibility off children and young people themselves.

2.10 Identity domain

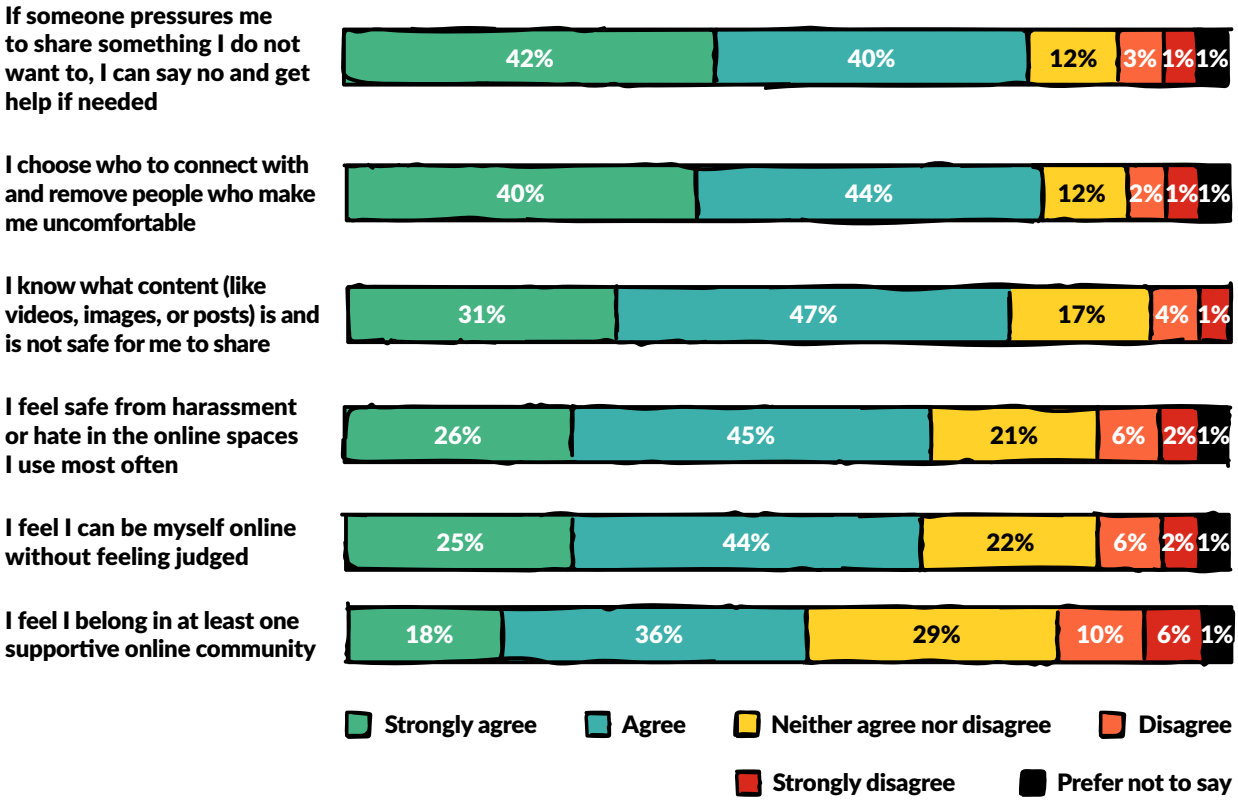
The Identity domain measures children and young people's ability to express themselves authentically online, manage their digital relationships, and feel safe in online spaces. This includes feeling free from judgement, choosing who to connect with, belonging to supportive online communities, understanding what content is safe to share, resisting pressure to share unwanted content, and feeling safe from harassment or hate.



2.10.1 Specific components

The Identity domain was measured through six statements about authentic self-expression and feeling safe in online relationships. Figure 2.15 shows the responses to each statement.

Figure 2.15: Identity domain individual item scores



Children and young people showed the strongest confidence in managing their connections and resisting pressure: 84% agreed or strongly agreed that they choose who to connect with and remove people who make them uncomfortable, and 82% said they felt able to say no and get help if someone pressures them to share something they do not want to. Knowledge of safe content-sharing was also reportedly strong, with 78% confident that they know what content is and is not safe to share.

However, not all children and young people feel they have found supportive online spaces. Only half (54%) agreed or strongly agreed that feel they belong in at least one supportive online community – the lowest of any statement in this domain – and one in six (16%) actively disagreed. While most (71%) feel safe from

harassment or hate in frequently-used online spaces, three in ten do not. Similarly, although 69% reported that they can be themselves online without feeling judged, this again meant three in ten did not feel able.

While children and young people are generally equipped with the skills to manage connections and resist pressure, online environments do not consistently offer conditions for belonging and safety. Where the data shows gaps in feeling safe from harassment and finding supportive communities, platforms and communities have a responsibility to create inclusive, protective spaces — children and young people should not have to navigate hostile environments.

2.10.2 Overall findings

Two-thirds of children and young people (66%) achieved 'good' or 'high' scores on the Identity domain, demonstrating that most young people can express themselves authentically online and manage their online relationships effectively. Over half (51%) scored in the 'good' category, while 15% achieved 'high' scores. However, about one-third (5% low and 29% moderate) are falling behind and could benefit from additional support in building healthy online relationships.

Table 2.9: Identity domain score

Category	 Low (0-49%)	 Moderate (50-69%)	 Good (70-89%)	 High (90-100%)
Total	**5%**	**29%**	**51%**	**15%**

2.10.3 Demographic differences

Outcomes on the Identity domain were consistent across age and gender. Younger teens (13–15 years) and older teens (16–18 years) showed nearly identical scores across all categories, and gender differences were similarly minimal.

More notable differences emerged across other demographic characteristics. Children and young people with disabilities or functional difficulties were significantly less likely to achieve 'high' scores (12% compared to 22% of those without difficulties) and more likely to fall into the 'moderate' category (33% vs 21%). Those experiencing regular anxiety or depression, compared to those who aren't, showed a similar pattern, with fewer achieving 'high' scores (12% vs 19%) and more in the 'moderate' range (33% vs 26%). Children and young people at risk of food insecurity were more than twice as likely to score 'low' (10% compared to 4% of their food-secure peers) and less likely to achieve 'high' scores (10% vs 16%). Children and young people identifying as minority ethnic were also slightly more likely to fall into the 'low' category (6% compared to 4% of majority ethnicities).

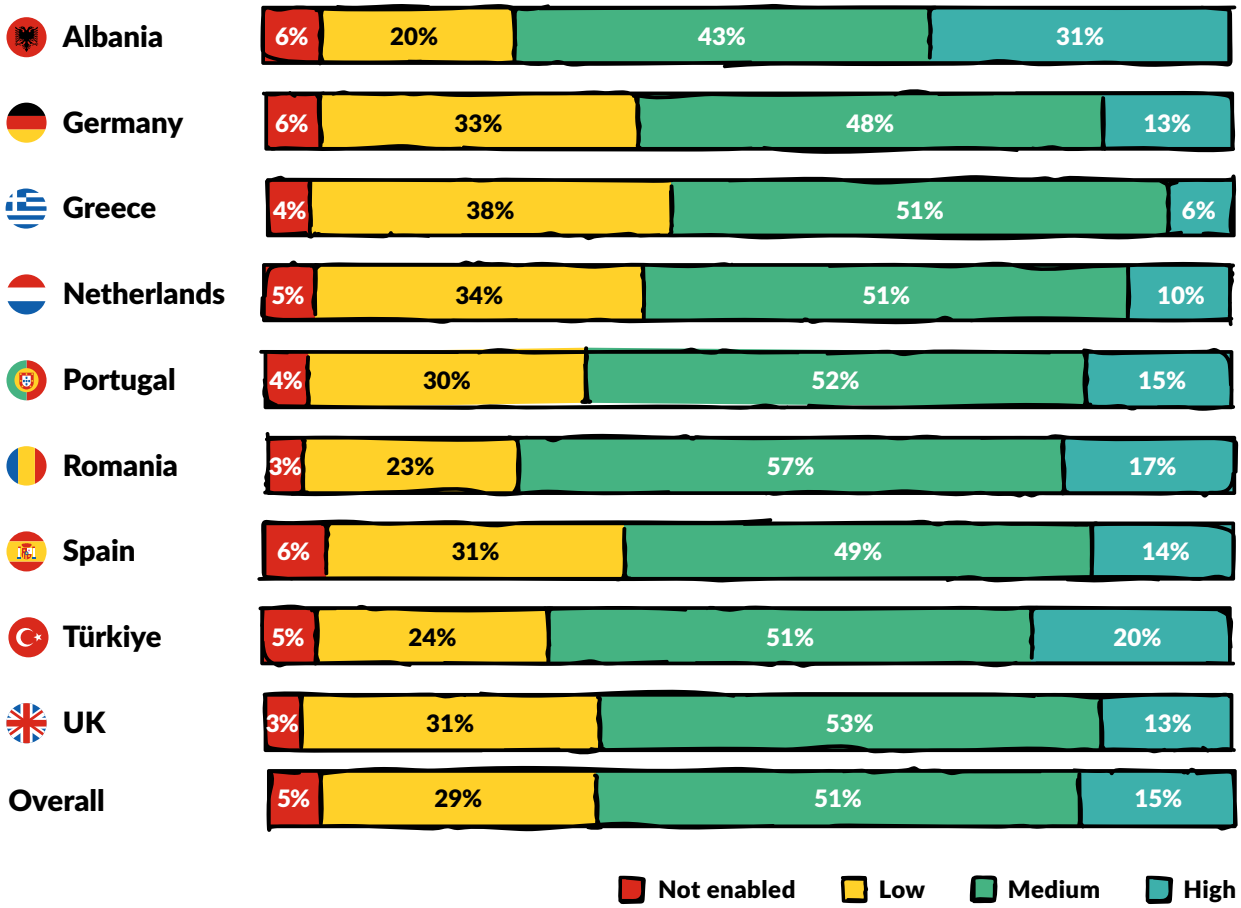
These findings suggest that while most children and young people feel able to express themselves authentically online, structural barriers create unequal conditions for certain groups. For many of these young people, digital communities and spaces serve as vital links to identity formation and belonging — yet the lower scores indicate they may be navigating these spaces with fewer protections, less accessible design, and environments not built to support their needs. These disparities reflect exclusionary structures and inaccessible platforms rather than deficits within the young people themselves. This reinforces the importance of safety-by-design and inclusion-by-design, ensuring digital spaces are accessible and supportive for all users from the outset.

2.10.4 Cross-country comparisons

Romania and Albania led this domain with about 74% each achieving good or high, far above the lowest rate of 57% in Greece, followed by Germany (61%) and the Netherlands (61%).

Notably, nearly one in three Albanian youth scored in the top tier (31% scored High) which was five times that of Greece (6%). Conversely, Germany, Spain and even Albania had the highest proportion of children and young people scoring in the 'low' category (6% each).

Figure 2.16: Identity domain country scores



Implication: Identity as a domain is generally strong as most can choose who they connect with and resist pressure. This reinforces that online life can support belonging and connection. However, only half feel they belong in a supportive online community and around three in ten do not feel safe from harassment or hate, which demonstrates that connection and identity expression still depend heavily on platform protections and culture.

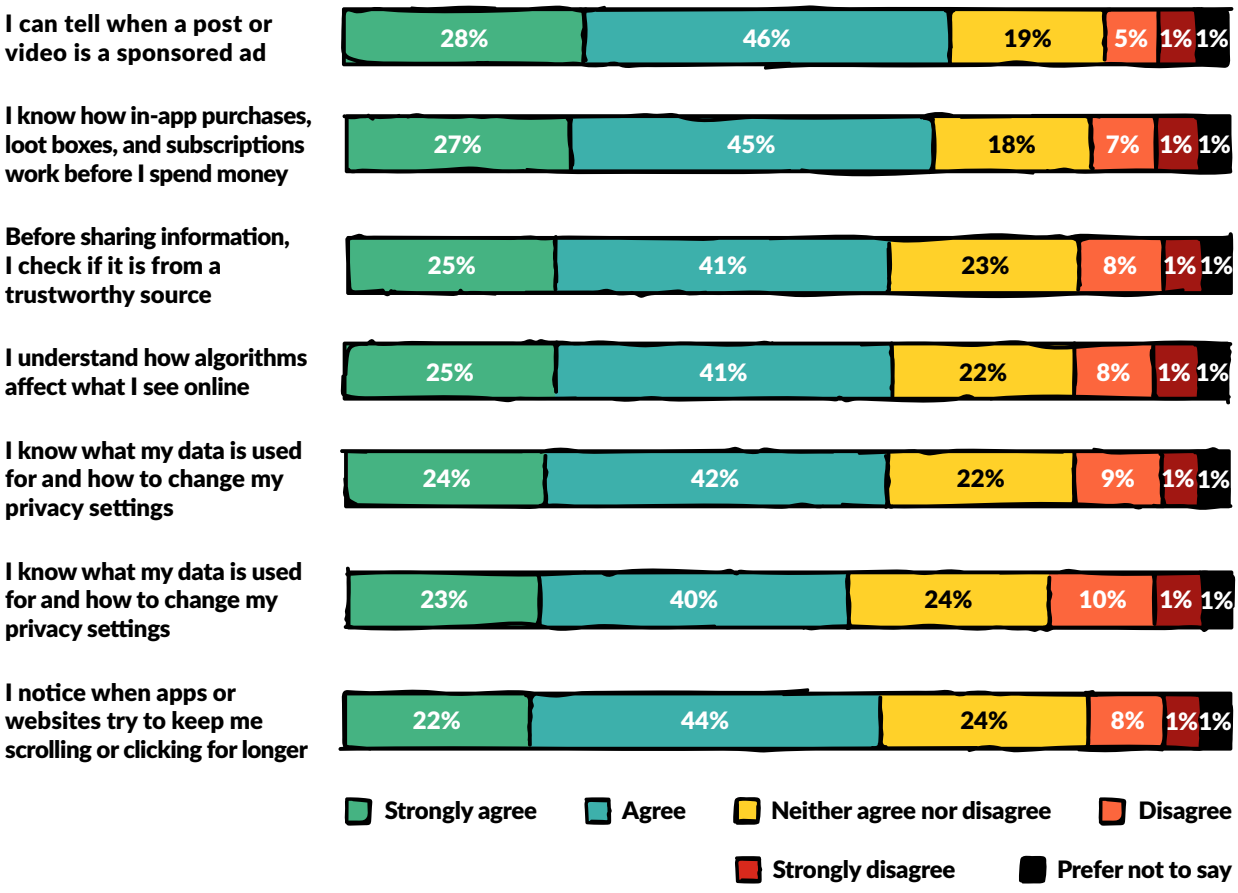
2.11 Literacy domain

The Literacy domain measures children and young people's critical understanding of the digital environment, including their ability to recognise sponsored content and advertisements, verify information before sharing, notice when platforms use persuasive design to extend engagement, understand how their data is used, recognise how algorithms shape their online experience, identify edited or AI-generated content, and understand how in-app purchases and subscriptions work.

2.11.1 Specific components

The Literacy domain was measured through seven statements about critical understanding of digital ecosystems. Figure 2.17 shows the responses to each statement.

Figure 2.17: Literacy domain individual item scores



Children and young people showed strongest agreement on recognising commercial content and understanding spending mechanisms; 74% agreed or strongly agreed that they can tell when a post or video is a sponsored ad, and 72% said they understand how in-app purchases, loot boxes, and subscriptions work before spending money.

However, responses were more modest across other critical literacy skills, with most statements clustering in the 63–66% agreement range. Only 66% reported checking if information is from a trustworthy source before sharing, and 66% said they notice when apps or websites try to keep them scrolling or clicking for longer. Understanding of how algorithms affect what they see online was reported by 66%, while 66% felt confident they know what their data is used for and how to change privacy settings.

The lowest agreement was for identifying AI-generated or edited content – only 63% agreed or strongly agreed that they can spot it most of the time, with 13% actively disagreeing. Given the rapid proliferation of AI-generated content, this represents a significant gap in digital literacy.

These findings highlight that while children and young people demonstrate reasonable awareness of advertising and commercial practices, more complex literacy skills – particularly around misinformation, algorithmic curation, and AI-generated content – are less well developed. This points to the need for sustained investment in critical digital literacy education that keeps pace with evolving technologies, rather than expecting young people to independently develop these skills without adequate support.

2.11.2 Overall findings

Just over half of children and young people (55%) demonstrated solid digital literacy with good or high scores within this domain. Around 42% earned a 'good' score and only 13% achieved 'high' scores. However, nearly half of young people (46% in total) scored in 'low' or moderate on the Literacy domain, indicating that a large cohort could benefit from strengthened media literacy education.

Table 2.10: Literacy domain score

Category	Low (0-49%)	Moderate (50-69%)	Good (70-89%)	High (90-100%)
Total	**11%**	**35%**	**42%**	**13%**

2.11.3 Demographic differences

Literacy slightly improved with age. Older teens (16–18 years) were significantly more likely to achieve 'good' or 'high' scores (57% compared to 51% of younger teens) and less likely to fall into the 'low' category (9% vs 13%). This suggests that critical digital skills develop as children and young people gain more experience navigating online environments. Gender differences were minimal, with males and females performing almost identically across all categories.

Table 2.11: Literacy domain score by age

Category	Low	Moderate	Good	High
13–15 years	13%	36%	40%	11%
16–18 years	9%	34%	44%	13%

Children and young people with disabilities or functional difficulties were significantly less likely to achieve 'high' scores (10% compared to 19% of those without difficulties) and more likely to fall into the 'low' or 'moderate' categories (50% combined, compared to 35%). Those experiencing regular anxiety or depression, compared to those who aren't, were also more likely to score 'low' (13% vs 9%) and less likely to achieve 'high' scores (11% vs 15%). Children and young people at risk of food insecurity showed a similar pattern, with fewer achieving 'high' scores (9% compared to 14% of their food-secure peers).

These findings highlight that critical digital literacy skills, such as recognising misinformation, understanding algorithmic curation, and identifying AI-generated content, are not equally accessible to all young people. The disparities observed do not reflect individual deficits but rather inequalities in how educational materials, tools, and learning environments are designed. When literacy education is inaccessible or fails to account for diverse needs, protection becomes unequal. Closing these gaps requires inclusive learning design that works for children and young people with different needs and circumstances from the outset.

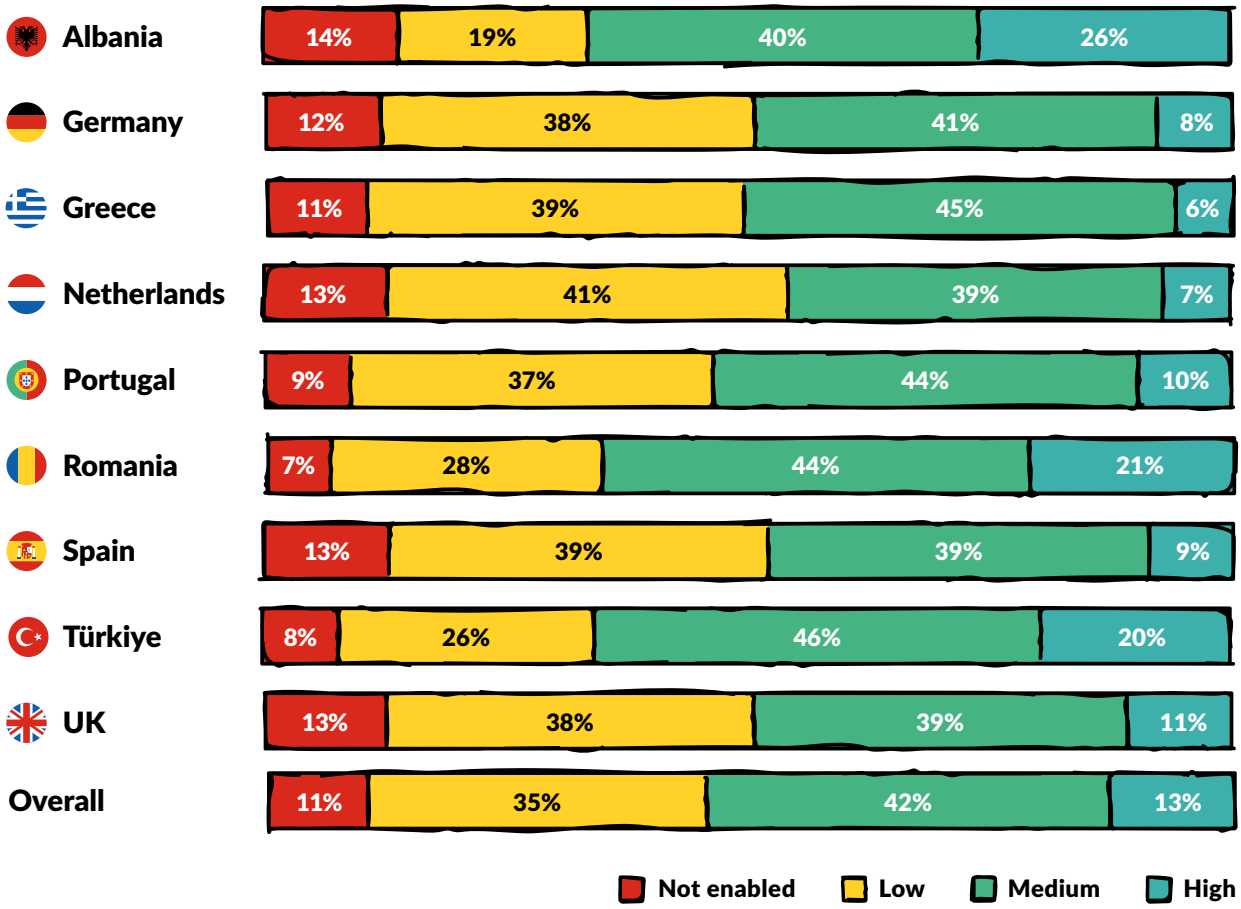
2.11.4 Cross-country comparisons

Country gaps in Literacy were considerable. In Albania and Türkiye, roughly two-thirds of children and young people scored 'good' or 'high' scores (66% each) whereas in the Netherlands fewer than half did (46%), followed by Spain (48%) and Germany (49%).

Albania also had the highest proportion of children and young people demonstrating advanced digital skills, with 26% of its young people achieving a 'high' Literacy score. This is in contrast to Greece who had the lowest proportion (6%).

Interestingly, Albania high scores/results are uneven as they also had the highest proportion of children and young people scoring in the 'low' category (14%), followed by Spain, the UK and the Netherlands (13% each).

Figure 2.18: Literacy domain country scores



Implication: Literacy is quite uneven across responses with only 55% reaching Good/High, and gaps are most visible in deeper critical skills such as verifying information and recognising AI content that has been edited. As platforms become more AI-based and persuasive, literacy needs to be treated as a protective capability for all, including children and young people, and this means keeping literacy programmes and content current with technological changes as well as practical and accessible to all learners.

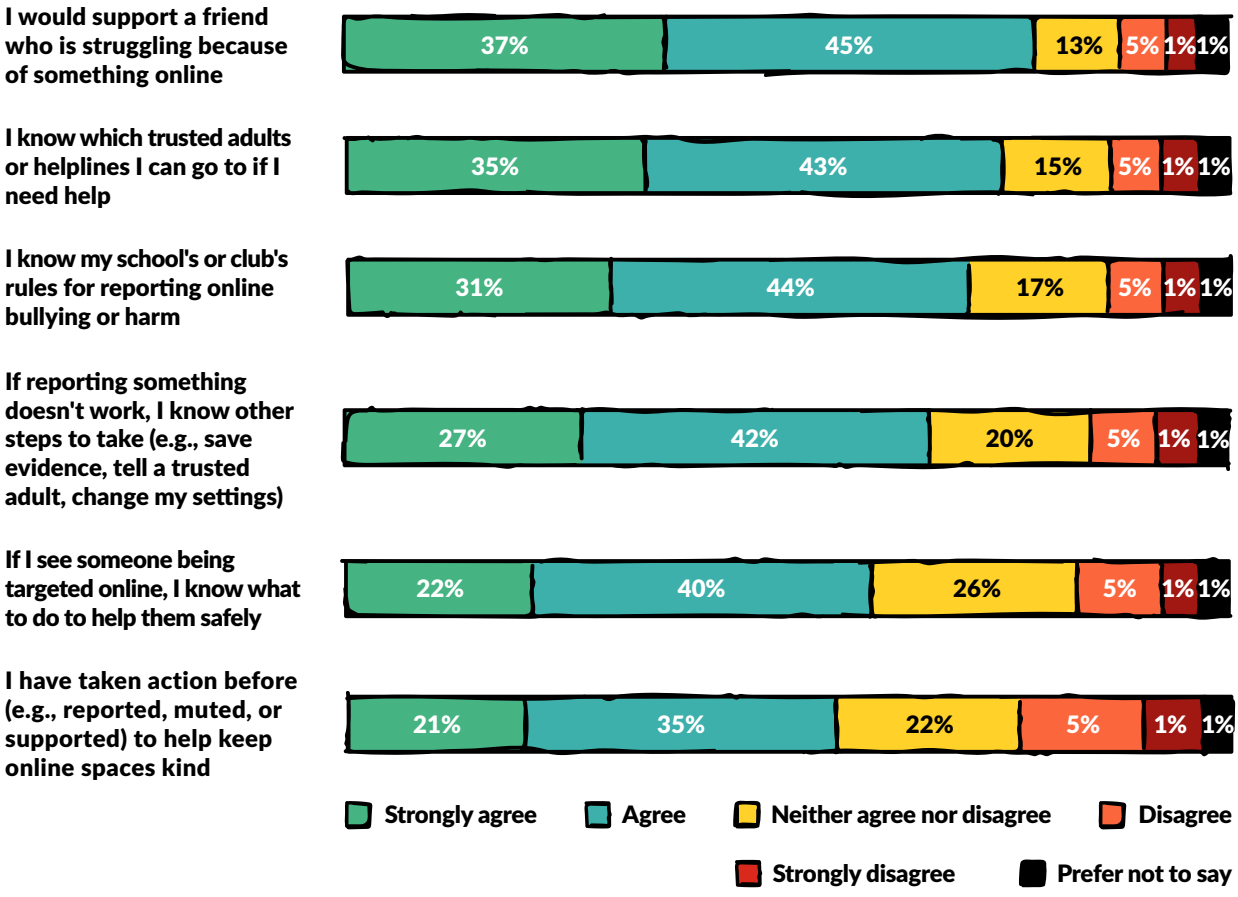
2.12 Empathy domain

The Empathy domain measures children and young people's prosocial and protective behaviours online, including their ability to support others who are targeted or struggling, knowledge of trusted adults and helplines, awareness of reporting mechanisms, and willingness to take action to keep online spaces kind.

2.12.1 Specific components

The Empathy domain was measured through six statements about prosocial and protective behaviours online and knowing how to seek help. Figure 2.19 shows the responses to each statement.

Figure 2.19: Empathy domain individual item scores



Children and young people showed strongest agreement on supporting others and knowing where to seek help – 82% agreed or strongly agreed that they would support a friend struggling because of something online, and 78% know which trusted adults or helplines they can go to if needed. Knowledge of school or club reporting procedures was also relatively strong at 75%.

However, confidence was lower when it came to taking action. Only 62% agreed or strongly agreed that if they see someone being targeted online, they know what to do to help them safely, suggesting that while the willingness to help is high, the knowledge of how to intervene safely is less developed. Similarly, only

56% reported having taken action before (such as reporting, muting, or supporting) to help keep online spaces kind, the lowest agreement of any statement in this domain with 21% actively disagreeing.

Awareness of escalation steps when initial reporting does not work was moderate at 69%, meaning nearly a third of children and young people may not know what to do if their first attempt to address harm is unsuccessful.

These findings suggest that while children and young people know where to seek support, the translation from intention to action remains a gap. Strengthening this domain requires not only supporting young people to identify where to get help but also equipping them with confidence and practical strategies for how to intervene safely and what to do when initial steps fail. This points to a need for more actionable, scenario-based education rather than awareness alone.

2.12.2 Overall findings

Six in ten children and young people (60%) scored 'good' or 'high' on the Empathy domain, suggesting a substantial majority have developed the knowledge and disposition to support others online and respond to online harm. Just under half (45%) scored in the 'good' category, while 15% achieved 'high' scores. However, roughly two in five (39%) rated only 'moderate' or 'low' on the Empathy domain online and they may benefit from further support in developing prosocial digital behaviours.

Table 2.12: Empathy domain score

Category	Low (0-49%)	Moderate (50-69%)	Good (70-89%)	High (90-100%)
Total	**7%**	**32%**	**45%**	**15%**

2.12.3 Demographic differences

Age and gender differences in the Empathy domain were modest. Younger teens (13–15 years) were slightly more likely to achieve 'good' scores (47% compared to 44% of older teens), while older teens were marginally more likely to reach 'high' scores (16% vs 14%). Gender differences were minimal across all categories.

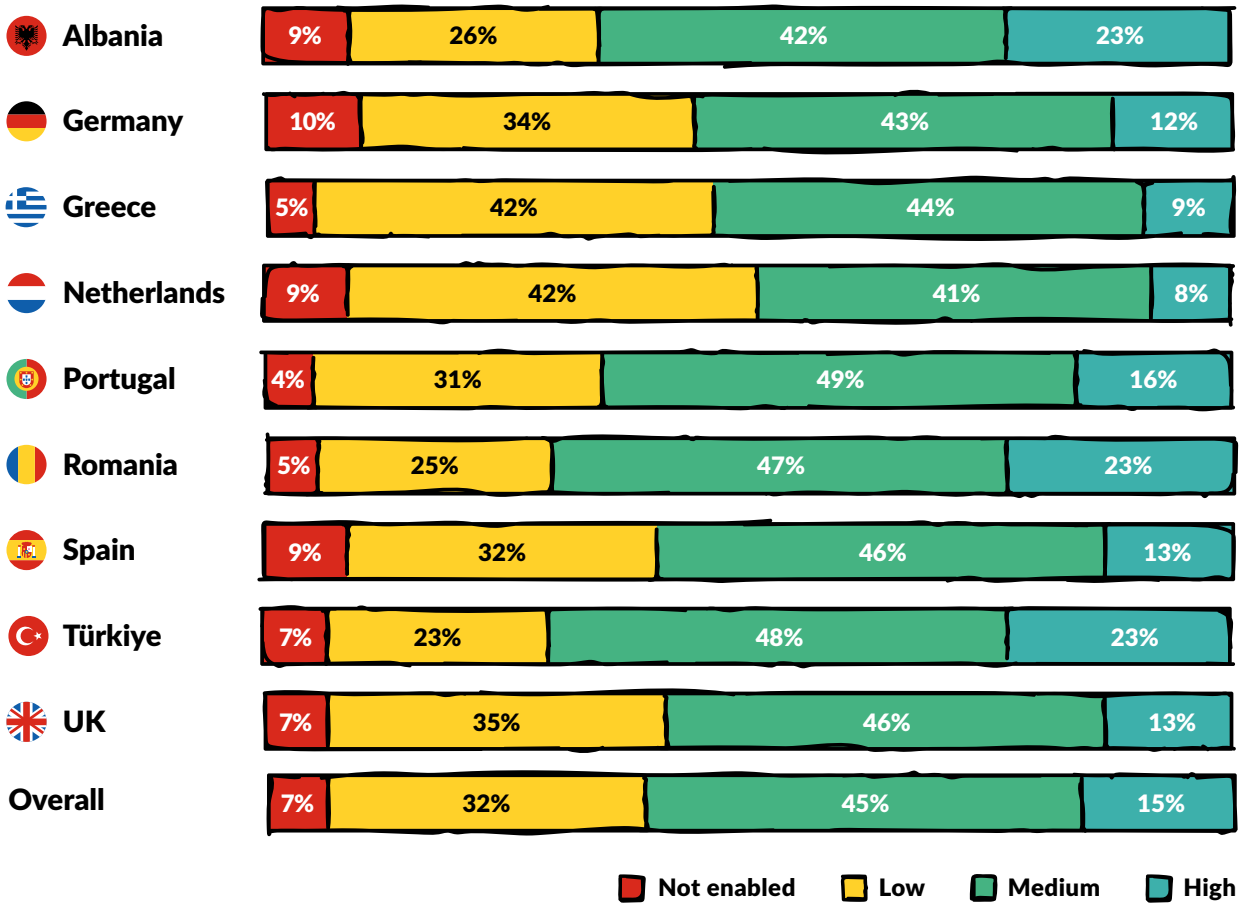
More notable differences emerged across other demographic characteristics. Children and young people with disabilities or functional difficulties were significantly less likely to achieve 'high' scores (13% compared to 20% of those without difficulties) and more likely to fall into the 'low' or 'moderate' categories (42% combined, compared to 33%). Children and young people at risk of food insecurity were nearly twice as likely to score 'low' (11% compared to 6% of those who are food-secure) and less likely to achieve 'high' scores (10% vs 16%). Those experiencing regular anxiety or depression, compared to those who aren't, showed a similar though less pronounced pattern, with slightly more in the 'low' category (8% vs 6%) and fewer reaching 'high' scores (14% vs 17%). This suggests that supportive online behaviour may be more difficult to sustain when vulnerable children and young people are dealing with stress and exclusion and where the is a lack of consistent support. Building safer online environments is part of enabling empathy to develop and grow.

2.12.4 Cross-country comparisons

Empathy domain scores differed markedly across countries. In Türkiye and Romania about 70% of youth reached 'good' or 'high' scores compared to the Netherlands, who had less than half (49%) which was the lowest of all countries.

Romania, Türkiye and Albania stood out with notably high proportions of children and young people achieving 'high' scores (23% each) in the Empathy domain which was well above the overall average of 15%. The Netherlands had the lowest proportion achieving 'high' scores (8%), followed by Greece (9%). On the other end, 10% of young German people scored in the 'low' category which was the largest share of struggling children and young people, and Portugal had the lowest proportion in the 'low' category (4%), followed by Romania and Greece (both 5%).

Figure 2.20: Empathy domain country scores



Implication: Empathy is genuinely perceived as a strength and most say they would support a friend but there are clear gaps as about one-third are not sure know how to help someone targeted in a safe way and only just over half report taking action to keep spaces kinder. This implies that prosocial behaviour needs additional support and infrastructure with clearer reporting and escalation pathways and scenario-based guidance so young people can act without increasing risk to themselves.

Key observations

About three-quarters (73%) of children and young people across the nine countries surveyed achieved 'good' or 'high' scores on the overall Index, indicating that most have developed the skills, knowledge, and resources needed for positive digital participation. However, nearly 30% did not, underscoring that a significant minority of young people are falling short and may benefit from targeted support to fully thrive and engage online.

Children and young people fared best in digital access and in over three-quarters of cases, they have the devices, connectivity and inclusion to get online. This widespread access reflects the high rates of smartphone ownership and home internet connectivity across all countries. Two other domains, the Security domain and the Identity domain, also emerged as areas of relative strength. Two-thirds (67%) of children and young people know how to stay safe online and feel they can express themselves authentically in digital spaces.

Notably, the Security domain had the highest proportion of children and young people achieving 'high' scores of any domain, with one in five (20%) reporting exemplary online safety practices. Within the Security domain, password hygiene emerged as a specific gap – only 61% of children and young people reported avoiding password reuse across accounts, the lowest of any security item and a common vulnerability. It is worth noting that these behaviours are self-reported, and there may be a gap between what children and young people say they do and what they actually do in practice, though this does not detract from their awareness of suitable behaviours.

On the other hand, the survey revealed clear areas of concern. Digital balance (the Management domain) emerged as one of the weaker spots, with only about a third of children and young people indicating they can effectively regulate their screen time and online activities. These findings suggest that while having access and knowing about safety is good, it is not necessarily translating into healthy habits and positive online experiences, and achieving that balance remains a significant challenge. The challenges with self-regulation were compounded by platform design features: 58% of children and young people acknowledged that notifications often distract them, only 54% use features like 'Do Not Disturb' or app timers, and 35% prioritise keeping up streaks on apps, highlighting how design choices that reward continued engagement make disengaging harder.

Literacy also emerged as an area requiring attention. Just over half (55%) of children and young people achieved 'good' or 'high' scores in this domain, with nearly half (46%) scoring only 'low' or 'moderate'. Particular gaps were evident in skills related to emerging technologies; only 63% felt confident identifying AI-generated or edited content, the lowest of any Literacy item. Similarly, only 66% reported verifying information before sharing. These findings highlight the need for sustained investment in critical digital literacy education that keeps pace with rapidly evolving technologies.

The Empathy domain showed middling results, with six in ten (61%) children and young people achieving 'good' or 'high' scores. Notably, while the willingness to support others was high – 82% said they would support a friend struggling because of something online – there was a clear gap between intention and action. Only 56% reported having actually taken action (such as reporting, muting, or supporting) to help keep online spaces kind, and just 62% knew how to safely intervene when seeing someone targeted. This suggests that strengthening prosocial digital behaviours requires not only awareness but also practical, scenario-based education.

Beyond the core Index domains, two additional indicators reveal important patterns. The Digital Wellbeing indicator showed particularly concerning outcomes: only 26% of children and young people reported positive digital wellbeing (good or high scores), with nearly two-thirds (64%) experiencing only 'moderate' wellbeing and 10% reporting 'low' wellbeing. This suggests that even with skills and knowledge, most young people are not experiencing consistently positive outcomes from their digital lives. In contrast, the Enablement indicator showed more positive results, with half (50%) of children and young people having high access to digital resources, though 15% remain 'not enabled' and face significant barriers to getting online, highlighting persistent digital divides.

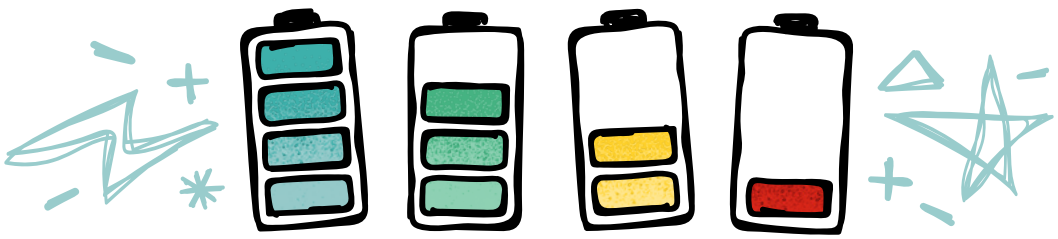
Importantly, the survey revealed that the enablement and wellbeing indicators function as mutually reinforcing conditions. Children and young people with 'high' enablement were far more likely to achieve 'good' or 'high' scores on the overall index (81%) compared to those classified as 'not enabled' (48%). The relationship with wellbeing was even more pronounced: 95% of those with 'high' wellbeing achieved 'good' or 'high' index scores, compared to just 38% of those scoring 'low' on the Wellbeing indicator.

There were a few small differences by age observed. Older teens tended to demonstrate stronger skills in the Security domain and the Literacy domain, suggesting these skills develop with age and experience whereas younger teens showed slightly stronger performance on the Empathy domain and the Enablement (access and inclusion) indicator, though differences were modest. For key areas such as the Management, Identity domains, or overall Index scores, 13- and 18-year-olds looked very similar. Boys and girls showed very similar outcomes across all domains, though boys were a bit more likely to be on the higher end of 'high' scores on the Security domain and on the overall Index but even these differences were very small.

Consistent patterns emerged across other demographic subgroups as well, revealing that digital wellbeing challenges are not evenly distributed. Children and young people with functional difficulties, those experiencing regular anxiety or depression, those facing food insecurity, those identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and those belonging to minority ethnic groups consistently reported poorer outcomes across multiple domains and indicators. These gaps were most pronounced on the Digital Wellbeing indicator, where these groups were significantly more likely to fall into the 'low' category and less likely to achieve positive wellbeing outcomes. Importantly, these disparities reflect systemic barriers – such as inaccessible digital design, socioeconomic disadvantage, discrimination, and lack of tailored support – rather than characteristics inherent to the young people themselves. These findings underscore that universal approaches to digital wellbeing are unlikely to be sufficient; targeted, inclusive strategies are needed to ensure all children and young people can thrive online.

The data revealed some significant results by country. Romania youth consistently performed highest across nearly all domains, with over four in five children and young people achieving 'good' or 'high' on the overall Index. Türkiye was not far behind, also performing strongly, particularly on the Security, Identity, Literacy and Empathy domains. Albania also demonstrated strong performance overall (75% achieving 'good' or 'high'), though it showed a more polarised pattern than other countries, with notably high proportions reaching 'high' scores in several domains alongside higher proportions in the 'low' category.

In contrast, the Netherlands and Greece consistently had the lowest scores with some of the lowest achievements of 'good' or 'high' scores including the Management and Empathy domains, and the overall Index. Germany's results were mixed, as German children and young people were very strong on the Wellbeing indicator and the Security domain but many fell into the 'low' category for the Enablement (access and inclusion) indicator and Empathy domain when compared to their peers in other countries. The UK showed mid-range performance on the overall Index (70% 'good' or 'high'), though UK children and young people had the highest share of screen time, spending 8 or more hours online on weekdays (14%).



3 COUNTRY-LEVEL SNAPSHOTS

This section summarises the key findings from the Youth Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index Survey 2025 for each of the nine countries. Priority results are disaggregated by key demographics and to identify cross-country patterns and highlight where attention may be most beneficial. There are more detailed summaries for each country in the appendix, setting out findings for the two key indicators – Enablement and Wellbeing – and for the overall Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index.

3.1 Albania

In Albania, 505 young people aged 13–18 completed the survey face-to-face. The key findings were:

- The main motivation for going online is to connect with friends or family (88%) and a third (33%) do not think they are missing out on anything offline when they are online – higher than in any other country surveyed.
- The proportion of young people in Albania achieving "good + high" scores in the Wellbeing indicator (52%) was considerably higher than across the nine countries combined (27%).

Key demographic differences within Albania included:

- Young people aged 16–18 showed significantly more use of personal smartphones (89%) compared to those aged 13–15 (78%). They also reported more frequent use of advanced digital devices such as laptops or Chromebooks (24% vs 16%).
- Teen boys reported higher use of certain digital technologies compared with teen girls, specifically personal smartphones (89% vs 79%) and gaming consoles (22% vs 2%).

Key differences between Albania and the nine countries as a whole included:

- Albania had the highest rate of children and young people usually going online at home (97% – above the 90% across the nine countries combined), but has the lowest proportion of young people, of all the nine countries, who also go online at school, college, or university (15%).
- On Degree of the Enablement indicator, Albania was among the countries with the lowest share of "high" scores (45%), alongside Greece (39%), Germany and the UK (47% each), below the overall proportion of 50% across the nine countries.
- Albania had the highest proportion of children and young people achieving "Good" or "High" scores on the Wellbeing indicator (53%) which was much higher than the closest countries.

- On the overall Index, 75% of young people scored 'good' or 'high', placing Albania top across the nine countries with 17% scoring 'high' on the Index (10% for the nine countries combined). However, Albania also had the highest proportion in the "low" overall Index category (5%), above the 2% across all nine countries combined.

3.2 Germany

In Germany, 1,000 young people aged 13–18 completed the survey online. The key findings were that most young people report strong digital access and safety knowledge but struggle to manage screen time and achieve digital wellbeing, with vulnerable groups facing notably poorer outcomes:

- Around two-thirds (69%) of young people achieved 'good' or 'high' scores on the overall Index, placing Germany slightly below the overall nine-country proportion, with Security (64%) and Identity (61%) emerging as the strongest domains.

- Management was a clear area of concern, with only 37% achieving 'good' or 'high' scores, indicating that most young people face challenges to effectively regulate their screen time and digital habits.

- Digital wellbeing outcomes were modest, with only 28% of young people reporting positive wellbeing experiences online, while the majority (72%) scored 'moderate' or 'low'.

Key demographic differences within Germany included:

- Young people at risk of food insecurity faced significantly poorer outcomes across all indicators, including lower enablement (26% vs 50% 'high') and much lower wellbeing scores (5% vs 31% 'good' or 'high').

- Those with disabilities/functional difficulties were less likely to achieve positive overall index scores (61% vs 81% 'good' or 'high'), as were those experiencing regular anxiety or depression (65% vs 73%).

Key differences between Germany and the nine countries as a whole included:

- Germany was at the nine-country average on the overall Index (69% vs 70% 'good' or 'high'), placing it in the middle range alongside Portugal, Spain, and the UK.

- Germany had a higher proportion of young people 'not enabled' for digital access (18% vs 15%), and fewer achieving 'high' enablement (47% vs 50%).

3.3 Greece

In Greece, 450 young people aged 13–18 completed the survey online. Key findings in Greece were:

- The main motivation for young people spending time online is to connect with family and friends (69%).
- On the Index, the Management domain is an area for concern with fewer than three in ten young people (26%) scoring 'good' or 'high' in managing their time online.

Key demographic differences within Greece included:

- Twice as many young people from low-income families rely on mobile data from a family member or parent/carer/guardian's plan (21%) compared to those from high-income families (10%).
- Children and young people living in a village or rural area (31%) have higher scores on the Wellbeing indicator than those living in a city or large town (22%).

Key differences between Greece and the nine countries as a whole included:

- Greece has the lowest proportion (38%) of children and young people with a 'high' score on Enablement, and is notably below the 50% across the nine countries combined.
- On the Wellbeing indicator, Greece was among the countries with the lowest proportion of children and young people scoring good or high (22%).
- On the Index, Greece ranks in the middle among the nine countries for combined 'good' and high' scores on the overall Index (70% with the UK) and above Germany (69%), Spain (67%) and the Netherlands (64%). It is also in the middle on the combined low and moderate scores (29% – with the UK also on 29%), after Germany (31%), Spain (33%) and the Netherlands (36%).
- Management is a particular challenge facing more children and young people in Greece than in all other study countries but one, with almost three-quarters scoring low or moderate (73% – only the Netherlands had more scoring in these categories combined, at 79%).

3.4 The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, 1,000 young people aged 13–18 completed the survey online. Key findings were:

- The main motivation for young people in the Netherlands going online is to relax or be entertained (58%) and to connect with friends or family (56%).
- On the Wellbeing indicator, around a quarter of children and young people achieved 'good' or 'high' scores (23%), slightly below the overall average of 27% across the nine countries, positioning the country in the middle of the study countries, alongside Greece and higher than Turkey (22%), Spain (21%) and Portugal (17%).
- On the Management domain, the Netherlands was the lowest of the nine countries with just 21% of teens achieving 'good + high' scores and the highest proportion scoring 'low' (24%).

Key demographic differences within the Netherlands included:

- Differences by age and gender were minimal.
- Young people aged 16–18 were more likely to access the internet using mobile data (21%) compared to younger people aged 13–15 (16%).

Key differences between the Netherlands and the nine countries as a whole included:

- In the Netherlands, almost two-thirds (64%) of young people achieved 'good' or 'high' scores on the overall Index, indicating they have developed the skills, knowledge, and resources needed for positive digital participation across the SMILE domains.
- However, the Netherlands is lowest on the overall Index among the nine countries, suggesting that a substantial proportion of its children and young people will stand to benefit from targeted efforts to enhance the skills, knowledge and behaviours that support positive digital participation.
- The Netherlands has the highest proportion in the 'moderate' category (34%) on the overall Index, and almost two in five in the 'moderate' or 'low' categories. It also has a notably lower proportion achieving 'high' on the overall Index than across the nine countries (4% vs 10%).

3.5 Portugal

In Portugal, 800 young people aged 13–18 completed the survey online. The key findings were that most young people have strong digital access and perform well on overall digital wellbeing, but struggle with managing screen time and achieving positive digital wellbeing outcomes:

- Three-quarters (75%) of young people had 'good' or 'high' scores on the overall Index, placing Portugal above the upper set of the countries.
- The strongest domains were Security (67% 'good + high'), Identity (66%) and Empathy (65%). Management was a clear area of concern, with only a third of young people (32%) achieving 'good' or 'high' scores, indicating that most young people face challenges to effectively regulate their screen time and digital habits.
- Wellbeing outcomes were the lowest of all nine countries surveyed, with only 17% of children and young people scoring 'good' or 'high', while 83% scored 'moderate' or 'low'.

Key demographic differences in Portugal included:

- Children and young people who identified as being at risk of food insecurity faced notably poorer outcomes across all indicators, including lower enablement (31% vs 54% 'high') and much lower wellbeing scores (12% vs 18% 'good' or 'high').
- Those who reported having functional difficulties were less likely to achieve positive overall Index scores than those who did not (71% vs 88% 'good' or 'high') and had lower scores on the Wellbeing indicator than those who did not (14% vs 28% scored 'good' or 'high').

Key differences between Portugal and the nine countries as a whole included:

- Portugal performed above the nine-country average on the overall Index (75% vs 70% 'good' or 'high'), placing it among the stronger performing countries.
- However, Portugal had the lowest proportion reporting positive Wellbeing outcomes (17% vs 27% 'good' or 'high'), indicating a significant gap for most young people in the country between digital skills and actual wellbeing experiences.

3.6 Romania

In Romania, 1,000 young people aged 13–18 completed the survey online. The key findings were:

- Romania consistently performed highest of the countries across nearly all Index domains, with four in five children and young people (82%) scoring 'good' or 'high' on the overall Index.
- The greatest proportion of children and young people scoring 'high' on digital Enablement (65%), with the highest use of mobile data (at home, outside and from personal plans).
- Security (self-reported) was a strength, with 77% scoring 'good' or 'high' – but digital balance was a challenge for many, with 42% scoring 'good' or 'high' on Management.

Key demographic differences within Romania included:

- On the Wellbeing indicator, more young males than young females scored 'good' or 'high' (34% vs 27%), with over a third of males (34%) scoring 'high' and a quarter of females (27%).
- Young males and 13–15 year-olds had the greatest proportions scoring 'high' on Enablement (69% of young males and 67% of 13–15 year-olds).
- Young people who reported experiencing food insecurity showed higher use of public Wi-Fi than young people who considered themselves to be from food secure families (10% vs 2%).

Key differences between Romania and the nine countries as a whole included:

- Romania had the highest proportion of young people with 'high' enablement (65% vs 50% in the nine countries combined) and the lowest proportion scoring 'not enabled' (10% vs 16%). Most (71%) have at least moderate access ('medium' or 'high'), the highest in any country. It also had the highest rate of children and young people with their own smartphones (86%).
- On the overall Index, Romania had the highest proportion of children and young people scoring 'high' or 'good' (82%) followed by Türkiye (78%) and Albania and Portugal (75%).
- Digital wellbeing was a strength in Romania, with the second-highest proportion of children and young people achieving 'good' or 'high' scores (31%). Albania had the highest, with 53%.

3.7 Spain

In Spain, 1,000 young people aged 13–18 completed the survey online. Key findings in Spain were:

- Children and young people tend to stay online longer than planned because they are enjoying what they are doing and do not want to stop (52%) and friends are online (48%).

- The strongest domains of the overall Index were Identity (63% scored 'good' or 'high') and Empathy (59% 'good' or 'high') suggesting that young people are well equipped to mange their online identity and their interactions in online spaces.

Key demographic differences within Spain included:

- Over half of children and young people from food secure families score 'high' on enablement (57%) but only two in ten from food insecure families are in the 'high' enablement category (19%).

- Children and young people experiencing anxiety or depression monthly or more frequently are more likely to score 'low' on the Wellbeing indicator (17% vs 8% for those rarely or never experiencing this) and less likely to fall within the 'good' or 'high' score (15% vs 26%).

- Two-thirds of children and young people from food secure families scored 'good' or 'high' on the Index (66%), notably more than among those from food insecure families where less than half achieved scores in these categories (47%).

Key differences between Spain and the nine countries as a whole included:

- On the Enablement indicator, Spain has a higher proportion of children and young people in the 'not enabled' category but a lower proportion in the 'low' enablement category compared to the nine countries combined (21% vs 16% 'not enabled' and 20% vs 27% 'low' enablement).

- On the overall Index, Spain is second to lowest on the proportion of children and young people with combined 'good' and 'high' scores (66%) just above the Netherlands (64%). Correspondingly, Spain is second highest on the overall Index for the combined 'low' and 'moderate' scores (34%) just behind the Netherlands (36%).

3.8 Türkiye

In Türkiye, 1,000 young people aged 13–18 completed the survey online. The key findings were:

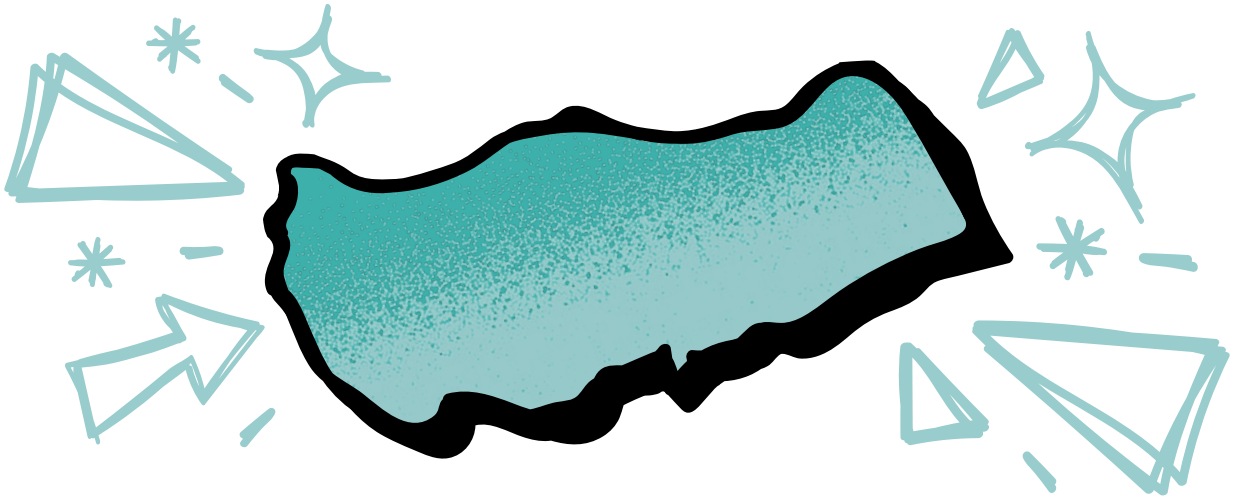
- Over three-quarters (78%) of young people achieved 'good' or 'high' scores on the Index, with Security, Identity and Empathy emerging as the strongest domains (all 71%).
- Management was an area of concern; only 38% achieved 'good' or 'high' scores, indicating that most face challenges to effectively regulate screen time and digital habits.
- Wellbeing outcomes were low; with only 22% of children and young people reporting positive wellbeing experiences online, while 78% scored 'moderate' or 'low'.

Key demographic differences within Türkiye included:

- Young people and children at risk of food insecurity reported lower levels on Enablement and Wellbeing. They were more likely to score as 'not enabled' (28% vs 17% overall) and less likely to score as 'high' on enablement (33% vs 49% overall). They were also more likely to score 'low' on Wellbeing (18% vs 11% overall) and less likely to score 'good' (10% vs 20%).
- Those reporting that they experience anxiety or depression monthly were half as likely to score 'high' in the overall Index than those experiencing this rarely or never (11% vs 22%).

Key differences between Türkiye and the nine countries as a whole included:

- Türkiye had a slightly higher proportion of young people scoring 'medium' on Enablement (12% vs 8% for the countries combined).
- Türkiye had a higher proportion achieving a 'high' overall Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index score (15% vs 10%).
- Türkiye scored slightly lower in the 'good' Wellbeing category and the combined 'good + high' score was also below the nine countries overall (20% Türkiye vs 27% overall).



3.9 The UK

In the UK, 1,000 young people aged 13–18 completed the survey online. The key findings were that most young people have strong digital access and perform well on overall digital wellbeing, but face challenges in managing screen time and achieving positive digital wellbeing outcomes:

- Over two-thirds (70%) of young people achieved 'good' or 'high' scores on the overall Index, with Identity (66%) and Security (65%) emerging as the strongest domains.
- Management was a clear area of concern, with only 30% achieving 'good' or 'high' scores, indicating that most face challenges to effectively regulate their digital habits.
- Wellbeing outcomes were modest, with only 29% of children and young people reporting positive wellbeing experiences online, while the majority (71%) scored 'moderate' or 'low'.

Key demographic differences within the UK included:

- Children and young people who reported having functional difficulties were less likely to achieve positive wellbeing outcomes than those without (24% vs 38% 'good' or 'high') and showed lower Management scores (24% vs 39% 'good' or 'high').
- Young people experiencing anxiety or depression monthly or more frequently were more likely to score 'low' on wellbeing (13% vs 4%) than those who experienced this rarely or not at all and less likely to achieve positive wellbeing (19% vs 40% 'good' or 'high').

Key differences between the UK and the nine countries as a whole included:

- The UK was fifth on the overall Index, with 70% scoring 'good' or 'high' compared to 73% in the nine countries combined. It was alongside Germany (69%) and Spain (67%), but below Romania (82%), Türkiye (78%), Albania (75%), and Portugal (75%).
- The UK had the heaviest screen time: 8+ hours on weekdays (14%) and weekends (17%).
- The UK had a higher proportion of young people with 'low' enablement than the combined nine countries (37% vs 27% overall), suggesting more polarised access patterns.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index Survey 2025 provides detailed insights into how children and young people aged 13-18 are navigating their digital lives in nine European countries. It explores their access and use of digital technology, enablement, digital wellbeing and their experiences and outcomes across the five domains of the overall Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index – Security, Management, Identity, Literacy and Empathy. The findings offer grounds for cautious optimism while highlighting clear areas for comprehensive action and indicating where targeted intervention could be of benefit. Six key recommendations have been developed with Save the Children and Vodafone Foundation to inform future activity.

4.1 Conclusions

The vast majority of children and young people have the foundational resources required for digital participation; 83% own their own smartphone, 90% go online primarily from home, half (50%) achieved 'high' scores on the Enablement indicator. However, although a basic level of digital access is near-universal, children and young people who experience additional barriers offline (such as those who are food insecure, or have anxiety, depression, or disabilities/functional difficulties) can have lower enablement – and wellbeing outcomes are lagging behind rates of access for all children and young people.

Widespread connectivity has not translated into consistently positive wellbeing outcomes. Only one in four (26%) children and young people achieved 'good' or 'high' scores on the Digital Wellbeing indicator, indicating that most experience only partial levels of digital wellbeing. The Enablement and Digital Wellbeing indicators provide important contextual insight into children and young people's access to digital resources and their subjective experiences of their digital lives. Importantly, these two indicators function as mutually reinforcing conditions – children and young people with positive wellbeing were far more likely to have high enablement, and those with higher enablement consistently achieved better overall Index scores. This suggests that addressing gaps in one area may help improve the other.

Online safety messaging appears to have translated into practice, but self-regulation is a challenge that undermines children and young people's wellbeing. Most children and young people report having strong safety knowledge: two-thirds of children and young people achieved 'good' or 'high' Security scores, with nearly one in five indicating exemplary online safety practices. By contrast, only a third achieved 'good' or 'high' scores on the Management domain. While safety messaging has been effective, a more holistic approach is needed to support children and young people with digital balance. Challenges with self-regulation are compounded by design features; 58% said that notifications often distract them, and 35% prioritised keeping up streaks on apps – highlighting how design choices that reward continued engagement make disengaging harder.

Identity online, however, is an area of strength. Two-thirds of children and young people feel able to express themselves authentically and manage digital relationships effectively. This is an encouraging finding, indicating that digital spaces offer opportunities for positive self-expression and connection for children and young people. It also reinforces wider evidence that online connectedness is key for children and young people as part of their wider relationships and sense of self. Efforts to enhance wellbeing and resilience

need to strengthen children and young people's ability to regulate and navigate digital engagement so that they can fully invest in online and offline relationships, build a sense of community, belonging and identity within and beyond digital experiences and integrate screen-free enjoyable routines into their daily lives.

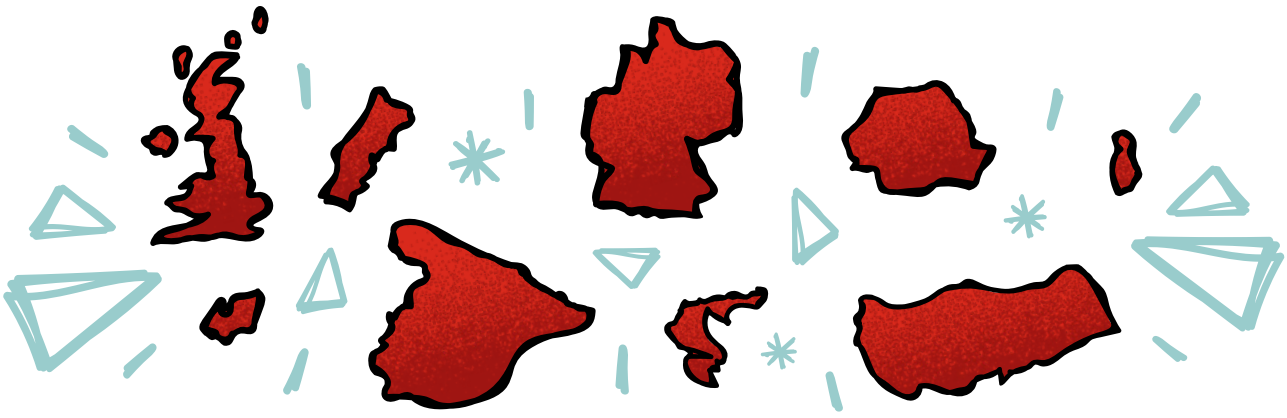
Literacy, however, does need reinforcing. Even though they are confident with their technology use, just over half of children and young people reported good critical understanding of the digital environment. With AI's increasing sophistication, sponsored content and algorithmic curation of news, information and content, strengthening the principles of digital literacy remains a priority.

The Empathy domain showed mixed results. While willingness to support others was high, there was a notable gap between intention and action. Most children and young people would support a friend struggling online, but far fewer know how to safely intervene or have ever taken action. This points to a need for practical, scenario-based education rather than awareness alone.

Age and gender differences are modest. Older respondents reported stronger skills in Security and Literacy, suggesting these competencies develop with experience. Differences by gender were minimal across most domains, indicating that digital wellbeing challenges and opportunities are broadly shared across children and young people regardless of gender.

More substantial disparities emerged across other demographic groups. Children and young people with disabilities/functional difficulties, those experiencing regular anxiety or depression, those facing food insecurity, those identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and those form minority ethnic groups consistently reported lower outcomes across multiple domains and indicators. These gaps were most pronounced on the Digital Wellbeing indicator. These findings underscore that digital inequalities mirror and amplify existing vulnerabilities – children and young people already facing difficulties in their offline lives are disproportionately affected in their digital experiences as well. Therefore, these disparities clearly reflect systemic barriers, such as inaccessible digital design, socioeconomic disadvantage, and lack of tailored support, rather than characteristics inherent to the young people themselves.

Cross-country variation on the indicators, domains and Index was substantial, highlighting that digital wellbeing and resilience are shaped by more than individual behaviour and characteristics. Romania consistently performed highest across nearly all domains, with over four in five children and young people achieving 'good' or 'high' on the overall Index. Albania also demonstrated strong performance with 75% achieving 'good' or 'high' overall, and Türkiye showed strong achievements on multiple domains, In contrast, the Netherlands and Greece had lower proportions achieving these scores on several domains, while Germany, Portugal, Spain and the UK fell in the middle range (68–70%). These national differences warrant further investigation but indicate the influence of policy environments, education and guidance and structural conditions around connectivity and platforms as well as cultural factors. The Index creates an opportunity for identifying transferable practices to improve outcomes.

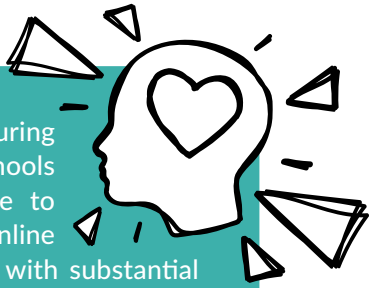


4.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings from this survey, the following recommendations have been developed with Save the Children and Vodafone Foundation and are offered to support children and young people's digital wellbeing and resilience across Europe:

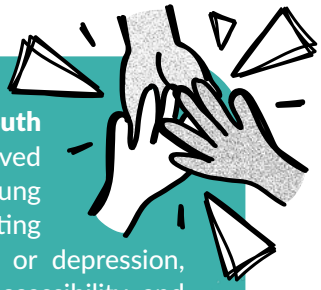
1. Embed wellbeing-by-design and hold technology platforms accountable by enforcing stronger safety- and wellbeing-by-design standards for social media and online platforms. The survey highlights a clear gap between connectivity and wellbeing, and shows that self-regulation is a major challenge for many children and young people. Regulators should require child and youth-friendly defaults, including high privacy and safety settings for children, alongside measures that reduce overuse pressures (for example, limiting addictive design features and strengthening controls that support breaks, sleep-friendly settings and notification management).

2. Integrate digital wellbeing into education by embedding wellbeing, self-regulation, empathy and critical digital literacy into mainstream curricula and teacher training. The findings suggest that basic safety knowledge is not enough on its own: children and young people also need practical, scenario-based learning on managing stress, navigating conflict and supporting others online, including how to respond if witnessing harm, cyberbullying or misinformation. Treat digital wellbeing as a fundamental literacy of modern life.

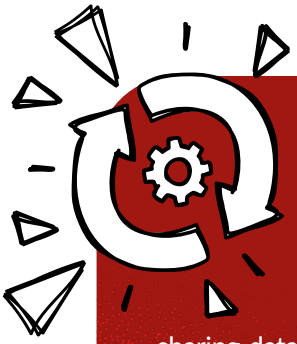


3. Strengthen mental health support in the digital age by ensuring accessible, child and youth-friendly pathways for support in schools and communities, including when online experiences contribute to stress, anxiety or fear of missing out. The survey suggests that online engagement is taking a toll for many children and young people, with substantial proportions reporting stress or difficulty feeling calm and positive after being online. Funding and strengthening access for support services, counselling, and trusted helplines should be protected and scaled, so support is available early and without stigma. This should happen across schools and communities and be considered within wider national health standards.

4. Empower educators and parents/carers with the confidence, knowledge and practical tools to guide children and young people online and shape healthier norms around digital balance without shaming connection. Trusted adults need accessible resources that keep pace with platform trends and equip them to have open, non-judgemental conversations, set healthy routines, and support children and young people to manage notifications, sleep disruption and online pressures.



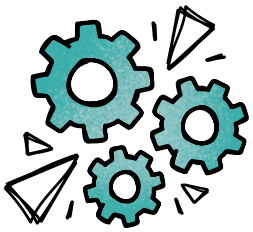
5. Guarantee equity and inclusion, and institutionalise child and youth participation so no group is left behind and solutions reflect lived experiences. The Index highlights lower scores among children and young people facing disadvantage or vulnerability (including those reporting disability or functional difficulties, food insecurity, regular anxiety or depression, and non-heterosexual young people). Policies should strengthen accessibility and targeted support and involve diverse children and young people through structured and unstructured participatory mechanisms so that platforms, services and education responses are inclusive, effective and accountable.



6. Build multi-stakeholder coalitions and commit to ongoing measurement and learning so action is coordinated and progress can be tracked over time. Digital wellbeing requires joined-up responsibility across platforms, policymakers, educators, health actors, civil society, donors and funders, parents/carers and children and young people themselves. Regularly updating the Index, tracking emerging issues (including AI-enabled risks), and sharing data and best practice across sectors and countries will support accountability and keep policy and practice responsive as technology evolves.

These recommendations are grounded in the Index findings, which highlight that most teens have internet access but struggle with healthy usage and some children and young people from marginalised groups are worse off. They also reflect the report's call for systemic change beyond safety training and the EU's emerging digital rules. These integrated steps highlight the urgency and opportunity identified in the report.

5 METHODS



The Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index Survey for children and young people employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to measure children's digital wellbeing across nine European countries. The study was conducted by Ipsos on behalf of Save the Children UK and Vodafone Foundation between October 2025 and January 2026.

5.1 Population and sample

The Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index (DWRI) 2025 was conducted with 7,755 children and young people aged 13–18 years in nine European countries in December 2025 and January 2026. A representative sampling strategy was used, with quota sampling applied to ensure representation within each country across age groups, gender and geographic region.

Country	Sample Size	Data collection mode
Albania	505	Face-to-face
Germany	1,000	Online
Greece	450	Online
Netherlands	1,000	Online
Portugal	800	Online
Romania	1,000	Online
Spain	1,000	Online
Türkiye	1,000	Online
UK	1,000	Online

5.2 Data collection methods

Online surveys (eight countries): Data were collected via Ipsos online access panels. Respondents aged 13–17 were recruited via their parent/guardian's panel membership. Those aged 18 completed the survey directly.

Face-to-face surveys (Albania): Trained interviewers conducted interviews using digital tablets. A random walk sampling method was used to select households within sampled locations. A self-completion (CASI) option was offered for sensitive questions.

In both modes, the parent/guardian was asked to use the 'next birthday method' to choose a child to invite to participate in the survey, if there was more than one eligible child in the household.

5.3 Index scoring and calculation

The Index comprises five domains measuring skills, knowledge and behaviours that support positive digital wellbeing and resilience, including Security, Management, Identity, Literacy and Empathy as well as two additional indicators that sit outside the core Index:

- **Enablement indicator:** Measures foundational resources for digital participation (device access, connectivity, accessibility tools)
- **Digital Wellbeing indicator:** Measures subjective experiences of digital life (feelings of calm, balance, sleep quality, stress)

Scoring: The five Index domains and the Digital Wellbeing indicator use a 5-point Likert agreement scale (from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'). Negatively worded items are reverse-coded. The Enablement indicator uses categorical response options.

Overall Index Calculation: Each respondent's total score is converted to a percentage of the maximum possible score (165 points) and categorised as:

5.4 Ethics, consent and safeguarding

Ethical approval was obtained from Save the Children's internal Ethics Review Board (reference number: SC-EEG-FY2025-269). The study complied with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national data protection laws.

Consent and assent: For respondents aged 18 years, direct informed consent was obtained, with the option to withdraw at any time. A two-stage process was followed for respondents aged 13–17:

1. Parental consent: Parents/guardians received information about the study's purpose and data protection measures; explicit consent was required before approaching the child;

2. Child assent: Children received age-appropriate information as they were invited to take part; it was their decision whether to participate or not, and if they did choose to take part, they retained the option to withdraw at any time.

Referral and support: National helpline information (phone number and website) was provided to all, in the study information provided before the survey began and again at the end of the survey. There were no open-text responses so no opportunity for disclosures to be made, but Ipsos' own Disclosure Board provided oversight for online responses and the project as a whole. In Albania, where interviews were conducted face-to-face, additional training was provided to interviewers on safeguarding procedures, with the referral processes aligned with Albanian national law.

Privacy protections: Particular care was taken for respondents from groups that may face stigma. In Albania, sensitive questions on sexual orientation, gender identity and ethnic minority status were administered via self-completion (CASI) so respondents could answer privately. Across all countries, there was a 'Prefer not to say' response option on all sensitive demographic questions.

5.5 Limitations

- **Cross-sectional design:** The survey captures a single point in time and cannot establish causal relationships or be used to infer causation;
- **Sub-group analysis:** many of the base sizes are too small to conduct sub-group analysis or statistical inference, or to assess relationships between intersecting characteristics;
- **Self-reported data:** All measures rely on respondents' self-assessment; there may be divergence between what respondents say and what they do;
- **Online methodology:** In eight countries, the sample is limited to those with existing internet access and panel membership; and
- **Mixed-mode data collection:** Albania used face-to-face interviewing, which may introduce different sources of bias compared to online self-completion.

6 APPENDICES

The main report is accompanied by a set of country summaries. The headline findings for each are in Section 5: Country-level Snapshots. The remaining portion of each summary is collated here and the full set of country summaries are also available from the commissioners of the Digital Wellbeing and Resilience Index.