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| Contribution by Italy | |
| DIGITAL LITERACY FOR CHILD PROTECTION | |
| **Purpose**  The purpose of this contribution is to encourage the process of media literacy by promoting intergovernmental projects aimed at strengthening the so-called 'digital citizenship' in order to empower and stimulate young people to become 'active and responsible citizens' capable of protecting themselves from the risks of the digital world.  **Action required**  This report is transmitted to the Council Working Group on Child Online Protection **for information**. | |

The opportunities that technological progress can provide are multiple, interdisciplinary and very dynamic. The governance of this process with the definition of certain rules to circumscribe and govern possible risks that may arise from it, especially when we are talking about minors, needs transversal technical, legal and economic skills, also in consideration of the need to initiate awareness actions towards adults and not only but also towards the different institutions involved by competence and the different stakeholders of reference both from the business world and the third sector.

In this context, it is essential that institutions implement policies to support childhood and adolescence in order to educate them to consciously and responsibly use technology, which is increasingly pervasive in the educational, recreational, social but also health fields, with specific skills as indicated by the European Commission itself, which has deemed necessary "basic digital skills and competencies from childhood and has invested in 'digital literacy also to combat misinformation and risks through a good knowledge and understanding of data-intensive technologies, such as artificial intelligence, risks that can also translate into criminally relevant behaviour.

Also highly topical is the issue of minors access to age-inappropriate content. From a regulatory point of view, at the European level, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive of 2018, transposed in Italy by Legislative Decree No. 208 of November 8, 2021 (under review) intervenes in the protection of children and adolescents by establishing for the first time that it is the responsibility of member states to ensure that providers of video sharing platforms, subject to their jurisdiction, take appropriate measures to protect minors from the dissemination of content that may harm their physical, mental or moral development. In 2022, a package of regulations aimed at regulating digital services was also passed, likewise, known as the Digital Services Package, consisting of the Digital Services Act (DSA - effective November 16, 2022) and Digital Market Act (DMA - effective November 1, 2022). These provisions establish an initial comprehensive regulatory framework to be applied to all online digital platforms accessed on a daily basis and aims to promote an open, safe and fair environment that acts to limit the dissemination of illegal content.

At the national level, the so-called Caivano Decree on "Urgent measures to combat youth distress, educational povertỳ and juvenile crime, as well as for the safety of minors in the digital sphere" has been approved, which introduces important and innovative provisions in the wake of the Guidelines dedicated to "systems of protection of minors from the risks of cyberspace" adopted by the Communications Guarantee Authority and entered into force last November 2023 in which it is stipulated that providers of Internet access services, whatever the technology used to deliver them, must make available to users "parental control systems or filtering of inappropriate content for minors and blocking of content reserved for an audience over the age of eighteen years."

With this in mind, the last budget law also provided for the establishment of a (three-year) fund for the support and promotion of educational and media and digital literacy projects by media service providers and video sharing platform providers with an allocation of three million euros. With the inter-ministerial decree of last June 9, which follows an evidence - based policy approach, that is, based on the prior assessment of scientific evidence and data provided by the research activity, study groups of experts and operators in the field, the modalities of use of the funds have been defined by providing for the selection and implementation of projects related to media and digital literacy for the protection of minors, with the involvement of all institutions operating in this field through the establishment of an inter-ministerial working table and the support of a group of experts.

With this in mind, interlocutions with the gaming world and the video game industry also plays a key role, given the significant growth of this sector both in terms of popularity, economic significance and social impact. The enjoyment of gaming media content, over the years, has experienced a very rapid surge reaching dizzying peaks of about 2 billion hours of monthly streaming viewing (data from the “Digital Content Observatory” of Polytechnic of Milan). Media, Virtual Reality and Gaming represent an interweaving that, exploiting the potential of 5G networks, makes available high-definition media content, realizes the distribution of high-quality content in different formats, on a multiplicity of technological platforms and directly in the places (including cultural interest) where users are located, as a (sustainable) driver for the literacy of the country. The video game industry brings together a wide range of skills and know-how that can have a major impact on digital literacy and education. The complementary use of video games in schools encourages students to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and math (STEAM). In addition, e-sports can be integrated into education pathways and contribute to the acquisition of essential skills in a digital society such as problem solving, analytical, social and intellectual skills, spatial coordination and teamwork, as well as an increase in concentration level, in addition to being widely accessible and also used to increase inclusiveness and diversity in learning environments. With this in mind, a contribution was made to the position paper "Gaming Challenges and Opportunities for the Diffusion of Digital Competencies," a document containing guidelines for policy makers and educators, prepared by the working group established by the Digital Transformation Department within Digital Republic. The latter, along with numerous other intergovernmental projects aimed at strengthening so-called "digital citizenship," aims at empowering young people, that is, stimulating them toward a path to become active, responsible citizens capable of protecting themselves from the risks of the digital world: promoting the culture of video games means generating a pedagogical reflection and thinking of them as a tool to improve certain skills of children and adolescents.

Some ISTAT data attest a constant increase in the last five years in the number of minors (6-14 years old) who use digital media, in particular 80% of Italian minors - in line with the European level - use smartphones daily to communicate and explore the web. It should be pointed out, however, that DESI (Digital Economy and Society Index) 2022 indicators show that Italy, while registering important progress in digitization levels over the five-year period 2017-2022, still has several positions to climb in the European rankings on basic digital skills. In fact, while Italy ranks 18th in the DESI ranking among EU member states, when it comes to "human capital" it ranks 25th. This result is particularly affected by the gap in the population's basic digital skills. Only 46 percent of the population has basic digital skills (54 percent the EU average). The gap narrows when considering advanced digital skills (23 percent compared to the EU average of 26 percent). Italy has a very low percentage of graduates in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) (just 1.4 percent of Italian graduates choose ICT disciplines) and in the labour market the percentage of ICT specialists is 3.8 percent of total employment (both below the EU average).

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