

Youth Media Protection Index 2022

About the study

In a digitised society, youth media protection aims to ensure children's and young people's safety without unduly hindering social and societal participation (Brügger et al. 2022).¹ Parents, children and young people navigate this delicate balance in their daily media and media education activities. Children and adolescents can only be protected from online risks if parents and adolescents are aware of the risks in their daily online activities and accept the necessary measures and media protection regulations.

Against this background, the Youth Media Protection Index analyses the perspectives of parents and their children aged 9-16 in Germany, examining perceived risks and countermeasures. In addition, it assesses youth media protection activities alongside relevant attitudes and skills from both groups' viewpoints. The combined survey allows for comparing perspectives, providing a basis for further refining child and youth media protection, considering parents' and children's expectations and experiences. These results also highlight areas requiring actions, including legal frameworks, implementation in media offerings and tools, support and counselling services, media literacy promotion for parents and adolescents, and media education expertise.

Retake of the Youth Protection Index 2017

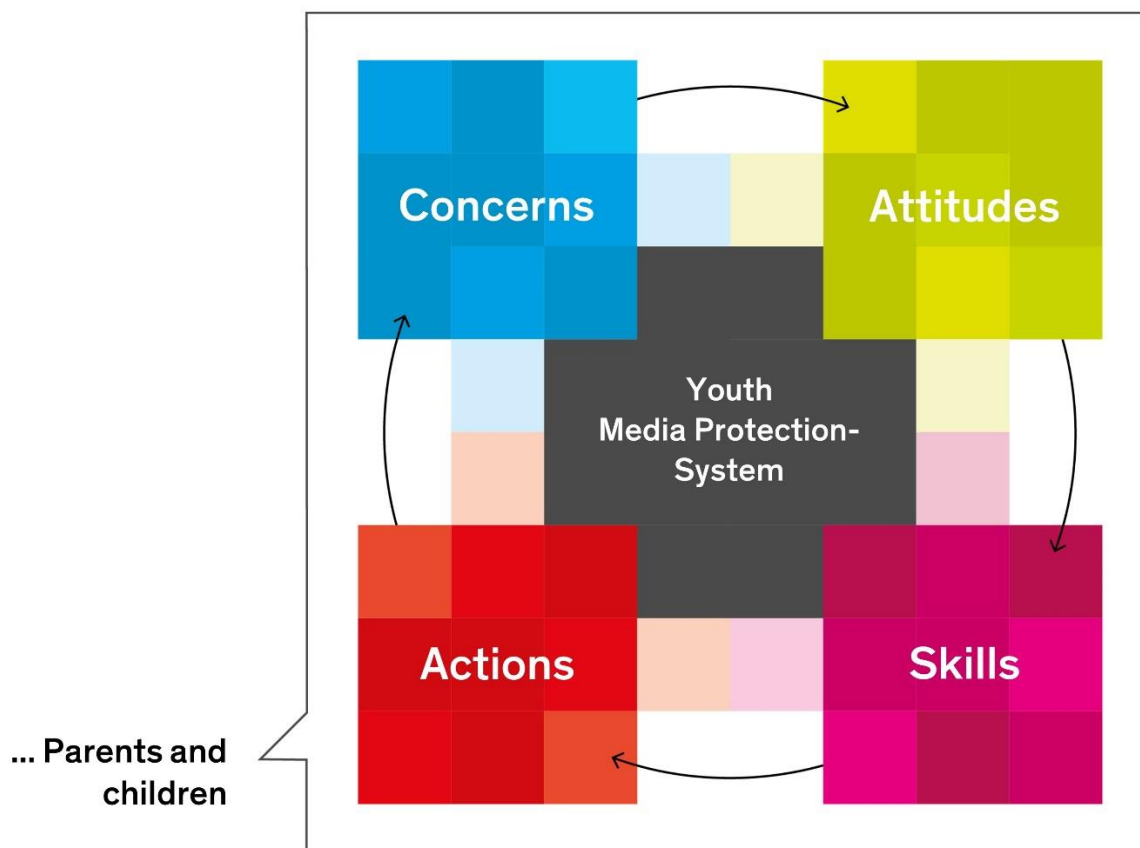
This study is a repetition of the representative survey of parents and their children in Germany from 2017 (Brügger et al. 2017). It allows for comparisons over a period marked by significant changes in online platforms and services and the contexts of everyday media

¹ Brügger, Niels; Dreyer, Stephan; Gebel, Christa; Lauber, Achim; Materna, Georg; Müller, Raphaela; Schober, Maximilian; Stecher, Sina (2022): Hazard atlas. Growing up digitally. Thinking from the child. Future-proof action. Updated and expanded 2nd edition. Published by: Federal Centre for Child and Youth Media Protection.



life. The COVID-19 pandemic increased the importance of online media for social participation among 9-16-year-olds. In addition, legal changes, such as the reform of the federal Youth Protection Act reform in Germany in 2021, put online media use risks, social participation importance, and the relevance of youth media protection under the spotlight. To reflect these developments, the questionnaire was revised to capture the tensions between safety and participation better. New questions were added to deepen the understanding of the respondents' attitudes and activities and updated questions on technical youth media protection. However, questions on the knowledge of the complex system of youth media protection were not included compared to the 2017 questionnaire.

Figure 1: Youth media protection-related concerns, attitudes, skills and actions from the perspective of parents, children and young people





The Youth Media Protection Index 2022 was commissioned by the German Association for Voluntary Self-Regulation of Digital Media Service Providers (FSM) and conducted by the JFF – Institute for Media Education in Research and Practice and the Leibniz Institute for Media Research | Hans-Bredow-Institut (HBI). The focus lies on the online use of adolescents, the concerns of parents, children and adolescents, and their perspectives on the actors and measures of current youth media protection.

The Youth Media Protection Index's empirical foundation stems from a survey of 805 internet-using children and young people aged between 9 and 16. Additionally, the parent who considers themselves responsible for the child's online use or education was also interviewed. The data collection was undertaken by GIM – Gesellschaft für innovative Marktforschung mbH between March 7 and May 1, 2022. A mostly consistent questionnaire enables a comparison of data from the 2017 and 2022 studies, thereby identifying any changes. The following summary provides an overview of the key findings.

Concerns about online use

- As in 2017, the collected data indicates that children's and young people's online use remains a concern for parents: Over three-quarters of the parents cited at least one reason for concern in the initial (open) question. However, compared to 2017, the proportion of children and adolescents mentioning at least one concern has dropped to 44 percent.
- Parents primarily focus on *contact and content risks*, followed by *concerns about excessive screen time* and *potentially negative consequences* for the child, as well as adolescents' *problematic behaviour* and *potential cost traps*. Adolescents rank their concerns differently, with issues related to the *conduct of (other) adolescents* (most notably, *'bullying'*) taking the forefront. This is followed by worries about *unpleasant interactions* and *potential financial* as well as *negative personal consequences of online use*.
- Compared to 2017, the number of encounters with certain risks has (significantly) increased in most cases – a fact that stands out. The prevalence has decreased only for two of the queried risks.



Attitudes towards the protection of minors from harmful media

- The majority of parents and children still consider the protection of children and young people from harmful media to be more important than unrestricted access to all online content. However, this majority is smaller than it was five years ago. Therefore, the opportunity of participation, in the sense of free access to online offerings, has also gained greater importance for children and young people.
- Most parents and children agree with the surveyed measures intended to protect minors online. However, for many of those measures, the level of approval has diminished compared to 2017. This fluctuation is, in some cases, different for specific age groups. This same age-dependent trend also applies to the opinion that children and young people are best protected when they understand how to protect themselves.
- Compared to five years ago, parents exhibit more confidence in assessing technical measures. Both parents and children deem these strategies beneficial, particularly for younger children. However, they perceive their protective effect as being limited.
- Parents and children agree on who is or should be responsible for protecting minors from harmful media. Parents are regarded as the first line of defence, but the responsibility should not rest solely on their shoulders. Many respondents believe that media providers, politicians, regulatory authorities, and schools should also be responsible for youth media protection.

Youth protection-related **knowledge and online skills**

- Parents' and children's assessments of their own and each other's skills in navigating online media are similar. Both parents and children perceive younger children as having lower skills than parents, while older children (from approximately 13 years onward) view themselves and are viewed as more competent.
- Just over half of the parents surveyed (55 %) rate their ability to ensure their child's safe online use as good or very good. Parents of girls rate themselves slightly higher in this regard than parents of boys.
- From around the age of 13 or 14, children rank their ability to cope with negative online experiences as superior to their parents' competency to support them.



- Only a minority of parents and adolescents know and use support services or complaint and reporting centres. For instance, merely a quarter of parents are informed about where to report or complain about online services. Overall, parental knowledge of support services and hotlines has decreased since 2017.
- 60 percent of children report knowing whom they would turn to concern negative online experiences.

Actions to protect minors from harmful media

- Parental protection is perceived as a key component of the German youth media protection system. However, compared to 2017, parents' engagement with children aged eleven and over has declined, showcasing their conflict between the orientation towards protection and participation.
- Parents mainly rely on rules regarding content and time, compliance with age ratings (especially for younger children), and discussions about online use (especially for older children). Notably, the surveyed parents' activities typically lessen when children age 13 to 14 years, sometimes even earlier.
- Parents utilise technical protection options mainly for their youngest children. One third of parents actively seek information about online risks and how to prevent them. Interestingly, 31 percent of parents permit their children to use online services they perceive as risky to prevent them from being excluded from desirable contacts or content.
- Disparities between parents and children are evident in the experience of using offers and services. Although parents use social media more than in 2017, they are largely unfamiliar with online games, gaming apps, and certain social media services like TikTok and Snapchat, which are popular among children and young people.

Challenges and needs for action

The Youth Media Protection Index survey findings reveal children and parents' concerns, attitudes, skills, and media-educational actions. These insights paint a detailed picture that raises pertinent questions and underscores the need for action. Notably, certain contradictions in the results highlight ongoing conflicts and challenges:



- Despite parents identifying numerous high risks, the survey shows decreased media education activities and information-seeking behaviours. This points to a recurring theme throughout the report of parental conflicts between protective measures and fostering participation.
- The conflicts are not coincidental; they emerge from new ways of media use among children and teenagers, such as communicative and interactive forms of use and the self-production of media content. These activities offer numerous positive opportunities but also expose children and young people to potential risks.

Strategies of parents and children: Embracing challenges or conceding defeat?

- Notably, as these changes unfold and current protective measures persist, parents' acceptance is declining, and their overall educational activities in this area have waned. Does this indicate that existing measures of youth media protection are inadequate and need to be more appropriate? Or could this be a sign of parental resignation in the face of novel requirements, social media offerings, and complex risks? The fact that parents do not relegate responsibility to third parties but continue to see themselves as (also) responsible counters the interpretation of "overwhelmed resignation" of parents. In addition, the interviewees have a stronger affiliation with protective measures than they did five years ago.
- The view of parents that others also bear responsibility, who, in their opinion, are not (yet) fulfilling their responsibilities in the best possible way, implies that parents might not be sufficiently aware of or able to utilise the available protections and support in their everyday parenting. Most parents want to do more but feel they need to be adequately supported or supported in the right places.
- To verify the above interpretations, further surveys – predominantly qualitative ones – would be necessary. These could explore the needs of parents and adolescents regarding youth media protection.
- The prevailing attitude favouring participation can serve as a starting point for educating parents and children. They can be instructed on how protective measures function and how these can be used to ensure worry-free participation for the younger generation. This is particularly relevant for technical measures, which parents of younger age groups increasingly adopt. The high esteem for technical solutions, especially for younger children, is echoed in the explanations for parental and child complacency stemming from their trust in these technical solutions.



A paradigm shift in youth media protection is imperative.

- The survey results make it clear: Germany is on the cusp of a significant change. Rising parental concerns combined with diminishing parental action in media education is dangerous, as it can trigger a vicious cycle that will be difficult to break. The inadequate knowledge of parents and children about reporting and support services is also disheartening, showing a need for intervention.
- The evolution of risks necessitates a corresponding transformation in protection concepts against communication and interaction risks: carefree participation is no longer guaranteed merely through provider-side access restrictions. In particular, it now requires features and tools for improved self-protection and measures for accompanying educational activities. For instance, it could be achieved technically via parental control functions combined with approaches of *supportive design* or through enhanced parental education and support offerings.
- The role of parents in youth media protection is shifting and gaining more importance. The new (German) legal framework calls for an even higher level of parental responsibility and accountability. However, it only indirectly and inconsistently prescribes support tasks for parents and children, or such duties are yet to be assigned and implemented in measures.

Do not leave them alone, but support and involve them!

- Given the survey results, the time to assist parents and children in navigating the complex challenges is *now*. A legal framework has been established for protecting minors from harmful media in Germany. Yet, substantial work lies ahead: implementing the paradigmatically changed tasks.
- It is crucial to offer **parents** detailed, accessible information about emerging online risks and potential hazards of various platforms and services. Awareness raising and education should include information on the possibilities and limitations of technical protection measures, along with guidance for participatory media education and support in everyday media life.
- For **children and adolescents**, the expansion of initiatives and educational opportunities that explain potential risks and protection options, promote resilience and coping strategies, and offer age-appropriate support for designing and using protective functions as well as preventive measures is needed.



- First and foremost, **media education experts** focussing on schools and extracurricular education are called upon to do this, as many have already adjusted their offerings to new risks and protection approaches.
- In addition, there are challenges for **providers**: There is a need for (even) more accessible communication, necessarily in cooperation with competitors and media education institutions. They must be more receptive to the concerns of parents and children and their desire for cross-service configurations. Technical protection and support approaches must be linked with parents' educational activities and work reliably, but they cannot be the sole pillar of contemporary youth media protection. More systematic cooperation with prevention, counselling and support services, and product development involving parents and children is desirable.
- Overall, **policy initiatives** must acknowledge that stakeholders have limited resources for the tasks at hand. If legislation aims to structurally change and expand protection approaches – putting parents in an even more central role and empowering children and young people to protect themselves – this must be reflected in the resources of stakeholder groups assigned with support and advisory functions.

A fundamental reorientation is required: focus on enabling, not restricting!

Beyond the legal paradigm shift in youth media protection, which focuses on carefree participation, *a modern support* should prioritise enabling over prohibition. It should provide supportive strategies for children's and parents' media engagement and educational behaviours.

Child and youth media protection governance demands network responsibility

Modern protective strategies in youth media protection cannot be imposed by politicians or providers; they must be accepted and utilised by parents, children, and adolescents. Hence, incorporating their perspectives is essential. Collaborative development, implementation, and evaluation of solutions are pivotal, especially for service and platform providers with relevance to the protection of minors.

Monitor developments and changes

To what extent can such a fundamental reorientation happen in the coming years? What new forms of cooperation can emerge during such a process? Which actors will be constructively



involved in the implementation of new approaches to protection? All this remains to be seen. A third survey for a Youth Media Protection Index in five years could reveal how all stakeholders, including parents, children and young people, have responded to these challenges and their impact on concerns, attitudes, skills and actions.

Research design

The target group of the study were households in Germany with at least one internet-using child aged 9 to 16, plus a parent who is most knowledgeable about that child's online activity. The quota of the sample was a) by the age of the child (equal number of interviews per year group), b) by gender of the child (half girls and half boys per year group) and c) by Nielsen area for equal coverage of the federal states in Germany.

A standardised questionnaire was used, which included an open-ended question about concerns related to the child's online use; the answers were categorised afterwards. The parent and child questions were formulated and structured mainly into four areas: concerns, attitudes, skills, and actions. The interview was conducted as a face-to-face CAPI (*computer-assisted personal interview*). One interview lasted about 30 minutes.

The survey ran from March 7 to May 1, 2022, involving 805 households. The range of variation at the total sample level is +/-3 percent.

GIM – Gesellschaft für innovative Marktforschung mbH carried out the survey.

Basic information on the sample

The parents we interviewed ranged from 28 to 61 years, with more than half being between 40 and 49 years and an average age of 41. Three-quarters of them are female. Fewer than 10 percent have a lower secondary school leaving certificate or no school leaving certificate. In contrast, about two-thirds have an intermediate (secondary school without Abitur), and nearly a quarter have higher educational qualifications. Among these parents, 13 percent raise their child alone or separately from their partner.



The children surveyed have an equal distribution of age and gender. Half of them have siblings, with a quarter having older siblings. Almost all (99 %) attended school at the time of the survey: 22 percent in primary school, 3 percent in lower secondary school, 28 percent in secondary modern school, 30 percent in grammar school, and 16 percent in district/comprehensive school.

The **Youth Media Protection Index 2022** was initiated by the FSM and conducted by the Leibniz Institute for Media Research | Hans Bredow Institute and the JFF - Institute for Media Education in Research and Practice.

Further information including a presentation of the study results as well as the full report (in German) can be found online at: www.fsm.de/en/index

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