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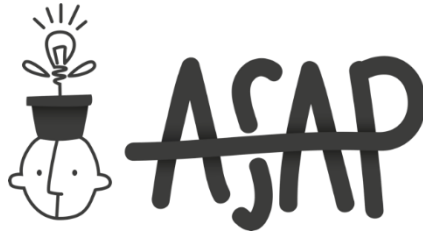


ASAP



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A Systemic Approach to social media and pre-adolescents through thinking skills education
Grant Agreement No. 2022-1-IT02-KA220-SCH-000090043



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Short Description	This report presents the results of desk research conducted in Italy within the ASAP project. It explores the complex relationship between pre-adolescents and digital/social media, with particular attention to cyberbullying, online risks and digital wellbeing. In addition to analysing statistical data and national research findings, the report highlights good practice initiatives, legislative frameworks, and strategies aimed at enhancing digital literacy and fostering safer, more responsible media use among young people in Italy.

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Executive Summary

The Italy Desk Research Report, developed within the Erasmus+ project *ASAP – A Systemic Approach to social media and pre-adolescents through thinking skills education*, provides an overview of the relationship between preadolescents and digital media in the Italian context. Below, the main insights are summarised according to the structure of the report.

1) Statistical Data

Official statistical sources do not provide data on users under 16, as social media platforms do not allow data collection or targeted advertising for this age group. The most comprehensive national overview comes from We Are Social – Digital 2023: Italy, which reports very high levels of internet and social media use among the general population but cannot directly describe the behaviours of preadolescents. For this reason, available information on Italian 11–13-year-olds relies primarily on academic and research studies.

Digennaro’s study (2022), conducted by the University of Cassino and Southern Lazio, directly examines the digital experiences of 11–13-year-olds. It confirms the near-universal use of social media among preadolescents (88%) and highlights the role of image editing, peer comparison and online validation in shaping body image and self-perception at a very early age.

The Digital Wellbeing – Schools (2018) Survey shows that most adolescents received their first personal smartphone during preadolescence (often at 10–12 years). Early ownership is associated with more pervasive use in later years and higher risk of problematic or addictive behaviours. Differences also emerge according to family education level: the higher the parents’ education, the later children receive a smartphone.

The EURES report (2021), although focused on older adolescents, provides important indicators for defining “problematic smartphone use,” showing that over 80% of young people display risk factors related to digital overuse, emotional regulation, compulsive checking and online dependency.

Together, these studies underline the strong link between smartphone access, social media use and wellbeing, and offer concepts and indicators useful for training and research activities.

2) National research and projects on social media and preadolescents

Three major initiatives offer relevant evidence for ASAP because they include preadolescents among their focus groups and propose educational pathways that can be adapted to schools:

- Digital Wellbeing – Schools, which couples data collection with tested tools for teachers on digital skills and citizenship.
- EU Kids Online, providing a European comparative overview of online practices, risks and skills among children aged 9–16.
- Duplicate bodies: social media use among under 14s, which explores how preadolescents build identity online, the role of image manipulation, and the discrepancy between “real” and “edited” bodies.

These research projects combine empirical data with training interventions, offering models that can inspire the design of educational tools.

3) Good practice examples

The Italian context shows how legislation can actively shape schools' readiness to address digital citizenship and online safety. Two laws have been particularly influential in creating an institutional environment that welcomes projects such as ASAP:

- Law 71/2017 on bullying and cyberbullying requires every school to appoint a designated reference teacher, develop prevention strategies, and collaborate with families, law enforcement and external experts.
- Law 107/2015 identifies the development of students' digital skills, including the critical and aware use of social networks, as a national educational priority, thus encouraging schools to engage with innovative digital education proposals.

Schools are therefore expected to organise educational and cultural initiatives that help students become more aware and responsible digital citizens, while teachers are required to participate in continuous professional development. Although Law 107/2015 does not specify a fixed number of annual training hours, many schools define a minimum of around 25 hours per year, and teachers maintain autonomy in choosing accredited training opportunities.

To support schools, the Italian Ministry of Education provides training, tools, and a national database of "Good Practices", hosted on Piattaforma ELISA, which collects examples of effective interventions against bullying and cyberbullying. The 2021 MIUR Guidelines offer criteria for designing, selecting and evaluating good practices, and call for the establishment of school-based Anti-bullying Teams and Emergency Teams. These structures reinforce the systemic approach promoted by national legislation and make Italian schools particularly receptive to structured, research-based initiatives.

4) Legislation and regulations

The Italian regulatory framework governing minors' use of digital technologies is shaped by both European and national legislation. At EU level, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) establishes that digital services cannot be offered directly to children under 16, unless Member States set a lower threshold (but not below 13). Italy has set the minimum age at 14 years, meaning that, in principle, no child under 14 can lawfully open a social media account without parental consent. However, this rule is widely disregarded due to the absence of effective age-verification mechanisms: platforms typically require users to declare their age but not prove it. As a result, both underage access and adults impersonating minors remain common, limiting the protective effect intended by privacy legislation.

Italian law also addresses minors' legal responsibility online. Children under 14 are never criminally liable; those aged 14–18 may be prosecuted only if professionals certify that they understand and can will their actions. Regardless of criminal liability, parents and guardians are civilly responsible for damages caused by their children. This framework, structured around the legal concepts of imputability (*culpa in educando*, *culpa in vigilando*, and *culpa in organizzando*) highlights the shared responsibility of families and educational institutions.

Italy was also the first European country to adopt a dedicated law on cyberbullying: Law 71/2017. While representing a significant step, the law is still under revision, requiring further regulatory interventions. The law focuses primarily on prevention, education and early intervention, requiring all schools to appoint a cyberbullying reference teacher, establish procedures for internal reporting and response, and involve families when cases arise.

To support implementation of Law 71/2017, in 2021 the Ministry of Education issued updated Guidelines calling for the creation of school-level Anti-bullying Teams and Emergency Teams, integrating educational, disciplinary and support functions. The 2021 Guidelines also refer to Law 107/2015, which introduced, among the priority educational objectives, the development of students' digital skills, also aimed at a critical and aware use of social networks and media, as set out in the National Digital School Plan. Additional regulations relevant to digital literacy include Law 92/2019 on civic education, which explicitly incorporates digital citizenship and responsible online behaviour into the national curriculum.

In parallel with these legal measures, the national Safer Internet Centre Generazioni Connesse plays a key institutional role. Developed within the European "Better Internet for Kids" network, it provides schools with operational tools helping institutions translate legal obligations into concrete practices. Its guidelines, training modules and monitoring instruments complement national legislation and contribute to fostering safer digital environments for children.

Together, these measures create a comprehensive, though still evolving, regulatory and institutional environment that shapes the responsibilities and protections surrounding minors' digital lives.

5) National initiatives

In Italy, the educational offer on social media is not limited to cyberbullying prevention. There are many training offers that address digital skills more broadly, following the DigComp framework, giving a different response and perspective to the need for the protection of kids.

Added to the programmes already mentioned, the report also highlights:

- Patti Digitali, community-based agreements on shared digital rules for families and schools.
- Patente di smartphone, a structured educational pathway treating smartphone access as a "rite of passage."
- Parole O_Stili, promoting respectful communication through a widely used Manifesto.
- MEDIAEDU, the national network supporting media education.
- Giovani Ambasciatori (MOIGE), a peer-led programme against cyberbullying.
- Italian Data Protection Authority, which produces privacy and data protection materials for minors.
- Open the Box, focusing on disinformation, social media and AI.

The report also presents initiatives developed by the ASAP partnership:

- Fondazione Carolina, a national reference point for child online protection, with initiatives such as the Rescue Team (cyber emergency service), TRACeD (gender-based cyberviolence), MinoriOnline.com (information platform for parents), Connessioni Delicate (paediatric guidance on digital health) and CyberJoy (online wellbeing campaign).

- Pepita, provider of “Io clicco positivo” and “Solo per te”, educational programmes on digital environments, awareness, relationships and affectivity.
- Le Nius, through the Digital Bees programme, supporting media and digital literacy through inquiry-based learning.

Conclusions

Across all chapters, several themes emerge as particularly relevant for ASAP:

- Statistical data and infographics can support teachers’ and parents’ training with evidence.
- The legal distinction between different forms of responsibility (*culpa in educando*, *in vigilando*, *in organizzando*) offers a valuable framework for school-family reflection.
- Problematic media use and early smartphone access are widespread and should be addressed through targeted training.
- The report suggests developing a definition of “problematic media use,” to be refined through field research.
- Laws on cyberbullying and digital literacy provide an enabling environment for school interventions but highlight gaps in enforcement (e.g. age verification).
- Teachers’ mandatory professional development supports the feasibility of ASAP and similar training initiatives.
- Children could benefit from clear awareness of internet crimes and the civil consequences of harmful behaviour.

Taken together, these findings provide a solid foundation for designing ASAP training activities, tools and recommendations tailored to the Italian context.

Introduction

This report, developed within the scope of the Erasmus+ project *ASAP – A Systemic Approach to social media and pre-adolescents through thinking skills education*, aims to provide a concise and comprehensive overview of the intersection between pre-adolescents, digital media, and the Italian context. It collects and examines data from studies and initiatives conducted over the last years seeking to analyse the evolving role of digital media in the lives of pre-adolescents. This report provides the context analysis of available data, research, good practices and strategies for dealing with social media uses and misuses in the school context, educational programmes and activities to prevent and combat cyberbullying, and enhance digital and social media literacy among pre-adolescents in Italy.

By examining existing research data, this report aims to equip readers with a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding pre-adolescents' interactions with digital media in the Italian context. It also aims to provide valuable insights to contribute to the ongoing discussion on pre-adolescents, digital media and online safety, presenting a basis for informed decision-making and critical reflection.

The report provides structured and relevant information on the following topics: 1) statistical data, 2) national research on social media and (pre)adolescents, 3) good practice examples, 4) legislation and regulation, 5) national initiatives, and conclusions.

1. Statistical Data

This chapter draws on four main sources to present and examine statistical data related to young people's relationship with digital technologies and social media in Italy. First, official data on internet and social media use, as reported in the *Digital 2023: Italy* report (We Are Social, 2023). Second, a survey conducted by Digennaro (2022) and the University of Cassino and Southern Lazio on social media use among preadolescents. Third, the project "Benessere Digitale – Scuole" [Digital Wellbeing – Schools] (Gui, Gerosa, Vitullo, & Losi, 2020), which investigated the relationship between smartphone ownership, digital competence, and wellbeing among secondary school students. Finally, the project "Smartphone addiction: vissuto dei giovani e strumenti di contrasto" [Smartphone addiction: experiences of young people and contrast tools] (EURES, 2021), which combined survey data, narrative accounts, and awareness-raising initiatives. Together, these sources provide complementary perspectives that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of young people's access to digital technologies, their patterns of use, and the risks of problematic behaviours, with implications for both education and wellbeing.

1.1. Digital 2023: Italy report

Recent data available on Internet users in Italy in the report *Digital 2023: Italy*, published by We Are Social (2023), shows that in January 2023, there were 50.78 million of internet users in Italy, and 43.90 million social media users, equating to 74.5% of the total population.¹

It is also reported that social media platforms from Meta dominate the ranking of the most used social platforms in Italy: WhatsApp above all, with 89% of people aged 16 to 64 who claim to use the app, followed by Facebook and Instagram, with 78% and 73% respectively. At the foot of the podium is the other messaging app from Meta, Messenger, used by more than one in two people, and in turn followed by other messaging platforms, with Telegram being the most used platform outside the Meta ecosystem, followed by TikTok, which 38% of people aged between 16 and 64 say they use.

According to this report, the main reasons why people visit and participate in the conversation on social media (Figure 1) are related to getting information, staying in touch with loved ones, spending spare time (all above 40%). Just behind these reasons are the search for inspiration on things to do or products to buy, and the search for content, such as videos (both items close to 30%).

Official data on access to the internet and use of social media platforms by preadolescents (age 11-14) are not available from *Digital 2023: Italy*. In fact, the report analyses users from 16 years of age and above, because the age limit for accessing different social media platforms doesn't allow for an analysis of the data of users under 16 years of age. Additionally, most data used for this report come

¹ The report uses different sources of data from third party providers (official platforms of social media, national reports, Eurostat, Google, GSMA Intelligence, etc.), then extrapolates and combines them to create new data points. For instance, numbers on internet users most of the time represent active use of the internet within the past 3 months. For social media, numbers reported are especially taken from social media platforms: these numbers are typically based on active user accounts and may not represent unique individuals. That is due to issues of duplicate accounts and non-human accounts (business, pets, music bands, etc.). See also here for reference of data and methodology: <https://datareportal.com/data-sources>

from the ad planning tools of top social media platforms, that don't allow ads to be directed towards populations below 16 years of age.

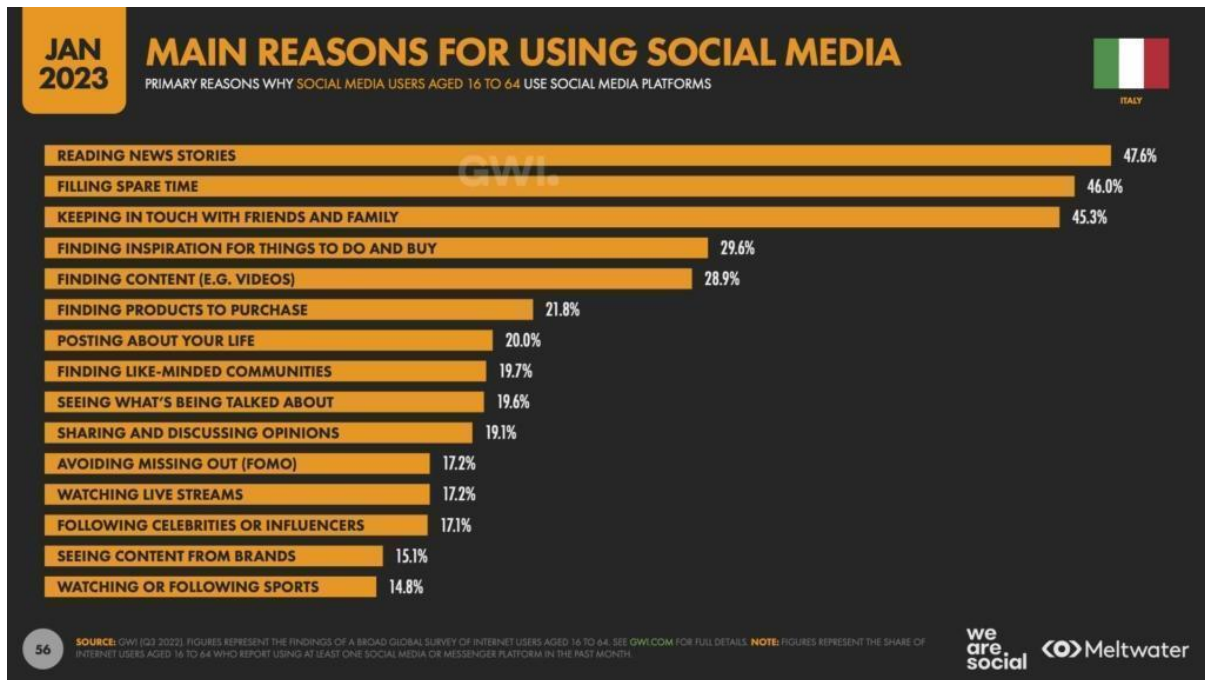


Figure 1: Main reasons for using social media in Italy as of January 2023 (Source: We Are Social, 2023, slide 56)

1.2. University of Cassino survey on the use of social media

A recent study from Digennaro (2022) and the University of Cassino and Southern Lazio, Department of Human, Social and Health Sciences, is based on a research involving 2378 boys and girls aged between 11 and 13, about their use of social media. According to Digennaro's findings, 88% of the interviewees, without significant variations based on gender, declare that they regularly use social media, and this despite the age limit for accessing sharing and messaging platforms being set by law at 14 years.² The percentage of users rises to 100% for thirteen-year-olds; additionally, 4 out of 10 preadolescents claim to have a public profile on social media in Italy.

Drawing on the broader findings of Digennaro's study, the survey also offers valuable insights into the ways preadolescents integrate social media practices into everyday self-presentation and peer interaction. Beyond the high prevalence of social media use among 11- to 14-year-olds, a particularly relevant aspect concerns the widespread adoption of filters and image-editing applications: more than half of respondents reported modifying images of their own bodies, with significantly higher rates among girls. These practices are closely linked to mechanisms of social validation, such as monitoring likes and views, and to constant appearance-based comparison with peers. The three indices

² According to Legislative Decree No. 101 of 10 August 2018 [Decreto legislativo 10 agosto 2018, n. 101], which updates the Italian Privacy Code and implements the EU General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679), minors may validly provide their own consent to the processing of personal data – and therefore register independently on online platforms, including social media – only if they are at least 14 years old.

developed in the study (virtualME, virtualPEERS and virtualVIP) further illustrate how preadolescents' engagement with digital platforms increasingly structures their sense of self, social belonging and exposure to aesthetic norms. Correlations between these indices and various dimensions of body satisfaction indicate that more intensive engagement with image-based social media activities is associated with heightened sensitivity to body-related feedback and with indicators of dissatisfaction and discomfort.

A second, particularly salient contribution of the study is the identification of a form of dualism between the real and virtual body, which highlights how preadolescents may come to experience a discrepancy between their offline appearance and the idealised images disseminated online. Notably, 44.3% of respondents reported having wished to look in real life as they appear when using filters on social media, signalling an early internalisation of the edited virtual body as a desirable reference point. This tendency is more pronounced among girls and is significantly associated with lower body satisfaction and greater engagement in appearance comparison processes. These findings underscore the importance of addressing how platforms shape preadolescents' self-evaluations and body image development, particularly at an age when identity formation is highly malleable. The results lend strong support to the need for integrated strategies in schools and families that combine digital and media literacy with positive body image education and emotional wellbeing support, as well as for a broader reflection on platform-level responsibilities in mitigating risks related to image manipulation and appearance-focused interactions.

1.3. Digital Wellbeing – Schools: survey on the use of smartphones

Since access to social media seems to be strongly related to the use of smartphones (Smahel et al., 2020),³ the findings of a survey carried out in 2018 within the project "Benessere Digitale – Scuole" [Digital Wellbeing – Schools],⁴ reported by Gui, Gerosa, Vitullo, and Losi (2020), are relevant to our purposes.

The survey involved a sample of 3600 boys and girls aged between 15 and 16; they were students of all the second classes of 18 upper secondary schools in the provinces of Milan and Monza-Brianza in the Lombardy Region. The objective was to explore the relationship between the age at which kids get their first personal smartphone and some aspects related to the socio-psychological wellbeing of kids: school performance in Italian and mathematics, the use of digital media, and digital competence.

The questionnaires asked about the age at which they received their first smartphone, their current perception of problematic use of this tool and their general degree of satisfaction with their lives, using internationally recognised scales. Their digital competence was then tested with an ad-hoc test and, finally, the data collected were combined with the students' results in the sample at the INVALSI tests⁵ in May 2018, carried out in conjunction with the *Digital Wellbeing – Schools* survey.

³ According to the EU Kids Online 2020 report, kids go online every day, mostly via the "anywhere, anytime connectivity" of smartphones (in 80% of the cases).

⁴ See <https://www.benesseredigitale.eu/>

⁵ The INVALSI test is a national standardised assessment in Italy that measures students' competences in subjects such as Italian, mathematics, and English. It is used to monitor learning outcomes, evaluate the quality of the education system, and provide comparable data across regions and school types. The test is developed by the National Institute for the Evaluation

The results show how the age of getting a personal smartphone varies according to the different personal and sociodemographic characteristics surveyed. Most surveyed students received their first personal smartphone at the age of 11 (28.7%) or 12 (29.2%). The earliest arrival concerns 21% of cases, who claim to have obtained it at an age below 11 (13% at 10 and 8.4% at 9 or below). Finally, students who got the device later, i.e. at the age of 13 or more, account for 20.6 % of the sample.

An initial analysis of the distribution by gender (Figure 2) shows that girls receive the smartphone slightly earlier. In fact, 9.1 % of girls get it at the age of 9 or less, compared to 7.5 % of boys. In contrast, only 18% of girls receive it from 13 years onwards, compared to 23% of boys. These differences – albeit small – can be related to the analyses carried out in the same project on the problematic use of smartphones, in which girls show higher levels than boys on all related scales.

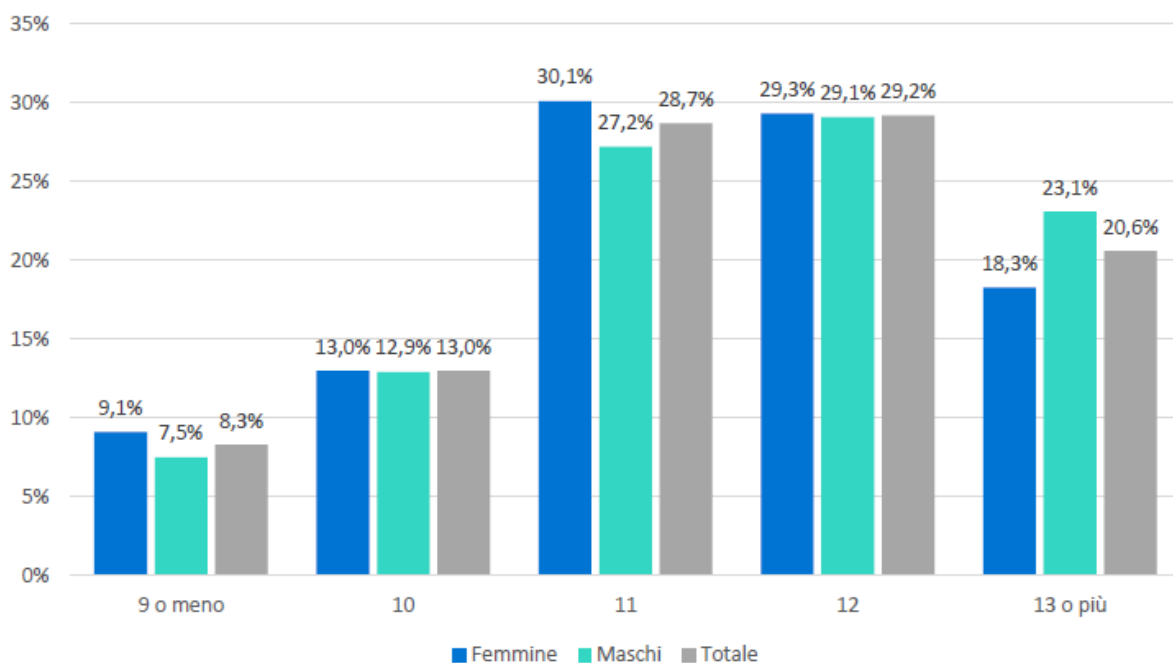


Figure 2: Age of first smartphone ownership by gender (in blue: girls; in light blue: boys) and total (in grey) (Source: Gui et al., 2020)

Figure 3 shows the distribution of the age of first smartphone ownership according to the educational qualification of the respondents' parents. As the parents' educational level increases, the moment in which kids get their personal smartphone is delayed. While 12% of parents with a lower secondary school education hand over the smartphone to their children at the age of 9 or earlier, this is only the case for 8% of parents with an upper secondary school education and 7% of those with a university degree. Now, suppose we add up the percentages for handing over before the age of 11; in that case, we see that while this occurred in 29% of cases among students with parents with a lower qualification, the percentage drops to 18% among students from families with a university degree.

of the Education and Training System (Istituto nazionale per la valutazione del sistema educativo di istruzione e di formazione), from which its name is derived.

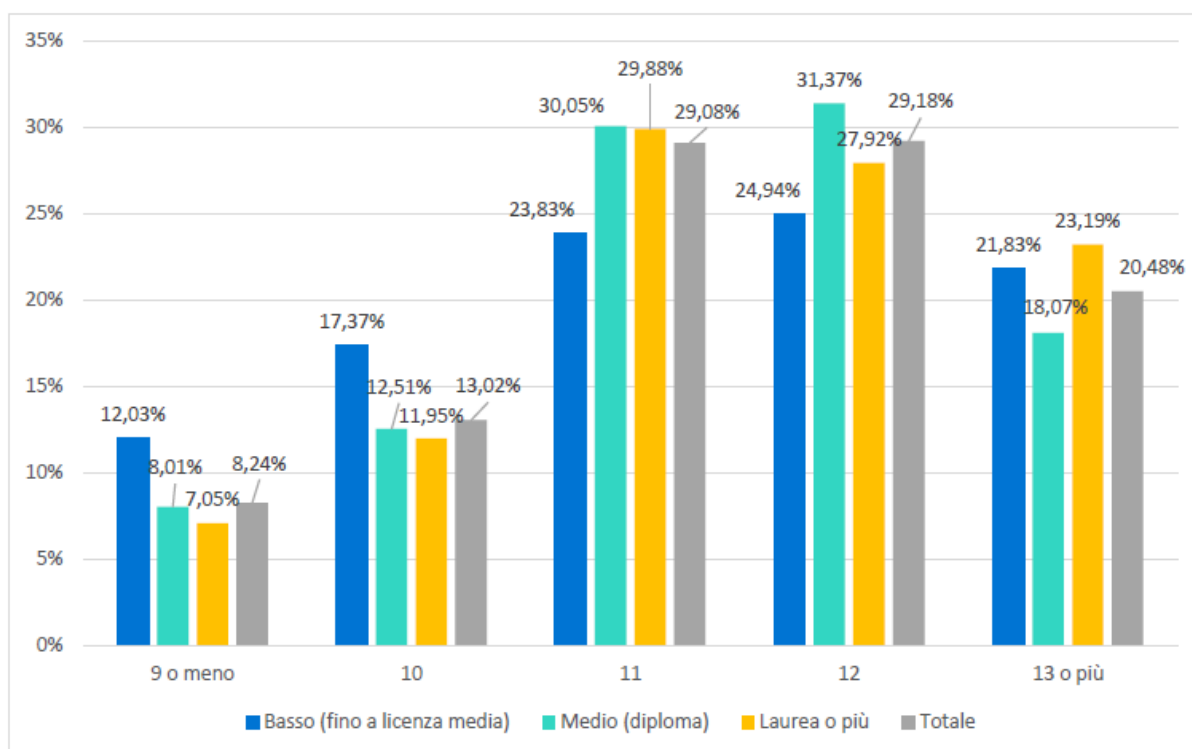


Figure 3: Age of first smartphone ownership by family education level. In blue: low level, parents with lower secondary school education or lower; in light blue: medium level, parents with upper secondary school education; in yellow: parents with a Bachelor/Master's degree or higher; in grey: total sample. (Source: Gui et al., 2020)

With regard to problematic media use (pervasiveness and addiction), the early ownership of the smartphone seems to be associated with both greater pervasiveness of the tool in later years and greater exposure to the risk of 'addiction' to it.

In order to measure students' pervasive use of smartphones, the Smartphone Pervasiveness Scale was used. The scale is constructed by asking respondents how often they use smartphones at social and physiological crucial moments of the day: at night, in the morning as soon as they wake up, at dinner with the family, with friends, while doing their homework, at school during class, while watching a film or a TV show. Therefore, a higher score is associated with more pervasive smartphone use on the resulting scale.

The Smartphone Addiction Scale (Kwon et al., 2013) was used to quantify the risk of smartphone 'addiction'; the test has connections with the Internet Addiction Test (Young, 1998). This index is defined by a battery of 10 items focusing on the respondent's perceptions of problems arising from smartphone use and their effects on everyday life. The measure extracted does not therefore summarise the onset of a severe pathology (after all, 'smartphone addiction', like 'internet addiction', is not recognised as a psychiatric pathology), but simply quantifies the manifestations of discomfort in the use of this device that have similar characteristics to those of other internationally recognised pathological addictions (such as, for example, gambling). Again, the higher the score on the resulting index, the greater the risk of actual problematic smartphone use.

As Figure 4 shows, the later one has access to a smartphone of one's own, the less pervasive its use and the risk of addiction over the years. 15/16-year-olds who received the device from age 11 onwards register levels of pervasiveness ranging from 7.6 to 10 points lower than those who were given it at age 9 or earlier. In general, the largest gap is between the kids who received their smartphone at the age of 9 or younger, who scored an average pervasiveness score of 49.8 points, and those aged 13, who scored 38.2 points.

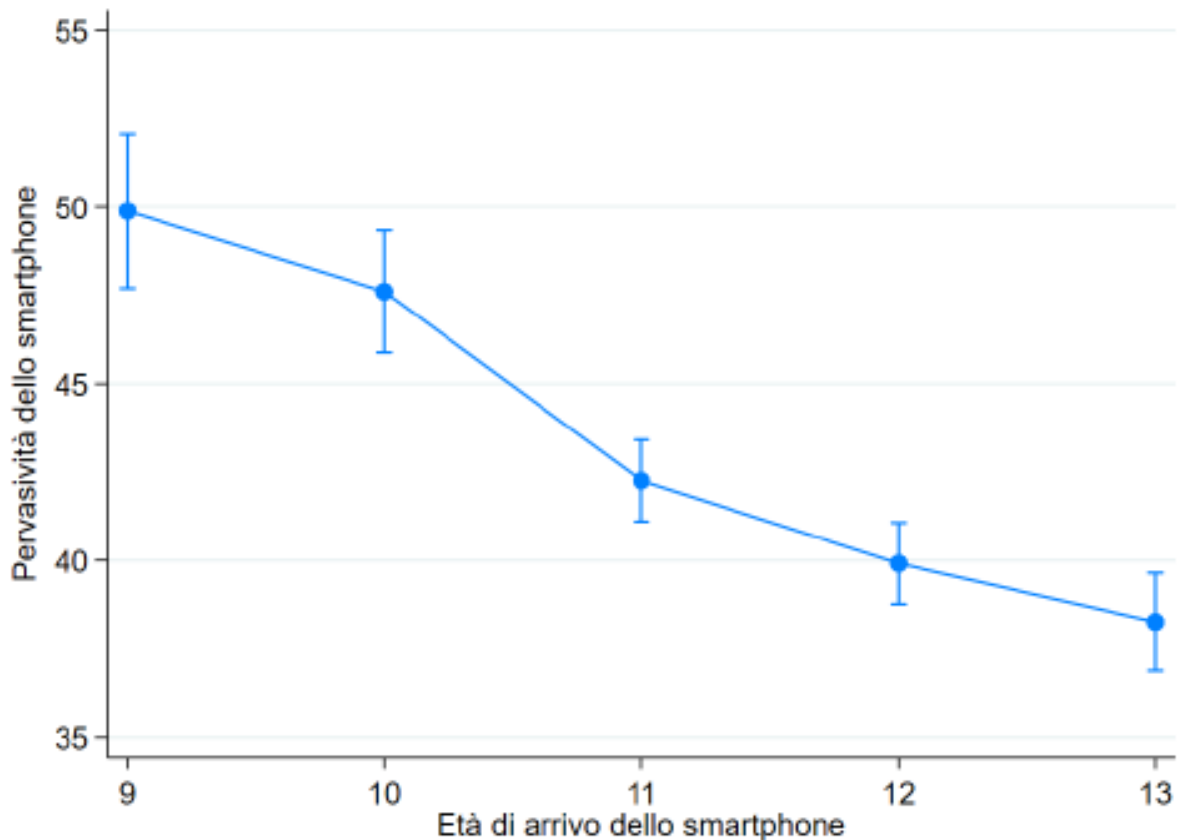


Figure 4: Effects of first smartphone ownership age (horizontal axis) on pervasiveness (vertical axis) (Source: Gui et al., 2020)

The same trend can also be observed with regard to addiction to the device (Figure 5): those who receive a smartphone around the age of 9 record an average score of 34.7, i.e. a risk of addiction that is around 8 points higher than those who receive it from the age of 13 onwards. Here again, we face a negative relationship between the risk of smartphone 'addiction' and the advancing age at which children receive it.

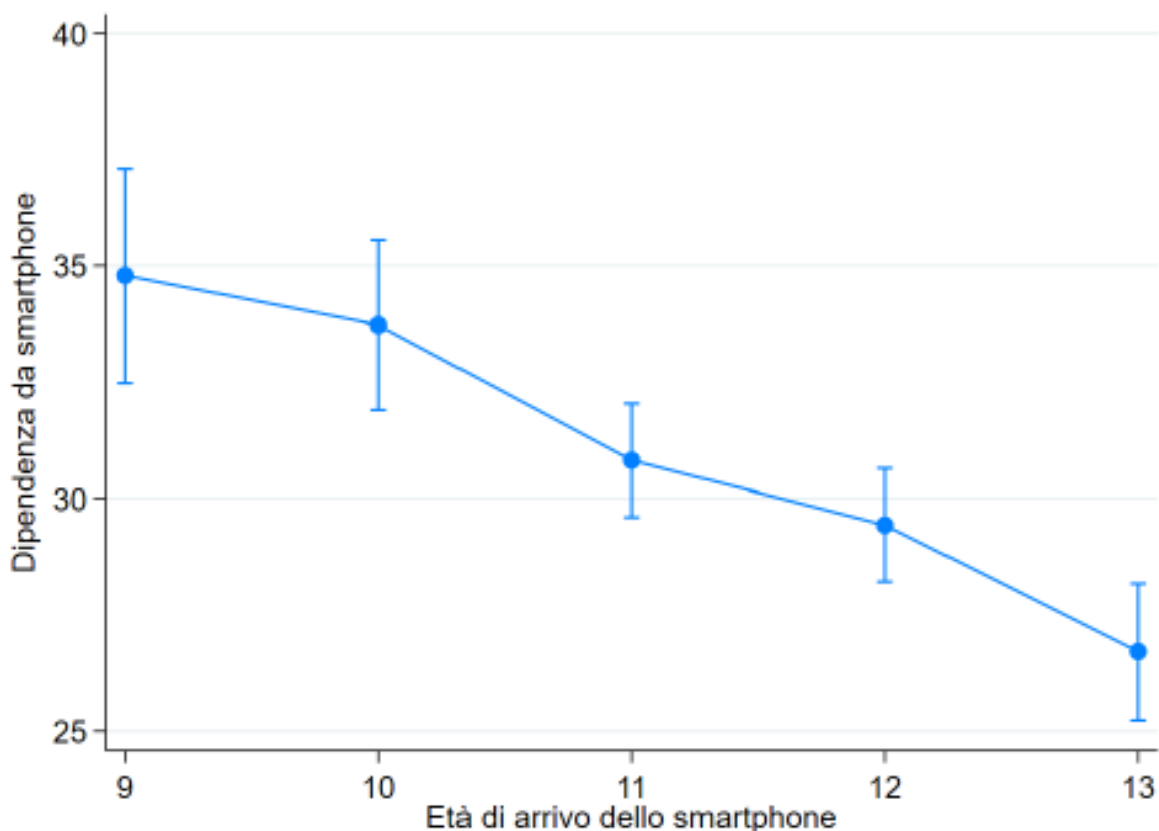


Figure 5: Effects of first smartphone ownership age (horizontal axis) on addiction (vertical axis) (Source: Gui et al., 2020)

1.4. EURES report on youth and smartphone addiction

The "Smartphone addiction: vissuto dei giovani e strumenti di contrasto" project [Smartphone addiction: experiences of young people and contrast tools] was carried out in 2021 by EURES Ricerche Economiche e Sociali [EURES Economic and Social Research] in collaboration with the Lazio Region and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies [Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali], and envisaged three research and intervention actions:

- sample survey among upper secondary school students (14-19 years old, ISCED 3) carried out in Rome in November-March 2021 (108 classes in 6 schools; over 1,800 students involved; 1,649 "valid" questionnaires);
- young people's short story about experiences related to online gaming, challenges or sexting, or, more generally, about the experience of cell phone addiction (600 stories collected and 100 selected and edited in the book);
- information, training and awareness-raising activities for 47 classes and about 900 students.

The survey shows that most young people, i.e. 54.5%, use the smartphone between 4 and 8 hours a day (30.2% from 4 to 6 hours and 24.3% from 6 to 8 hours a day), while over a quarter (25.4%) exceeds 8 hours. The report shows that 82% of young people are at risk of smartphone addiction.

The synthetic index of the risk of smartphone addiction places almost a quarter of the young people interviewed (22%) in the critical area of alert addiction, or in a "high risk" range, in particular:

- 77% of respondents check their smartphone before falling asleep;
- 72.2% believe using the smartphone to feel better when they are down in the dumps;
- 66.9% declare they use smartphones excessively, in spite of the acknowledgment of the adverse effects of smartphones use;
- 45.1% of the sample confesses that they are worried about calls or messages they might miss when they don't have the mobile phone at hand;
- 36.7% of young people cannot resist the urge to use their smartphone and 27.7% feel a sense of dissatisfaction, discomfort or irritability when being without a smartphone for a long time;
- 8.7% of the young people interviewed report physical or mental problems caused by excessive use of smartphones.

According to the EURES report (2021), among the main reasons that would explain the excessive use of mobile phones are young people indicate: fighting boredom, the possibility of feeling part of a group and being accepted by others, the inability to deprive oneself of own device, a desire to maintain high visibility on the web, and a lack of parental control.

The report also shows that the activities to which young people mainly engage are:

- Follow stories (on Instagram, YouTube, etc.): 133 minutes a day, rising to 153 among girls;
- Communicate with friends: 130 minutes, rising to 159 minutes in the female sample;
- Chat/message with your partner, confirming the centrality of the friendship sphere in this particular phase of life: 71 minutes;
- Listen to music: 113 minutes;
- Studying or doing research for school: 98 minutes, rising to 115 for girls and 81 for boys;
- Information on matters of personal interest: 66 minutes;
- Play online: 96 minutes for boys versus 31 for girls;
- Online shopping: 34 minutes;
- New acquaintances: 12.5 minutes.

2. National research and projects on social media and preadolescents

This section reviews three research initiatives that provide evidence and educational approaches relevant to preadolescents' use of social media. They were selected because they include under-14s among their target groups and offer training resources that align with the aims of the ASAP project. Together, these studies illustrate increasing attention to the risks and opportunities of digital engagement during preadolescence and show how research findings are being translated into practical tools for schools and educators.

2.1. Digital Wellbeing – Schools

[Benessere Digitale - Scuole](#) [Digital Wellbeing – Schools] is a project whose partnership is composed by Milano-Bicocca University, Fastweb S.p.A and Benesseredigitale.eu (Erasmus+). In May 2018, the project carried out a longitudinal survey on a sample of 3600 boys and girls aged between 15 and 16 described above (1.3).

The project is carried out as part of the “[Curricula digitali](#)” [Digital Curricula] programme of the Ministry of Education and involves a network of Italian lower and upper secondary schools (ISCED2 and ISCED3). The project offers teachers resources and tools for digital education. The proposed materials and contents can be used to carry out activities on media education and digital citizenship courses in teaching civic education in the classroom. It offers a scientifically validated digital competence test based on the DigComp 2.1 European framework, which teachers can administer to their students to assess their level of digital citizenship. The project also offers teachers the possibility of obtaining a certification from the University of Milan-Bicocca for 25 hours of training (which is the compulsory number of training hours each teacher must complete each year, see below 3.1).

2.2. EU Kids Online

[EU Kids Online](#) is an international research network set up in 2014 and funded by the European Commission's Better Internet for Kids programme. 19 European countries are represented in the network, including the ASAP countries. It seeks to enhance knowledge of European kids' online opportunities, risks and safety. It uses multiple methods to map children's and parents' experiences of the internet, in dialogue with national and European policy stakeholders. It regularly publishes a report related to a survey. Its last report, *EU Kids Online 2020: Survey results from 19 countries* (Smahel et al., 2020), maps the internet access, online practices, skills, risks and opportunities for children aged 9–16 in Europe.

2.3. Duplicate Bodies: Social media use among under 14s

The University of Cassino and Southern Lazio, Department of Social, Health and Human Sciences, under the guidance of Professor Simone Digennaro carried out in 2022-23 an in-depth study on the subject of social media and preadolescents, opening a scientific dialogue with 2378 boys and girls aged between 11 and 13 in some schools. They have recently published a research report *Corpi duplicati: l'uso dei social media tra gli under 14* [Duplicate bodies: social media use among under 14s] (Digennaro

& Iannaccone, 2023), and the research team has developed a training course for the schools where they have carried out research.

The training course for the school's teachers is based on the main findings of the research, and provides teachers with the following:

- a general introduction to social networks and their risks;
- identification and management of uncomfortable situations in the schools;
- tools and approaches for prevention of discomfort and risks with social media use (and misuse);
- instructions for developing educational paths promoting a positive use of social media.

3. Good practice examples

The school has also the task of educating and ensuring to all students to live in total serenity their path of growth and learning, with the support of the families and the educational institutions of the territory. As far as digital and civic education are concerned, teachers base their actions by drawing operational indications from Law 71/2017 on bullying and cyberbullying (described below in section 4). The first figure involved in this Law is the School Leader⁶ (SL), to whom the law delegates specific obligations and responsibilities.

In their capacity as head of the Institute, the SL is called to involve all members of the educating community in the fight against bullying and cyberbullying and ensure the implementation of the necessary interventions to combat it in all its manifestations, with preventive actions and with a strategy of attention, protection and education towards the minors involved, both in the position of victims and in that of crimes' perpetrators.

In collaboration with the bullying and cyberbullying reference teacher (established in compliance with Law 71/2017) or the cyberbullying team, the SL draws up a shared Regulation that provides sanctions inspired by restorative justice and support for victims. The disciplinary measures must have an educational function, be adequate and proportionate to the infringements, inspired by the principle of damage reparation and acquisition of awareness of the meaning of one's behaviour. The Regulation specifies also which are the competent bodies to provide sanctions and the relative procedure.

Through the SL, the school organises educational and cultural initiatives aiming to make students more aware and responsible in the digital field, and designs training activities on issues related to citizenship and legality education.

Some indications for the set up and definition of good practices are contained in the 2021 MIUR Guidelines for the prevention and contrast of bullying and cyberbullying, meant to give continuity to the Guidelines issued in October 2017 in relation with the Law 71/2017 on Cyberbullying and by Law 107/2015 (see section 4 below).

3.1. In practice: training and continuous updating

In order to promote and support processes of didactic and organizational innovation of the school, strengthen school autonomy and encourage the development of professional figures to support school autonomy and educational work, the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) establishes paths for the development of professionalism and skills for the activities of

⁶ In English, there are several expressions for referring to the person entitled with the legal responsibility for each school institute and often for the vision of the school they lead. We can find "Headmaster" or "School Head", "Principal", "School Manager" or "School Director". Some of these terms are linked to a national school system and therefore marked with a specific connotation we prefer to avoid. In the ASAP proposal and its Reports we use "School Leader", which is a neutral term with respect to variants in different English-speaking countries (see a Eurydice report using the term "School Leader": European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice, 2013. *Key Data on Teachers and School Leaders in Europe. 2013 Edition*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union). Also "School Head" seems to be a neutral term (see a Eurydice report using the term "School Head": European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2022. *Teachers' and school heads' salaries and allowances in Europe – 2020/2021. Eurydice Facts and Figures*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union). In Italian the official wording is "Dirigente scolastico", but we also speak of "Preside" and "Direttore".

planning, tutoring, accompaniment, orientation to the development of students' potential, aimed at teachers with collaborative assignments to support the organisational system of the school institution and school management.

The MIUR sets the areas of updating, but it is the School Leader within each institute who takes care of drafting the guidelines and also elaborating indications by inserting specific training proposals within the Three-Year Plan of the school training offer. In any case, the pivotal role within this system is constituted by the freedom of the teachers. In fact, they are free to attend external courses, provided they are offered by bodies accredited by the MIUR.

No state law imposes additional hours of work dedicated to training. Therefore, the training obligation for the teachers has to be fulfilled within the 40 hours/year dedicated to the activities of the class council. The compulsory, permanent and structural training of teachers, defined by paragraph 124 of Law 107/2015, has no annual or three-year time constraint.

The obligation of training and professional updating concerns all tenured teachers under contract in public institutions, whether part-time or full-time. It extends to all orders and degrees of education. It should be noted that it is the teachers themselves who voluntarily choose which course to enrol in and it becomes mandatory to make this choice for newly appointed teachers following the introduction of new regulations in application from the 2022/23 school year.

Although in fact Law 107/2015 does not define a fixed number of training hours for non-specialist teachers, many schools decide to have them attending a minimum of 25 hours/year of mandatory training/updating courses. These training/updating courses have the following general aims:

- Updating of competences in the fields of pedagogy and teaching methodologies and technologies (in continuation with the skills and knowledge acquired in the course of initial university training);
- Contribution to the improvement of the educational offer of the school where the teacher works.
- Acquisition, according to the teacher's choice, of the following specific contents:
 - Deepening of the specific contents of the teaching discipline;
 - Tools and techniques for planning and participation in national and European calls;
 - School governance: theory and practice;
 - Educational leadership;
 - Staff and system figures: technical-methodological, socio-relational, strategic training;
 - School inclusion in the classroom with disabled pupils;
 - Continuity and training and work orientation strategies;
 - Strengthening of skills in the assessment of pupils;
 - Application profiles of the national evaluation system of educational institutions;
 - Digital teaching techniques.

Starting from the 2023/24 school year, mandatory teacher training will be introduced in working hours focusing on digital skills and the critical and responsible use of digital tools. All teachers will be involved in the process of professional updating on digital skills and knowledge useful for carrying out teaching activities. At the moment, the MIUR has not yet detailed these training courses but has set aside 800

million euros (1230 euros/teacher) of the Next Generation EU for Italy fund⁷ at this purpose to be used by 2027.

3.2. In practice: the collection of good practices

MIUR has a [national database](#) dedicated to share examples of "Good Practices" for the fight against bullying and cyberbullying, in order to exchange knowledge of programs, projects and tools active at regional and local level. The database is hosted on Piattaforma ELISA, the e-learning platform for teachers on anti-bullying strategies (see 4.4 below). The "Good Practices" were selected by the Regional Integrated Working Groups within the [SIA Project](#)⁸.

Example 1:

Country	Province	Areas
ITALY	BOLZANO	Training courses
<p>TITLE: Updating courses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GOOD PRACTICE BECAUSE: In order to mature a sensitivity to the problem it is necessary to be trained to be able to recognize in time every act of bullying and cyberbullying. Training cannot be extemporaneous but continuous and updated over time. - REALISED BY: Interventions of external experts. - TARGETS: Teachers, Managers, Non-teaching staff, Families of students in primary and secondary school. - LEVEL OF PREVENTION: Promotion and positive development and universal prevention - DESCRIPTION: The intervention aims to give appropriate tools to bring out from invisibility the victims who, for shame, shyness or fear, after having suffered an act of bullying or cyberbullying, have holed up in a corner of shadow to avoid being detected and remain hidden; know how to recognize the victims' attitudes and behaviours (reticence in speaking, escape from group activities, sudden changes of friendships or group attendance, etc.). - EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATION: Self-evaluation of course participants; the contents learned are put into practice. - TIMING: It is active every year. - REFERENCES: Bolzano provincial update plan. 		

Example 2:

Country	Province	Areas
ITALY	Chieti	Training courses

⁷ <https://pnrr.istruzione.it/competenze/didattica-digitale-integrata-e-formazione-sulla-transizione-digitale-del-personale-scolastico/>

⁸ SIA (Sostegno per l'Inclusione - Support for Inclusion) is a measure of the Italian government for fighting poverty. It provides an economic benefit called "Carta SIA" to families in poverty in which there is at least a minor or a disabled person or a woman in a state of pregnancy.

TITLE: Education to combat bullying, cyberbullying, gender violence and all kinds of social discrimination

- **GOOD PRACTICE BECAUSE:** It is an integrated education within the vertical curriculum of the whole comprehensive institute of Teramo 5
- **REALISED BY:** All school staff integrated through community pacts with the whole territory
- **TARGETS:** Entire school community; students from primary to upper secondary school
- **LEVEL OF PREVENTION:** Promotion and positive development
- **DESCRIPTION:** Rebuild a new humanism, acquire attitudes to respect, collaboration and democratic coexistence, and promote a climate of well-being in learning and teaching
- **EFFECTIVENESS EVALUATION:** Quantitative performance indicators
- **TIMING:** It is still active.

4. Legislation and regulations

This chapter provides an overview of the main European and Italian legal instruments that regulate children's and young people's use of digital technologies, with particular reference to social media. It outlines the framework established by the GDPR and national data protection rules, and examines how criminal and civil liability apply when minors are involved in online offences, including bullying and cyberbullying. The chapter then considers specific legislation on cyberbullying and gender-based violence, as well as policy measures and institutional initiatives designed to support schools in prevention and intervention. Finally, it highlights how these norms are complemented by actions in the field of digital literacy and citizenship education, which are crucial for the objectives of the ASAP project.

4.1. European Union General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the minimum age

The European General Data Protection Regulation⁹ 2016/679 – better known by its acronym, GDPR – is the European standard for data collection, storage, and usage among all companies that operate in Europe. GDPR is a series of laws defining digital rights for citizens of the European Union. It builds on an earlier policy, called the Data Protection Directive, which Europe adopted in 1995.

The art. 8 of the GDPR provides for the prohibition of the direct offer of digital services to minors under the age of 16, while granting the Member States the option to establish a different age (in any case not less than 13 years). The GDPR establishes that consent is given or authorised by the holder of parental responsibility and requires the data controller to take steps to verify the authenticity of the data given for the consent.

The Italian Legislative Decree 10 August 2018, n. 101 adapts the Code regarding the protection of personal data (Legislative Decree 30 June 2003, n. 196) to the provisions of Regulation (EU) 2016/679 and sets the minimum age at 14 years and consequently, in compliance with the GDPR, no minor of 14 years can be the owner of a social account in Italy.

The rule of consent is often disregarded, due to the lack of a single method of the State for verifying consent and the counterfeiting of the registry age (age swapping). Each social network sets a specific age for opening an account: the problem arises when the age control system is ineffective and easy to be bypassed, i.e. when registration is required to indicate age, without having to prove it.

Although privacy protection is fundamental in the digital era, some of its measures prevent protecting children from online dangers, such as grooming by an unidentified adult pretending to be a kid while playing online or being exposed to violent contents when accessing a digital space where no ID is required.

⁹ Regulations are legal acts that apply automatically and uniformly to all EU countries as soon as they enter into force, without needing to be transposed into national law. They are binding in their entirety on all EU countries.

4.2. Criminal and Civil liability¹⁰: who is responsible for bullying and cyberbullying acts perpetrated by a minor?

In discussing the legislation concerning use, misuse and abuse in the online environment, it is important to begin with the provisions on the age of imputability of a minor and the responsibility of the legal guardians in the Penal and Civil codes.

The concept of the child's imputability

The Penal code provides that minors between 14 and 18 years of age are imputable if their ability to understand and want is demonstrated through professional consultants (art. 98 of the Penal Code)¹¹ and that the minor of 14 years is never penally liable (art. 97 of the Penal Code).

The Italian juvenile penal system is built around the concept of imputability: in order to be able to proceed criminally against a minor, it is necessary that they are imputable, or that the capacity of the minor has been assessed to be declared responsible for a crime and to be subjected to a sorry.

Since the minor is liable for penal sanctions only after turning 14, the parents are responsible for the civil consequences of their deeds. If damages to the victim (or the victim's family) result from the conduct of a minor, the minor under 18, even if over 14, may be subjected to a criminal trial, but will not be required to pay compensation directly which must be paid by the parents or guardian (since they exercise parental responsibility over the minor, they bear the civil consequences of the damages caused by the minor).

What happens if a minor under 14 commits a crime?

If a minor under 14 commits a crime, there is no criminal liability. Therefore, the persons responsible cannot be tried in court and will not be sentenced for any crimes committed by them. Nor can the sentence be imposed on the parents since the criminal responsibility is only personal even for minors aged at least 14. However, this does not exclude civil liability for compensation for damages, and ablative or limiting parental responsibility measures by the Juvenile Court.

However, in the case a minor under 14 is deemed dangerous, the judge, considering the seriousness of the fact and the moral conditions of the family in which the minor lived, can order that the minor is hospitalised in a judicial reformatory, placed in a community or placed in probation.

As in the case of the criminal liability of a minor aged at least 14, the civil consequences of the crime fall on the parents of the minor, who are therefore required to pay compensation for damages to the victim.

The Juvenile Court

¹⁰ In Italian, "Responsabilità penale e civile".

¹¹ Art. 98 indicates that "anyone who, at the time they committed the crime, had turned 14 but not yet 18, is imputable, if they have the capacity to understand and want." Therefore, pursuant to art. 98 of the Criminal Code, for minors aged between 14 and 18 the ability to understand and want in relation to the crime committed must always be ascertained.

In criminal matters, it is the body competent to decide on the criminal liability of a minor¹² is the Juvenile Court (JC). In short:

- the JC is competent for crimes committed by minors under the age of 18;
- the JC and the Juvenile Surveillance Magistrate exercise their powers until the person's 25th birthday (who committed the crime as a minor);
- the JC is a specialised collegiate body, as it comprises four judges: two professional and two honorary judges, chosen from among the experts of the human sciences (biology, psychiatry, criminal anthropology, pedagogy, psychology).

Alongside the criminal field, the competence of the JC concerns every matter relating to the protection of minors also in the civil and administrative fields.

Responsibility of parents: culpa in educando (fault in educating)

Parental responsibility does not cease even when children are entrusted to third parties (such as school and teachers). The assignment to supervise third parties relieves the parent from the presumption of *culpa in vigilando* (see below), but not also from the *culpa in educando* (fault in educating).

Article 2048 of the Civil Code provides that: "The father and the mother [c.c. 316], or the guardian [c.c. 357], are responsible for the damage caused by the unlawful act of unemancipated minor children or of persons subject to guardianship, who live with them [c.c. 2047]. The same provision applies to the franchisor. (...)

The persons indicated in the paragraphs above are released from liability only if they prove that they could not prevent the fact.

Responsibility of teachers: culpa in vigilando (fault in supervising)

Teachers' responsibility is limited to the period of time that pupils are in their custody, including, in addition to the lessons, the entry to school, break time, school trips, leisure time spent on school premises such as the playground and gym, up to the return to the parents or whoever takes their place. (Court of Cassation sentence n. 14701/2016)

Responsibility of School Leaders: culpa in organizzando (fault in organising)

School Leaders are not responsible for supervisory tasks, but for organisation and control over the activity of school operators. School Leaders are held responsible if they have not put in place all the organisational measures to guarantee safety in the school environment and discipline among the pupils.

¹² Probation (MAP) and restorative justice in juvenile criminal proceedings: the Juvenile Court, having assessed the personality of the minor who committed the crime, can order the suspension of the trial and the probation of the person, elaborating an intervention project in agreement with the juvenile services, the family and the same minor. The project includes the reparation of the consequences of the crime and promotes the reconciliation of the minor with the offended person; the positive outcome of the probation extinguishes the crime.

If the act does not constitute a crime, the School Leader must inform the families and activate suitable educational actions. If the act constitutes a crime, the contact person must notify the School Leader and the authorities, and the contact person and the School Leader must inform the families.

4.3. Internet Crimes

By the Italian Law, internet crimes are:

- a) Defamation via the Internet
- b) Identity theft and impersonation
- c) Possession and dissemination of child pornography
- d) Soliciting minors
- e) Gender-based violence
- f) Cyberbullying

Defamation via the Internet (Art. 595 of the Penal Code)

The crime of defamation via the Internet is about offending the reputation of others through a "means of advertising". It occurs in the event that a user, via IT and telematic means of communication, by accessing a blog or any other website, posts something, leaves a comment or participate in a virtual discussion and make statements harmful to the reputation of others. Even sharing or liking offensive posts can represent the integration of a crime.

It should be noted that:

- the publication of embarrassing photos is part of the crime;
- consent to take a photograph is not the same as consent to publish it;
- offending teachers during online lessons integrates the crime of insulting a public official.

Identity theft & Impersonation (Art. 494 of the Penal Code): creation of fake profiles

This crime is about pretending to be someone else on the web in order to mislead third parties. One example of how someone could steal identity is by creating a false social profile (fake profile) or by opening and using an email account under a false name. While the creation of a false profile as such is not a crime, its use to mislead a third party it is a crime. It is frequent the case of adults operating under a false profile in which they pretend to be a minor, in order to get in touch with kids and to induce them to actions they would not accept to perform with an adult. Therefore, anyone who chats under a false name in order to initiate correspondence with persons who would otherwise not have granted them friendship and trust can be persecuted.

The Privacy Code (Legislative Decree 196/2003) also protects personal identity. Illegal processing of personal data (Article 167 of the Privacy Code) provides that it is a crime disseminating another person's personal data on the Internet (publishing photos or videos of them, sharing their telephone number or email address, tagging them, etc.) without their consent and causing them damage.

Possession and dissemination of child pornography (Art. 600 quarter of the Penal Code)

These crimes are about keeping and/or sharing photos or videos of a sexual nature of minor persons being aware of the minor age of the person portrayed. For these crimes, a minor is directly liable to the law from the age of 14 if their ability to understand and want is demonstrated by professional

consultants. Compensation for damages to victims of bullying and cyberbullying with the relative outlay of money is always due by the parents, until proven otherwise, as long as the kid is a minor.

Soliciting minors (Art. 609 undecies of the Penal Code)

This crime refers to any act carried out to steal the trust of a minor through tricks, flattery or threats implemented also through the use of the internet or other networks or means of communication¹³.

Gender-based violence (Law 69/2019)

This crime is established with the Law of 19 July 2019, n. 69 "Amendments to the Penal Code, the Code of Penal procedure and other provisions regarding the protection of victims of domestic and gender-based violence", known as the Codice Rosso, or the Red Code Law. The law establishes the punishment of those who create and disseminate private, sexually explicit images or videos, without the consent of the people represented, to damage them for the purpose of revenge or personal revenge, including those who "share" images online. The crime is punished with imprisonment from 1 to 6 years and a fine from 5,000 to 15,000 euros and provides for aggravating circumstances if the crime of illicit publication is committed by the spouse, even if separated or divorced, or by a person who is or has been linked by an emotional relationship to the offended person.

4.3.1. Cyberbullying and Law 71/2017

The Italian legal system was the first in Europe to boast legislative protection for episodes of cyberbullying, with Law 71 of 29 May 2017 containing "Provisions for the protection of minors for the prevention and fight against the phenomenon of cyberbullying". While representing a significant step, the law is still under revision today to be compensated for with further regulatory interventions.

«One of the central themes in examining the issues of the use of the network is, in addition to that of cybercrime and, consequently, the need to protect minors, also that of the "Penal" use of the network by the minors themselves [...] The topic of cyberbullying constitutes a borderline phenomenon between juvenile deviance and group psychology, which represents and expresses, with great emphasis, the complex and problematic character assumed by the current relationship between children, young people and technology. It is a recent phenomenon that manifests itself whenever minors use the new media to convey or implement vexatious, persecutory actions, harmful to the dignity of peers"¹⁴.

The purpose of Law 71/2017 is to contrast the phenomenon of cyberbullying in all its manifestations, essentially with educational and preventive measures. It mentions "actions of a preventive nature and (...) a strategy of attention, protection and education towards the minors involved, both in the position of victims and perpetrators of offences, ensuring the implementation of interventions without distinction of age within educational institutions". The law provides in all schools for the figure of a reference teacher for counteracting cyberbullying and bullying. It also enables the School Leaders to inform, unless the fact constitutes a crime, the parents of the minors involved in acts of digital bullying,

¹³ The norm was introduced with Law 172 of 1 October 2012, the ratification of the Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (or Lanzarote Convention).

¹⁴ Autorità Garante per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza, "La tutela dei minorenni nel mondo della comunicazione", 21 dicembre 2017.

also imposing disciplinary sanctions if needed. Furthermore, the conduct may also be relevant from a Penal point of view; the police commissioner may issue a warning for perpetrators of cyberbullying acts between 14 and 18 years of age, if no complaint or charges have been filed for the crimes of insult, defamation and threat.

The technical Committee for the implementation of the law (to be composed by the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Education, University and Research, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of Health, the Authority for Communications Guarantees and the Ombudsman for Childhood and Adolescence) has not yet been activated to date. The Italian Government announced in November 2022 the intention to set up a new technical Table for the prevention and fight against cyberbullying.

Commission for the fight against intolerance, racism, anti-semitism and incitement to hatred and violence

In February 2023, the Senate unanimously decided to reconstitute the extraordinary Commission for the fight against the phenomena of intolerance, racism, anti-semitism and incitement to hatred and violence. The Commission has tasks of observation, study and initiative for the direction and control of the phenomena of intolerance, racism, anti-semitism and incitement to hatred and violence against people or social groups based on characteristics such as ethnicity, religion, origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or other physical or mental conditions. It monitors and directs the concrete implementation of international conventions and agreements, and national legislation related to the above phenomena. The Commission has also a proactive function in elaborating and implementing legislative proposals and promotes any other useful initiative at the national and international levels.

Provisions for the Schools set by Law 71/2017: MIUR 2021 Guidelines

In 2021, Italy updated the MIUR Guidelines for the prevention and contrast of bullying and cyberbullying for educational institutions of all levels (Ministerial Decree 18 of 13 January 2021 issued with note 482 of 18 February 2021). The 2021 Guidelines were meant to give continuity to the Guidelines issued in October 2017 and to implement the necessary additions and changes provided for by the regulatory interventions; in particular, the modifications refer to the innovations introduced by Law 71/2017 on Cyberbullying and by Law n. 107 of 13 July 2015 which introduced, among the priority educational objectives, the development of students' digital skills, also aimed at a critical and aware use of social networks and media, as set out in the National Digital School Plan. The Guidelines provide also for indications for the definition of good practices. Each school, as part of its autonomy, is called to appoint one reference teacher, to support strategies to prevent and combat bullying and cyberbullying.

The reference teacher becomes a point of reference for the victims, their families and the teachers involved, proposes to the Board of Teachers and organizes training and refresher courses, coordinates the Anti-bullying team and the Emergency team and carefully monitors cases of bullying within their institution. The reference teacher is also the first one to be informed in cases of bullying and cyberbullying that occur within the classes, so that they can take immediate measures.

4.4. Projects and Tools supporting Law 71/2017 on bullying and cyberbullying

ELISA Platform

In October 2018, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the University of Florence, activated the [ELISA Platform](#), an e-learning and monitoring path dedicated primarily to teachers responsible for bullying and cyberbullying defined based on the indications of Law 71/2017.

ELISA is a platform that collects data and acts as a container for all actions against bullying; it provides courses for teachers and school leaders on issues related to bullying and cyberbullying. At the end of the 2021/22 school year more than 10,000 Italian teachers and about 70% of the educational institutions are enrolled.

To strengthen the prevention and contrast of bullying and cyberbullying in a systematic and integrated perspective, School Leaders can also participate in the courses. The above mentioned MIUR 2021 Guidelines suggest establishing, on the recommendation of the School Leader, Working Groups (Anti-bullying Team and Emergency Team) respectively at the school and territorial level, consisting of reference teachers, digital animators and other qualified personnel. These Teams are intended to assist the School Leaders, coordinator of the Team in their school, in the definition of prevention interventions and in the management of cases of bullying and cyberbullying that may arise.

Anti-bullying Team and the Emergency Team in Schools

As described above, Law 71/2017 provides, in each school, the figure of a reference teacher with the task of coordinating initiatives to prevent and combat bullying and cyberbullying, also making use of the collaboration of the Police Forces as well as any association present in the area.

In addition, the 2021 updated guidelines invite to set up working groups at the school level; namely the Anti-bullying Team and the Emergency Team, integrated, if necessary, by specialist reference figures.

The Anti-bullying Team has the following functions:

- assisting the School Leader, coordinator of the Teams, in the definition of bullying prevention interventions;
- promoting knowledge and awareness of bullying and cyberbullying through school projects involving parents, students and all school staff;
- promoting in the "National Day against Bullying" a reflection in all classes;
- involving External Bodies, Law Enforcement Agencies (State Police, Postal Police, Guardia di Finanza) in training activities aimed at students and the entire community;
- participating in local and national events/competitions;
- creating a special section on the institutional website;
- communicating to pupils, families and all school staff the existence of the team to which they can refer for reports or requests for information on the subject;
- preparing special cards and setting up areas within the institute to facilitate the reporting of alleged cases of bullying or cyberbullying;
- collecting reports and take charge of them for an initial evaluation.

Law 71/2017 gives indications on the operation of the anti-bullying team. Emergencies related to acts of bullying or cyberbullying are taken in charge by the Emergency Team, composed by the School

Leader and the Bullying reference teacher, assisted by class teachers, other members of the Anti-bullying Team and the school psychologist, already engaged in the "listening desk"¹⁵.

The Emergency Team deals with the management of the case with the choice of the most appropriate intervention to be implemented and the monitoring of the situation to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions over time.

Fighting internet crimes and taking action for prevention: the Postal Police

The Postal Police (Polizia Postale e delle Comunicazioni) was established in 1981 with the State Police reform law, to guarantee the secrecy of correspondence and the freedom of all forms of communication (values recognised by Art. 15 of the Italian Constitution).

In the 1990s, with the spread of the Internet and the evolution of technology, new criminal threats to security arose. To combat crime in the telecommunications sector, a police unit was set up in 1996. Finally, the Postal and Communications Police was established in 1998, merging the Telecommunications Police and Postal Police units.

The Postal and Communications Police is present in the national territory through its 20 Departments, with regional jurisdiction and provincial jurisdiction sections, which are centrally coordinated, and employ around 2,000 specialists. National coverage is complemented by international collaborations that ensure the prosecution of the perpetrator of any crime committed through the network.

The postal police is also involved in awareness-raising campaigns in schools aimed at informing kids, teachers and parents about the risks and pitfalls of the web. Initiatives include:

- [“Una vita da social”](#), an educational campaign now in its 10th edition, carried out by the State Police and the Ministry of Education, as part of the Generazioni Connesse project (see below).
- [“Cuori connessi”](#), a project that since 2020 has offered meetings with students in schools, live streaming sessions aimed at schools to explore web-related issues, and publication of free downloadable books with real cyberbullying stories experienced by kids.

4.5. Regulations and actions on Digital Literacy

Law 92/2019 on Citizenship education

Law 92 of 20 August 2019 (“Introduzione dell'insegnamento scolastico dell'educazione civica”) is related to citizenship education and includes digital citizenship education. The law establishes civic education being taught in the first and second cycle of education (primary, lower and upper secondary school), in order to contribute to the education of responsible and active citizens as well as to “promote full and aware participation in civic life, cultural and social aspects of the communities, in compliance with the rules, rights and duties”.

In particular, education in “essential digital skills and knowledge to be developed gradually taking into account age” is also envisaged; digital education includes knowing how to “analyse, compare and critically evaluate the credibility and reliability of sources of data, information and digital content,

¹⁵ <https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/20182/2432359/AVVISO+ASSEGNAZIONE+RISORSE.pdf/0e8f63aa-dae1-1f61-703e-5dfb0bbdf126?t=1594396003474>

interact through various digital technologies and identify the appropriate digital means and forms of communication for a given context, create and manage digital identity, be able to protect one's reputation, manage and protect the data that is produced through different digital tools, environments and services, respect the data and identities of others; use and share personally identifiable information while protecting themselves and others and be able to avoid, using digital technologies, health risks and threats to their physical and psychological well-being; be able to protect themselves and others from potential dangers in digital environments; be aware of how digital technologies can affect psychophysical well-being and social inclusion, with particular attention to behaviours attributable to bullying and cyberbullying.”

Italian Safer Internet Centre: Generazioni Connesse

The Safer Internet Centre (SIC) project is co-funded by the European Commission under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) - Telecom program, and is part of a network promoted by the European Commission that takes the form of the online platform "Better Internet for Kids" managed by European Schoolnet, in close collaboration with INSAFE (network that brings together all European SCIs) and Inhope (network that collects all European hotlines).

In Italy, the Safer Internet Centre takes the name of [Generazioni Connesse](#) [Connected Generations] (GC) and is coordinated by MIUR in partnership with Italian bodies dealing with Internet security¹⁶.

The Safer Internet Centre was created to provide information, advice and support to children, teenagers, parents, teachers and educators in their experience with the Internet, and to facilitate the reporting of illegal material online. The Centre develops high quality services with innovative content, in order to guarantee young users' safety "in the online environment", considering, at the same time, the related investment as a 'virtuous' opportunity for a 'social' and economic growth of the entire community. The project offers a guided path that allows each participating school to:

- reflect on their approach to issues related to online safety and the integration of digital technologies in teaching, in order to identify measures to be taken to achieve an improvement;
- take advantage of tools, materials and training meetings, for the realisation of personalised projects that each School will elaborate on a guided path (Action Plan);
- adopt an e-safety policy recognized by MIUR, built in a participatory way involving the entire school community, based on its reality and the Action Plans.

Digital Innovation Team and Digital Animator

The decree of the Minister of Education 30 April 2021, n. 147, defined the allocation of the resources of the National Plan for the digital school for the year 2021. The decree provided for an investment of over 66 million euros, to which must be added, again for the year 2021, another 35 million euros for the training of teachers and school staff also in the digital areas, for a total of about 101 million euros to be used in the 2021/22 school year. These resources support the implementation of the [PNSD](#)

¹⁶ They are: Authority for Childhood and Adolescence, State Police, the Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities, the Universities of Florence and 'La Sapienza' of Rome, Save the Children Italy, Telefono Azzurro, EDI cooperative, Skuola.net, DIRE press agency, and the Ente Autonomo Giffoni Experience.

(National Digital School Plan) at school level and therefore directly underpin the work of the figures responsible for digital innovation within each institution.

The Digital Innovation Team, made up of 3 teachers, has the function of supporting educational innovation in educational institutions and the activity of the Digital Animator. Its work contributes to the effective use of the resources allocated for digital innovation and teacher training, helping schools translate national planning into concrete actions.

The Digital Animator is a teacher who, together with the School Leader and the Administrative Director, has the task of coordinating the dissemination of digital innovation as part of the actions envisaged by the "PTOF" (the three-year plan of the educational offer that each school has to draft), and the activities of the PNSD. The Digital Animator is a single person, internal to the school, not an external expert, who collaborates in disseminating innovative initiatives. This role is central in guiding how the resources provided by the Ministry are used to promote digital transformation within the school.

For instance, the Digital Animator of the Istituto Comprensivo di Via Bologna in Bresso, Italy, an ASAP partner, during the 2022/23 school year organised a series of training workshops for all teachers. During those workshops, he showed, in collaboration with Apple, how to use the [Swift Playgrounds](#) app, create lesson plans based on it, and monitor students' learning progress. The Digital Animator also provided resources and tips on how to effectively integrate the app into daily teaching, more particularly with regard to mathematics and coding. Later, it continued to provide ongoing informational support to teachers interested in implementing the app in question.

As another example, it is mentioned the initiative of the "A. Manzoni" Comprehensive Institute of Maracalagonis where in the [project](#) of improvement and digital innovation of the school lasting 3 years (2021-2024) the Digital Animation Team has undertaken 3 main paths aimed at internal training, involvement of the school community and the creation of innovative solutions. The fundamental characteristic of this three-year project is that it starts from a deep knowledge of the context in which it is applied. Among the noteworthy objectives there is the implementation of the new electronic register, the activation of a YouTube channel for the collection of videos of the activities carried out in the school, and the establishment of the online school newspaper on a bimonthly basis for primary and secondary students which has provided for the selection of a group of students for the creation of an editorial office.

The Decree 147/2021 provides for the allocation of 1,000.00 euros in the 2021/22 school year, to be used for supporting the Digital Animator with training activities.

Each educational institution, within the framework of its organisational autonomy, establishes the criteria for the assignment of the task of "Digital Animator"¹⁷. The Digital Animator should be the promoter of the following actions:

¹⁷ Generally, the School Leader, following the contents of the regulation – approved by the School Council – which governs the assignment of assignments to internal and external experts, announces a "Selection notice for internal staff" in which they invite the interested teachers to submit their Curriculum vitae. Subsequently, a ranking is drawn up after the evaluation procedures carried out by an Examining Commission of which the School Leader is a member and appointed by the latter, a ranking is drawn up.

- Internal training: stimulate internal training at the school in the areas of the PNSD, through the organisation of training workshops, encouraging the animation and participation of the whole school community in training activities;
- Involvement of the school community: encourage participation and stimulate the students agency in the organisation of structured activities on the themes of the PNSD and DDI, also through training sessions, for the realisation of a shared digital culture;
- Creation of innovative solutions: identify sustainable methodological and technological solutions to be disseminated within the school environments, consistent with the analysis of the needs of the school itself.

Purpose Networks

The [purpose networks](#) between educational institutions are set up for the enhancement and training of professional resources, the common management of administrative functions and activities, as well as for the realisation of projects or didactic, educational, sports or cultural initiatives in the same territorial area. They are regulated by the Art. 1 of Law 107/2015 (paragraphs 70, 71, 72, and 74) with the aim to:

- Achieve, through mutual support and joint action, the qualification of all school staff through updating and continuous training;
- Promote the enrichment of the professional skills of teachers of individual schools through the socialisation of existing resources within the Network and the acquisition of new ones, through joint training projects and initiatives;
- Provide the Network schools with consultancy and support in the management of problems related, for example, to child abuse, cyberbullying and juvenile deviance;
- Develop homogeneously and effectively the integration of the school service with the other services in the social field carried out in the territory by public and private bodies;
- Self-assessment and social reporting;
- Dematerialization and digital school;
- Expo (national, regional and territorial measures and actions);
- Training and updating of staff (managers, teachers, administrative staff);
- Methodological-didactic innovations;
- School-work integrations (orientation, alternation, territorial profiling of curricular skills of technical and professional instruction, placement);
- Internationalisation (exchange development, dissemination of foreign languages), support of the CLIL methodology;
- Accompanying measures for the implementation of the National Indications: training, action research and documentation;
- ICT promotion in teaching (training trainers, consistent project actions) and organisation;
- Safety and safety culture in schools;
- Educational success: containment of early school leaving;
- Special educational needs (learning different abilities, developmental disorders, students with non-Italian citizenship, newcomers)

Although schools in Italy receive a significant support in the fight against cyberbullying and related issues (reference teachers, anti-bullying and emergency teams in schools, digital animators and digital

animation teams, purpose networks, etc.), no data are yet available to assess the effectiveness or impact of such measures.

5. National initiatives

This chapter presents a selection of national initiatives that contribute to the promotion of safe, informed and responsible digital practices among children and preadolescents in Italy. Earlier chapters have already highlighted several key institutional measures and programmes, including the Safer Internet Centre's Generazioni Connesse, the Ministry of Education's Piattaforma ELISA for training and monitoring on bullying and cyberbullying, the digital citizenship pathways linked to Law 92/2019 on civic education, and the broader interventions introduced through the National Digital School Plan. Together, these initiatives form the structural foundation of Italy's policy and educational response to the opportunities and risks associated with minors' online lives.

Building on these elements, this chapter expands the analysis by presenting additional national programmes and community-based projects that play an increasingly significant role in digital education. Section 5.1 introduces several initiatives developed by universities, associations, and civic organisations that complement institutional frameworks by addressing themes such as digital wellbeing, media literacy, respectful communication, data protection and peer-led prevention of cyberbullying. Section 5.2 then highlights initiatives implemented directly by the partners of the ASAP project, providing concrete examples of how schools and local actors are translating national strategies into innovative practices at the local level.

Taken together, the initiatives presented in this chapter illustrate the diversity and richness of the Italian landscape in the field of digital education. They also demonstrate how national policies, research-based programmes and community-driven actions can reinforce one another in supporting minors' digital growth and in promoting safer, more inclusive online environments.

5.1. Other national initiatives

Patti Digitali

[Patti Digitali](#) is a national initiative that promotes community "digital pacts" as a shared educational strategy for supporting children and preadolescents in their relationship with digital technologies. It is coordinated by the Digital Wellbeing Research Centre (Centro di Ricerca Benessere Digitale) at the University of Milan-Bicocca, in collaboration with three associations active in media education (MEC – Media Educazione Comunità, Aiart Milano, and Slowworking). The initiative emerged from dialogue between researchers and groups of parents concerned about the early and largely unregulated entry of children into the online world, and proposes a model in which families, schools and local institutions jointly agree on a small set of common rules and expectations for digital use.

A digital pact is defined as an informal agreement between families who decide to follow the same everyday practices in order to promote safe, active, creative and conscious use of technology. Rather than focusing solely on individual parental choices, Patti Digitali emphasises the importance of educational alliances at community level, involving parents, teachers, paediatricians, local authorities, youth organisations, sports clubs and parishes. The pacts typically revolve around three main commitments: deciding collectively when children and preadolescents should start using different types of screens and receiving a personal smartphone connected to the internet; taking part, together with their children, in moments of digital education; and regulating the use of smartphones and other devices through clear, shared agreements within families. The initiative also sets out a series of

principles for community digital education, including age-appropriate timing, preparation for digital autonomy, clear rules and dialogue, and informed, responsible adults.

At operational level, Patti Digitali functions as a national network of local pacts. Its website hosts a map of existing community pacts across Italy and provides model documents, guidelines and resources (research summaries, articles, videos, reading lists) to support new groups that wish to launch a local pact. As of 2023, more than 160 pacts had been initiated in 16 regions, with others in preparation, often under labels such as [Aspettando lo smartphone](#) [Waiting for the smartphone] which explicitly aim to delay the age of first smartphone ownership and to make this decision a collective commitment rather than individual burden for families. The network offers step-by-step guidance for parents, schools and municipalities wishing to start a pact, and experts from the university and partner associations can accompany local communities through training and reflection pathways on healthy, gradual and community-based digital education.

Patente di smartphone

[Patente di smartphone](#) [Smartphone licence] is an educational initiative aimed at promoting responsible and aware use of digital devices among children and adolescents. The project was conceived in 2017 in the Verbano-Cusio-Ossola area in Piedmont through a collaboration between the local health authority, the territorial school office, and civil institutions. It is now coordinated by the non-profit organisation Associazione Contorno Viola in partnership with schools, public health services and local authorities.

The model treats smartphone ownership and use not simply as a personal matter, but as a “rite of passage” comparable to obtaining a driving licence. Before gaining access to devices connected to the internet, young people attend a structured educational pathway involving lessons, peer education, class-level sessions, final testing and a public ceremony for the delivery of the “smartphone licence”. The approach seeks to raise awareness of both opportunities and risks of digital life (privacy, cyberbullying, online identity, responsible behaviour), fostering digital citizenship rather than simply regulating access.

At the organisational level, similarly to Patti Digitali, Patente di smartphone operates as a national network: the website maps existing “pacts” across several Italian regions, offers course materials, guidelines and resources for schools and families, and supports the establishment of new local pacts. Since its inception, the initiative has involved thousands of students, teachers and parents, aiming to create a shared community commitment to digital education, prevention of cyberbullying and responsible use of technology.

Parole O Stili

[Parole O Stili](#) is a national education and social-awareness project launched in 2017 with the aim of promoting respectful, responsible and non-violent communication both online and offline. Its name is a play on words in Italian: while it evokes “parole ostili” [hostile words], the underscore also suggests “parole o stili” [words or styles], highlighting the idea that communication is a matter of choice and that non-hostile language is an intentional and responsible practice. Developed by the Parole O Stili Association, the initiative brings together educators, schools, public institutions, journalists, technology companies and civil-society organisations to counter the spread of hostile language, misinformation and online aggression. At the core of the project is the [Manifesto of Non-Hostile](#)

[Communication](#), a set of ten principles designed to foster empathy, critical thinking and accountability in digital interactions. The Manifesto has been translated into several languages and widely adopted in Italian schools, and it is adapted for different audiences, including children, teenagers, teachers, parents and professionals.

The project provides a wide range of educational resources and training opportunities to support schools in integrating digital citizenship and media literacy into their curricula. These include classroom materials, workshops, webinars, teacher training modules and national events such as “Festa della Parola” [Word Day] and thematic campaigns on online safety, hate speech, stereotypes and digital wellbeing. Parole O_Stili also collaborates with the Ministry of Education and various regional school offices, contributing to national efforts to promote a healthier digital culture among young people. Its materials and methodologies are designed to help students recognise and manage conflict, understand the impact of language, and adopt constructive behaviours in social media and online communities.

MEDIAEDU – Italian Network for Media Education

[MEDIAEDU](#) is the Italian Network for Media Education, a national consortium that brings together universities, research centres, schools, public institutions and civil-society organisations committed to promoting media literacy across age groups. The network functions as a collaborative platform for sharing research, pedagogical approaches and educational resources on digital citizenship, critical media use and online participation. By acting as a bridge between academia and the school system, MEDIAEDU supports the development of a coherent national vision for media education and strengthens the capacity of educators to address emerging challenges linked to misinformation, digital wellbeing and youth online behaviours.

The network provides access to teaching materials, guidelines, professional development opportunities and thematic working groups for educators interested in innovating their media education curricula. MEDIAEDU also collaborates with international partners and contributes to national debates on digital rights, educational innovation and the role of media in democratic life. Its activities help schools integrate media literacy into everyday teaching and foster a culture of informed, responsible and critical engagement with digital environments.

Giovani Ambasciatori contro il Cyberbullismo (MOIGE)

[Giovani Ambasciatori contro il Cyberbullismo](#) [Young Ambassadors against Cyberbullying] is a national programme promoted by [MOIGE – Movimento Italiano Genitori](#) [Italian Parents Movement]. The initiative trains selected students to become peer educators within their schools, equipping them with knowledge and skills to recognise, prevent and address cyberbullying. Through workshops, interactive sessions and support from trained facilitators, the young ambassadors learn how to promote positive online behaviours, challenge harmful practices and support classmates who may be experiencing digital aggression. This peer-to-peer model leverages the influence of young people within their own communities, making prevention more effective and relatable.

The programme also includes awareness-raising activities for families and teachers, as well as school-wide events aimed at creating a safe, inclusive and supportive digital environment. By involving students directly in prevention efforts, the project strengthens youth agency and encourages a shared responsibility in monitoring and improving online culture. Its national reach, structured methodology

and strong focus on empowerment make it a relevant example of how schools can complement legislative provisions, such as Law 71/2017, with community-based prevention strategies.

Italian Data Protection Authority – Educational Materials for Minors

The Italian Data Protection Authority [Garante per la Protezione dei Dati Personali] provides a range of [educational materials](#) designed to help children, adolescents, parents and teachers understand privacy, data protection and digital rights. These resources include illustrated guides, videos, classroom activities and thematic campaigns explaining how personal data are collected and used, how to protect one's digital identity, and how to navigate platforms safely. The Garante's initiatives aim to make the principles of the GDPR accessible to younger audiences and to encourage responsible, informed behaviour in the digital environment.

The Authority also collaborates with schools through awareness-raising campaigns and produces resources tailored to emerging concerns such as social media profiling, cyberbullying, online reputation and the management of digital footprints. By translating complex legal concepts into age-appropriate language, the Garante supports teachers in embedding privacy education within broader citizenship education pathways. As such, these materials represent a crucial institutional contribution to fostering digital literacy and ensuring that minors understand their rights and responsibilities when engaging online.

Open the Box

[Open the Box](#), developed by Dataninja Srls, is a digital media and data literacy programme designed for high school students, teachers and educators, delivered mainly through online learning formats. The initiative aims to strengthen critical thinking and help young people navigate an information ecosystem increasingly shaped by algorithms, social platforms and automated content production. Its courses are grounded in an accessible, research-based approach that combines explanatory materials with practical exercises.

The programme offers three thematic pathways focused on disinformation, social media and artificial intelligence, each consisting of ready-to-use lessons built around short videos, quizzes, classroom activities and guided discussions. The materials are designed to be integrated into regular teaching and to support educators in addressing misinformation, online manipulation and the ethical implications of AI. Through these structured modules, Open the Box promotes a more conscious and responsible use of digital technologies, equipping learners with essential skills for understanding how information is created, shared and transformed online.

5.2. ASAP Partner initiatives

Fondazione Carolina

[Fondazione Carolina](#), an Associated Partner of the ASAP project, is the foundation established in memory of Carolina Picchio, the first officially recognised victim of cyberbullying in Italy, who died by suicide at the age of 13 following severe peer online violence. The foundation brings together professionals and organisations committed to supporting Carolina's father in his public effort to co-create a digital world that is safer and more welcoming for all children. Fondazione Carolina works across research, prevention, support and advocacy, combining scientific expertise with direct engagement in schools, communities and institutions. As an official partner of the Italian Ministry of

Education, it has become a national point of reference for schools, families, public administrations and stakeholders seeking guidance on promoting a correct, positive and conscious use of digital technologies by minors. Although headquartered in Milan, its network of educators, psychologists, legal experts and trainers operates throughout the country, reaching an average of 50,000 students every year. The following paragraphs present some of the foundation's key initiatives.

[Rescue Team](#) is Fondazione Carolina's cyber emergency service providing rapid support to minors who are victims of online violence, including cyberbullying and the dissemination of sexual or harmful content. The service is delivered by an interdisciplinary team with expertise in education, psychology, law and communication, working together to protect victims, guide families, support school communities and promote recovery of those who have caused harm. Where necessary, the team draws on specialised input from law enforcement, IT forensics and local child neuropsychiatry services, offering a coordinated and holistic response to complex digital emergencies.

The Rescue Team can be contacted directly by individuals, schools, institutions or educational organisations via email, or through the 1Safe app, a participatory safety tool enabling parents, teachers, educators and coaches to activate a "Cyber Emergency Response" with a single click. In 2021 the team conducted 34 interventions across Italy, rising to 57 in 2022, reflecting both the easing of pandemic restrictions and the persistent exposure of young people to online risks.

Fondazione Carolina is also a partner of [TRACeD: Let's tackle gender-based cyberviolence now!](#), a two-year project (March 2022 – February 2024) funded by the European Union. The initiative aims to combat gender-based cyberviolence affecting girls aged 7–18 and young women aged 18–25 across Greece, Cyprus, Italy and Slovenia. TRACeD is implemented by a consortium including the Centre for European Constitutional Law, ActionAid Hellas, CODECA – Centre for Social Cohesion, Development & Care, the Cyber Security International Institute (CSII), Fondazione Carolina and the University of Ljubljana. Through research, training, awareness-raising and community engagement, the project seeks to strengthen prevention, enhance support mechanisms for victims and promote safer digital environments for girls and young women.

[MinoriOnline.com](#) is an information platform created for parents, offering up-to-date, practical guidance on the digital environments children commonly access for 4 to 8 hours a day. It provides clear explanations of the features and potential risks of social networks, platforms and videogames, highlighting how events occurring online can have long-lasting effects on children's wellbeing. The platform also includes legal references, handbooks, family games and self-assessment tools designed to help parents understand their children's online experiences and to support them in adopting safe, conscious and developmentally appropriate digital habits.

[Conessioni Delicate](#) [Delicate Connections] is a project developed by Fondazione Carolina in collaboration with Meta Italia and major Italian paediatric associations. Launched in 2022 as a pilot and expanded nationally in 2023, it supports paediatricians in guiding families with children aged 0–15 on the health risks associated with early and excessive digital device use. The project addresses issues such as reduced neurological responsiveness, addiction, obesity, exposure to traumatic content and online sexual exploitation. By integrating digital education into paediatric care, Conessioni Delicate strengthens families' ability to make informed, health-protective decisions about technology use.

CyberJoy is Fondazione Carolina's 2023 [Safer Internet Day campaign](#), centred on the child's right to experience joy and safety online. To promote this principle, the foundation released free educational tools for schools and families and introduced the CyberJoy Sticker: a visible sign recognising schools, companies and public or private organisations committed to ensuring safe and positive online environments for children. The sticker symbolically acknowledges those actively working to uphold children's digital rights.

Pepita

[Pepita](#) is an ASAP full partner and an official partner of Fondazione Carolina. Its active training methodology is based on dynamic group work and individual activities, allowing students to experience and reflect on the contents addressed. The organisation works with schools, educators and families to promote digital awareness and wellbeing, helping children recognise the characteristics of the digital environment and make informed, safe choices. Among its initiatives, this report presents *lo clicco positivo* and *Solo per te*, two complementary educational pathways focusing on digital awareness and affectivity in online contexts.

[lo clicco positivo](#) [I click positive – a reference to the title of a famous Italian song called “Penso positivo”] is the main digital education format developed by Pepita in collaboration with Fondazione Carolina. Implemented in more than 500 classes across Italy during the 2022/23 school year, it reaches children and young people aged 5 to 16, as well as teachers, school staff and families. Its central aim is to introduce children to the digital environment and to strengthen their awareness that the online world is an ecosystem that must be learned, navigated and approached with care. Through accessible language and concrete examples drawn from young people's digital lives, the format encourages participants to recognise opportunities and risks, reflect on their digital choices, and adopt safer and more responsible behaviours.

[Solo per te](#) [Just for you] is a complementary educational pathway specifically dedicated to affectivity and sexuality in the digital age. The programme supports children and adolescents in understanding the emotional, relational and ethical dimensions of intimacy, guiding them to transfer this awareness into online contexts where interactions may appear easy, immediate and infinitely reproducible. Through structured activities and guided discussion, *Solo per te* helps young people reflect on consent, privacy, emotional vulnerability and the long-term consequences of sharing personal content. The approach emphasises the difference between healthy relationships and risky dynamics, addressing how digital platforms can amplify misinformation, pressure, and distorted perceptions of intimacy. By fostering critical thinking and emotional literacy, the programme equips participants to make thoughtful and informed decisions in both offline and online relationships.

Associazione Le Nius

Also a full ASAP partner, [Le Nius](#) is an Italian non-profit association dedicated to promoting high-quality information, digital awareness and civic engagement through journalism, training and educational projects. Founded with the aim of making complex issues accessible to diverse audiences, the association combines media production with initiatives that strengthen critical thinking and responsible participation in the digital public sphere. Its work spans fact-based reporting, community engagement and educational formats that bring together young people, educators and adults. Through its projects, Le Nius supports the development of informed and active citizens capable of navigating digital environments with autonomy and awareness.

Among its initiatives, [Digital Bees](#) is a media and digital skills education project run since 2016. Its aim is to promote informed and aware digital citizens, both young people and adults, capable of using online information channels carefully and engaging constructively with social media. The project focuses on the development of digital competencies aligned with the DigComp framework and is grounded in an active learning approach inspired by inquiry-based learning, designed to generate interest, stimulate questions, foster critical reasoning and support students in identifying solutions.

The learning pathway is structured into five phases.

1. Engagement: students participate through gamification, group activities and case studies (using tools such as Kahoot) and share their own experiences.
2. Guided explanation: visual materials such as infographics and slides (produced by the project and accessible online) support conceptual understanding.
3. Comparison: participants exchange perspectives and experiences in peer discussion.
4. Exploration: between sessions, students carry out individual or group tasks, such as identifying or constructing examples of fake news.
5. Evaluation: learning outcomes are assessed collectively, often through gamified tools or peer challenge.

Digital Bees adopts an integrated young–adult education model, involving both adolescents/preadolescents and the adults around them, recognising that an effective digital learning environment must engage all key stakeholders.

6. Conclusions

This report has outlined how preadolescents' relationship with digital media in Italy is shaped by high levels of connectivity and smartphone use, emerging risks related to problematic and addictive behaviours, a complex legal and policy framework, and a rich ecosystem of educational initiatives. Taken together, the statistical data, research projects, legislative measures and good practices examined here suggest that effective responses must be systemic: they should involve schools, families, institutions and local communities, and combine regulatory provisions with sustained educational work and support.

In view of the ASAP project's objectives, several aspects emerge as particularly relevant for further exploration in the project's outputs and for the design of educational materials and training activities:

- **Use of statistical data in training.** The charts, indicators and key figures presented in chapter 1 can be turned into diagrams and infographics for use in parent and teacher training. Visual representations can help adults grasp at a glance the scale and nature of children's and adolescents' digital engagement, and provide a concrete basis for reflection and informed decision-making. This is consistent with the ASAP perspective: not to replace adults in their educational responsibility, but to offer them evidence, tools and questions that support awareness and autonomous choices.
- **Legal responsibility and the "three culpa".** The distinction between *culpa in educando*, *culpa in vigilando* and *culpa in organizzando* drawn from the Italian Civil and Penal Codes (section 4.2) offers a useful framework for discussing different layers of adult responsibility. Parents, teachers and school leaders do not need legal expertise, but a basic understanding of these dimensions can foster greater awareness of their duties towards minors and, in the case of parents, of their civil liability for their children's actions.
- **Problematic media use and smartphone addiction.** Findings from the Digital Wellbeing – Schools survey (section 1.3) and the EURES report (section 1.4) converge on the centrality of problematic and potentially addictive uses of smartphones, including pervasiveness of use in crucial moments of daily life and emotional dependence. It would be valuable for ASAP to develop a working definition of "problematic media use" to guide both the field research and the educational resources, and to explore how preadolescents, parents and teachers themselves understand this concept in focus groups and other qualitative activities.
- **Cyberbullying legislation as an entry point.** Law 71/2017 on cyberbullying (section 4.3.1) has played a key role in bringing issues of online harm into schools and in formalising dedicated roles and procedures. In practice, it has often functioned as a "Trojan horse" allowing the school system to address broader topics such as affectivity, sexuality, emotional intelligence and digital citizenship in connection with online risks. This experience is highly relevant for ASAP's approach to social media education and can inform the design of activities that start from concrete risks but open up wider educational discussions.
- **Limits of age-based regulations and policy recommendations.** The analysis of GDPR implementation and national rules on minimum age for digital services (section 4.1) highlights the limited effectiveness of setting age thresholds without robust verification mechanisms. This tension between formal rules and everyday practices should be addressed in ASAP's

policy recommendations, emphasising the need for realistic, enforceable measures and for complementary educational strategies rather than relying on legal age limits alone.

- **Teacher training as a structural lever.** The obligation of continuous professional development for teachers and the training framework described in section 3.1 constitute an important feasibility condition for the ASAP training offer. They provide guidance on formats, timing and workload, and suggest that digital skills, media literacy and critical use of technology are increasingly recognised as legitimate and necessary components of teachers’ professional learning.
- **Value of existing research and initiatives.** The national research projects on social media and smartphone use (chapter 2), together with the institutional measures and programmes (chapter 4) and the national and partner-led initiatives described in chapter 5, represent both a knowledge base and a potential network of collaboration. ASAP can draw on their tools, methodologies and findings to avoid duplication, build synergies and enhance the transferability and sustainability of its outputs.
- **Awareness of legal consequences for minors’ online behaviour.** Finally, the overview of “internet crimes” (section 4.3) and of criminal and civil liability (section 4.2) underscores the need to help preadolescents understand that certain online behaviours may constitute offences, with concrete consequences for themselves and their families. In Italy, minors under 14 cannot be held criminally responsible, but their parents bear civil liability; this dimension can be addressed in age-appropriate ways in ASAP’s educational paths, alongside a broader focus on rights, duties and digital citizenship.

By integrating these elements, the ASAP project can build on the Italian context to develop research tools, teaching materials and training pathways that are grounded in evidence, aligned with existing policies and sensitive to the lived experiences of preadolescents, their families and their schools.

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DESK RESEARCH

This report is part of the Erasmus+ project ASAP – *A Systemic Approach to social media and pre-adolescents through thinking skills education.*

It presents key findings from desk research conducted in Italy with students, parents, teachers, and school leaders. The study explores the challenges of digital life in early adolescence and the educational needs of all involved.

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