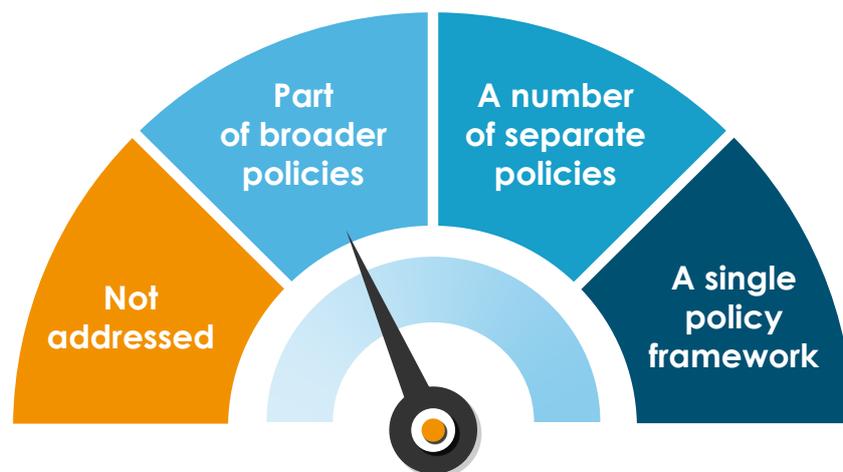# Belgium

The Better Internet for Kids (BIK) Policy Map is a tool used to compare and exchange knowledge on policy making and implementation in EU Member States on the themes and recommendations of the European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children (or BIK Strategy) first set out by the European Commission in May 2012. The third BIK Policy Map report (2020) examines the implementation of the BIK Strategy in 30 European countries, including all EU Member States, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom.

For each country in the BIK Policy Map study, we outline findings for Policy frameworks, Policy making and Policy implementation, and conclude by providing a selection of good practices.

Download the full BIK Policy Map report from the Better Internet for Kids website.

1. Policy frameworks

Policy frameworks refer to the organising principles and long-term goals for policies, guidelines, decisions and other statements made at the national level in the course of putting into practice the BIK Strategy.

In Belgium, the European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children has influenced national policy debates on the subject of children's use of the internet. The topic of children's use of the internet forms part of broader policies which address the four different pillars of the BIK Strategy. The BIK Strategy is a key resource used by the Belgian Safer Internet Centre when creating new content, tools or campaigns. It is also used in advocacy work with different stakeholders and policy makers. Some examples are given below.

Pillar 1: High-quality content online for children and young people

- Policy Paper Flemish Minister of Education 2019 - 2024 which addresses *inter alia* the need for digital competences and the impact of technological evolution on the learning environment.

- [Minister Glatigny](#) (Wallonia – Brussels region).

Pillar 2: Stepping up awareness and empowerment

Media literacy in Belgium is organised on a regional basis:

- In Flanders, [Mediawijs](#) is the Flemish Knowledge Centre for Digital and Media Literacy of the Flemish government and imec vzw. Mediawijs helps the inhabitants of Flanders and Brussels to consciously, actively, critically and creatively use ICT and media to participate in society.

- In Wallonia – Brussels, [Media Animation](#) was created from the merger of a film documentation centre and a music information centre. Média Animation was recognised in 1976 by the French Community of Belgium as a General Service for Continuing Education. It is from its work of permanent education in the audiovisual field that the association has contributed to a critical education of the citizen regarding the media (media education). This led, in 1995, to a complementary recognition as a resource centre for media education for teaching.

Pillar 3: Creating a safer environment for children online

- The [Belgian Better Internet Consortium (B-BICO)](#) is a nationwide project that reaches across the different parts of the federal structure of the country and across the different language groups. Child Focus coordinates the project with a federal partner: CERT.be.

- The French speaking community is represented by Média Animation and the [Conseil Supérieur de l'Education aux médias](#) (CSEM), and by iMinds (Mediawijs.be) for the Flemish community.

Pillar 4: Legislation and law enforcement against child sexual abuse and exploitation

- Law or regulation are the primary means for implementing Pillar 4 which includes the [Criminal Code](#).

2. Policy making

Policy making refers to the general process by which policies are developed within each country, including how coordination and oversight is managed, the extent to which the policy agenda is informed by an evidence base, and whether there are arrangements for young people to be involved in the policy process.

The [Belgian Better Internet Consortium](#) plays a key role in coordination. The aim of the Belgian Better Internet Consortium is to gather and streamline all Belgian actors and expertise involved in eSafety and online media literacy and concretely work together by taking joint initiatives, for instance via the creation of a "one-stop shop" for the Belgian general public.

The organisations that are members of the consortium work on very diverse topics, going from technical safety, and from safe use to a better use of the internet.

2.1 How are policies coordinated?

In Belgium, there are more than six ministries involved in coordinating policies related to children's use of the internet and digital technologies:

- The different ministries of education (4: 2 FR, 1 FL & 1 DE) have an involvement such as through the inclusion of eSafety in educational curricula.

- The Federal Minister of Justice has responsibility for the legal framework and criminalisation of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and other forms of online sexual exploitation.

- The different regional ministers of health (3: FL, DE & FR) are responsible for prevention towards possible perpetrators.

- The Federal Minister for Data Protection addresses all issues related to data protection of minors.

2.2 Who is primarily in charge of policy coordination?

Responsibility for coordination of BIK-related policies varies by each respective pillar of the BIK Strategy.

- Under Pillar 1: High-quality content online for children and young people, this is primarily overseen by the relevant ministries of education (4).

- Under Pillar 2: Stepping up awareness and empowerment, the regional organisations for media literacy have the main role.

- Under Pillar 3: Tools and regulation for an online safe environment, Child Focus is the agency with responsibility for policy coordination.

- In Pillar 4: Legislation and law enforcement against child sexual abuse and exploitation, the Ministry of Justice has the primary responsibility for policy coordination.

Inter-departmental communication mechanisms include B-BICO in relation to awareness raising. In relation to CSAM and sexual exploitation online, there is a Memorandum of Understanding between Child Focus (NGO/hotline), the Federal Police, the Crown Prosecutor's Office and the Minister of Justice.

2.3 Data collection in the last three years

Data collection to support policy making related to the BIK Strategy includes national and regional surveys with quantitative data specifically focused on children's use of the internet, quantitative data on some topics of children's use of the internet collected as part of a broader survey, and qualitative research specifically focused on children's use of the internet. Examples include:

- [Apestaartjaren](#) is a large-scale biennial study into the digital world of Flemish children and young people aged between 6 and 18. As of 2020, the study became 'national', since there is also a questionnaire for the French speaking community, conducted by the University of Liège.

- The Child Focus helpline produces statistics in its [annual report](#).

2.4 Involvement of young people in policy making

The involvement of young people in policy making is described as one whereby young people's interests are considered indirectly (for example, through analysis of existing surveys or data collections). This is primarily represented through survey work undertaken by Child Focus and other NGOs who have extensive child participation throughout their awareness-raising work.

3. Policy implementation

Policy implementation refers to the involvement of the relevant stakeholders in the delivery of initiatives and the spread of activities as envisaged under each of the four pillars of the BIK Strategy.

Pillar 1: High-quality content online for children and young people

Activities under Pillar 1 are led by relevant government ministries of education. The Safer Internet Centre has a complementary role in this area.

Summary of Pillar 1 actions:

	Introduced in the last 12 months	Existent before last year	Not available
Initiatives to stimulate the production and visibility of quality content for children	☑	☐	☐
Initiatives to encourage children's creativity and to promote positive use of the internet	☑	☐	☐
Initiatives to implement standards for quality online content for children	☐	☐	☑
Other relevant activity (please specify)	☐	☐	☐

Pillar 2: Stepping up awareness and empowerment

Public agencies, specifically the regional agencies for media literacy ([Mediawijs](#) and [Media Animation](#)), take the lead in Pillar 2.

Summary of Pillar 2 actions:

	Introduced in the last 12 months	Existent before last year	Not available
"Teaching online safety in schools"			
Strategies to include teaching online safety in schools	☐	☑	☐
Activities to reinforce informal education about online safety	☐	☑	☐
Activities to provide for online safety policies in schools	☐	☑	☐
Activities to ensure adequate teacher training in online safety	☐	☑	☐
Activities to support public-private partnerships in online safety	☐	☑	☐
"Digital and media literacy activities"			
Activities to support young people's technical skills required to use online media content and services	☐	☑	☐
Activities to encourage critical thinking around media industries and evaluating content for truthfulness, reliability	☐	☑	☐
Activities that encourage interaction, engagement and participation in the economic, social, creative, cultural aspects of society through online media	☐	☑	☐
Activities that promote democratic participation and fundamental rights on the internet	☐	☑	☐
Activities that challenge radicalisation and hate speech online	☐	☑	☐
"Scaling up awareness activities and youth participation"			
National support for public awareness-raising campaigns	☐	☑	☐
Involvement of children when developing national campaigns	☐	☑	☐
Involvement of children when developing legislation with an impact on their online activities	☐	☐	☐
Activities or initiatives to match the Commission's support for the national Youth Panels	☐	☑	☐

Industry funding and technical support for NGOs and education providers	☐	☑	☐
Industry dissemination of awareness material either online or at the point of sale	☐	☑	☐
"Simple and robust reporting tools for users"			
Mechanisms for reporting content and contacts that may be harmful for children such as cyberbullying or grooming	☐	☑	☐
Initiatives to facilitate cooperation between helplines and law enforcement	☐	☑	☐
Initiatives to monitor the effective functioning of reporting mechanisms at a national level	☐	☑	☐

Pillar 3: Creating a safe environment for children online

The Safer Internet Centre takes the lead role in this pillar with government ministries having a complementary role.

Summary of Pillar 3 actions:

	Introduced in the last 12 months	Existent before last year	Not available
"Age-appropriate privacy settings"			
Activities to ensure the implementation of EU legislation	☐	☑	☐
Self-regulatory measures by industry about age-appropriate privacy settings	☐	☑	☐
Awareness-raising activities regarding age-appropriate privacy settings	☐	☑	☐
"Wider availability and use of parental controls"			
Activities to promote the availability of parental control tools	☐	☑	☐
Tests and certification for parental control tools	☐	☑	☐
Efforts to support industry implementation of parental control tools	☐	☐	☐
"Wider use of age rating and content classification"			

Activities to promote the adoption of age rating and content classification among relevant stakeholders	☐	☑	☐
A complaints process for the effective functioning of such systems	☐	☑	☐
"Online advertising and overspending"			
Activities at the national level to ensure that legislation regarding online profiling and behavioural advertising is observed	☐	☑	☐
Support industry in developing codes of conduct regarding inappropriate advertising	☐	☐	☐
Monitor implementation of codes of conduct at the national level	☐	☐	☐

Pillar 4: Fighting against child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation

The Ministry of Justice lead in the implementation of Pillar 4 activities with a complementary role played by NGOs such as Child Focus and industry. An MoU exists between Child Focus (NGO/hotline), the Federal Police, the Crown Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of Justice for the fight against CSAM and online sexual exploitation.

Summary of Pillar 4 actions:

	Introduced in the last 12 months	Existent before last year	Not available
Increased resources for law enforcement bodies that fight against child abuse material online	☐	☐	☑
Effective safeguards in place to ensure democratic accountability in the use of investigative tools to combat child sexual abuse	☐	☑	☐
Activities to support the functioning and visibility of hotlines at the national level	☐	☑	☐
Activities to support the improvement of cooperation between hotlines and industry for taking down child abuse material	☐	☑	☐

4. Good practices

The following are three selected examples of good practices in supporting children's use of the internet in Belgium:

MoU in the fight against CSAM

The MoU between Child Focus (NGO/hotline), the Federal Police, the Crown Prosecutor's Office and the Minister of Justice in the fight against online child sexual abuse material is cited as an example of best practice.

Campaign against CSAM

On the occasion of the European Day for the Protection of Children against Sexual Abuse (17.11.2019), Child Focus launched a striking campaign. On Sunday evening, Goedele Liekens, clinical psychologist and sexologist, published a link to a supposedly made porn film. Through this link, people did not end up on a regular porn film, but on an explicit reconstruction of actual intercepted images of child sexual abuse, in which a scene was re-enacted by adults. Based on a video originally hosted on www.chaletfilm.be, the organisation aimed to raise the issue of images of child sexual abuse and break taboos that prevail in society about this. The number of reports of abuse images is increasing exponentially, both worldwide and in Belgium. This problem is shocking, but unfortunately it is a harsh reality hence it is high time to make it a top priority.

STAR eSafety tool for youngsters with autism spectrum disorders

STAR is an online, educational tool that promotes safe and responsible internet use among young people between the ages of 10 and 14 with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This free tool can be used by professionals in facilities, as well as in regular inclusive and special education. This tool opens the dialogue on various themes such as privacy settings, online and offline friends, challenges and sexting. The enclosed pedagogical sheets contain more in-depth questions and offer a guide throughout the modules. STAR won the resource competition at a bi-annual Insafe meeting in 2019.