



D5.6 Child-Friendly Film Industry

Project: Reviving, Boosting, Optimising and Transforming European Film Competitiveness - REBOOT

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THE REBOOT PROJECT SUMMARY

This project aims to connect existing strengths, identify and overcome weaknesses, and plan for future competitiveness in the fields of policy, practice and experience. More concretely, the project's objectives are, firstly, to explore the long-standing strengths and pervasive gaps in European competitiveness and policies for competitiveness. This includes ways of measuring, analysing and evaluating the impact of policies and strategic pathways. Secondly, the project aspires to actively prepare for future audiences by exploring audience preferences and their generation, as well as modes of film content production. The latter are elements which today's youth will engage with in the coming decades as makers and consumers, as well as industry and policy leaders. Therefore, the consortium interrogates not only "what is" but also "what has been" and "what will be" from fresh perspectives.

REBOOT's ambition is to provide a full set of knowledge of the European film industry, which maximises its existing strengths, combined with strategic and tactical dimensions of action to optimise the potential held in European youth publics, understood both as emerging audiences and as citizens. Specifically, the ambition of the project combines several dimensions, which reinforce each other but are listed separately for analytical purposes (and in no particular order): a) increasing support for young people's engagement with European film; b) strengthening the place of the European Union (EU) in the global audiovisual economy, particularly in light of the rise of video on demand (VoD); c) supporting cultural diversity in the EU film industry; d) addressing the need for a different understanding of competitiveness and relevant indicators in this context; and e) recognising and supporting the importance for the EU of film and, more broadly, of the cultural and creative sector as a geopolitical asset.



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Deliverable 5.6, we report the findings from literature and policy analysis, as well as focus groups conducted with young people aged 12 to 24 across nine countries, in order to examine the child-friendly European film industry.

After introducing the concept of the children-friendly European film industry (part 2), the analysis combines literature review and policy mapping across EU and international frameworks and critically assesses the scholarship on children's roles as citizens, consumers and users in relation to film production and consumption (parts 3 and 4). It situates discussion within global and European perspectives, drawing on cross-national studies that span Europe, Africa and Asia, while also engaging with psychological and sociological analyses of taste, participation and identity. Through these lenses, the report examines the ways in which European cultural and audiovisual policies engage with children's lived realities, moving beyond protectionist or sectoral approaches towards an integrated vision that foregrounds agency, inclusion and rights. Ultimately, it seeks to reframe young audiences not as passive recipients of culture, but as social actors whose interactions with media constitute acts of citizenship, consumption and creation (Soto-Sanfiel et al., 2018; Veenstra et al., 2022) but also to illuminate the broader implications for cultural policy, educational practice and debates on digital inclusion.

On a second level (part 5) the report further examines the broader European regulation in enabling and protecting young people to active media consumption and engagement, as there is a lack of specific film regulation related to children. General and tailored initiatives from institutions and policy makers are addressing specific vulnerabilities but also opportunities provided by the film industry to enhance children's rights. To this end, it is essential to analyse the main features of the international and EU strategies on the rights of the child that are impacting on the design and implementation of the film industry ones.

These findings offer essential guidance for developing forward-thinking audiovisual policies that prioritise the protection of minors' rights, especially given that young people's tastes and worldviews are still forming. Current recommendation algorithms often reinforce existing preferences, creating the illusion of choice while narrowing cultural engagement. In contrast, focus group participants expressed a clear desire for discovery, dialogue and cultural exploration through cinema. These insights suggest the need to reimagine algorithms, so they stimulate new interests, foster critical thinking and expand cultural horizons.



Designing a child-friendly European film industry which aligns with children's rights to diversity, self-expression and inclusive cultural participation represents a critical policy innovation. By centring youth voices and values, future audiovisual frameworks can resist passive consumption models, instead promoting active, meaningful engagement with film as a tool for education and empowerment. This report addresses the regulatory framework impacting children's rights protection and promotion to shape a child-friendly film industry. Building on these insights, the report in Chapter 6, introduces young people's voices and situates them as stakeholders who shape the cultural and filmic impact by expressing their perspectives and preferences on the films, their infractions with films beyond watching and their engagement with film as creators. Finally, in part 7, the conclusions of the European child-friendly film industry are being presented.



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2. INTRODUCTION: CHILD FRIENDLY FILM INDUSTRY

Recent years have seen children's engagement with culture and media emerging as a central concern in both academic research and policy design. As digital and audiovisual ecosystems evolve, questions of access, participation and representation have gained renewed importance within debates on democracy, education and cultural inclusion. At stake is not only how children consume culture, but how their rights, voices and creative capacities are recognised and sustained across institutional and technological environments. As the technological means to create and access audiovisual content become universally available, resulting in an overabundance of material (Husbye et al., 2015), the challenge is no longer merely technical. Instead, it depends on ensuring that children are equipped with the necessary digital literacy skills and are provided with content that supports their well-being and rights. Unlike earlier generations, whose engagement with film and media was largely limited to scheduled broadcasts, theatrical screenings and carefully regulated cultural products, contemporary youth navigate a dynamic environment of streaming platforms, social media and participatory networks. Within this landscape, children are no longer easily characterised as passive viewers of cultural commodities. Instead, they appear simultaneously as consumers of global cultural industries, as users and producers of digital content and as citizens with rights to participation, voice and representation.

The shifting perspectives on childhood in media research reflect broader transformations in the social sciences. Early work often cast children primarily as vulnerable audiences, in need of protection from media effects such as violence, advertising or moral decline (Livingstone, 2002). Such approaches echoed broader developmentalist perspectives that positioned childhood as a stage of becoming rather than being, with emphasis placed on preparing children for adult citizenship rather than recognising their present agency. More recent research, however, informed by the "new sociology of childhood" (James & Prout, 2015; Qvortrup, 1994), challenges these assumptions. It highlights children as active social agents who negotiate meaning, construct identities and exercise creative practices in their everyday media engagements. Within this shift, children are understood not simply as objects of cultural influence but as participants in the production, circulation and interpretation of cultural texts.

Film continues to occupy a special place within this broader media landscape. Despite the diversification of media forms and the rise of algorithmically curated short-form content, film remains a powerful site of cultural storytelling. It provides young audiences with narratives of identity, belonging and difference, while also serving as a source of aesthetic pleasure, aspirational role



models and moral frameworks. Moreover, film frequently inspires creative practices that extend far beyond the theater or streaming platform - ranging from fan fiction and meme culture to amateur filmmaking and professional aspirations. For many children, film represents both a mirror of social worlds and a canvas for imaginative reinvention.

At the same time, the global circulation of film underscores the importance of studying children's media engagements comparatively. Hollywood continues to exert a dominant influence, shaping youth tastes across continents and reinforcing global hierarchies of production quality, narrative form and celebrity culture. Yet regional industries such as Nollywood in Nigeria and Bollywood in India, as well as emergent digital filmmaking traditions across Asia, Africa and Europe, provide important counterpoints. These industries not only offer alternative narratives and cultural repertoire but also raise questions about language preservation, cultural identity and the pedagogical role of media. Recent scholarship emphasises how children's engagements with these diverse film cultures are mediated by socioeconomic status, peer networks and digital infrastructures (Aniukwu, 2025; Chawla & Srinivas, 2021; Klaysung, 2024).

This report situates the analysis of young audiences within a broader normative framework: that of *child-friendliness* as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). The review mobilises three interrelated analytical lenses: the *child as citizen*, the *child as consumer* and the *child as user*. These conceptual figures draw upon the sociology of childhood (James & Prout, 1997; Qvortrup, 1994), cultural studies (Jenkins, 2006) and media policy analysis (Livingstone & Third, 2017). The conceptual triad of child as citizen, consumer and user offer a productive framework for synthesising this growing body of research. Each of these roles highlights a distinct yet interconnected dimension of children's engagement with film. The child as a citizen emphasises rights to participation, representation and cultural belonging, drawing on frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989). The child as a consumer foregrounds market relations, taste cultures and peer dynamics, exploring how young audiences negotiate global and local film cultures, how preferences are structured by gender, class and temperament and how consumption itself becomes a form of identity work. Finally, the child as a user reflects the participatory and prosumer dimensions of digital culture, where children not only watch but also remix, produce and circulate filmic content.



3. THE CONCEPT OF “CHILD-FRIENDLY” IN POLICY

3.1. Framing “Child-Friendliness” as a Normative Policy Principle

The growing awareness that children and young adolescents live in a media-saturated environment - often described as a *media bedroom culture* (Bovill & Livingstone, 2013) has led to a surge in media policies and industry initiatives aimed at protecting them, as well as efforts to prepare children and young adolescents to become more critical future adults, citizens and media consumers. As Buckingham (2012) argues, this awareness has given rise to socially constructed discourses, strategies and practices developed by a wide range of organisations to shape and regulate children's relationship with audiovisual media.

The adoption of the UNCRC in 1989 marked a milestone in the recognition of children as autonomous rights-holders, endowed with a comprehensive set of civil, political, economic, social and cultural entitlements applicable to all individuals under the age of eighteen (United Nations, 1989). By formally acknowledging children as full legal and moral subjects, the Convention laid the ethical and analytical groundwork for the emergence of “*child-friendliness*” as a guiding principle in contemporary policy discourse. Recognising the importance of the media in disseminating information, Article 17 of the convention states that governments should make media available to children by encourage “the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child,” and encouraging “the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being.” Article 13 roots this principle by affirming children's right to freedom of expression, including access to information and ideas through media.

In this sense, the Convention provides an interpretive lens through which the ethical orientation of European cultural and media policies targeting young audiences can be examined. “Child-friendliness” thus assumes a dual function, not merely a descriptive label but a normative and evaluative criterion obliging institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, to uphold children’s agency within the cultural and communicative environments they contribute to shape (UNICEF, 2004; Lundy, 2007). This principle, anchored in the fourfold architecture of the UNCRC (protection, provision, participation and development) has progressively reoriented public policy from a purely protective framework toward one that actively fosters children’s expression, inclusion and influence in public life. As Livingstone and Bulger (2014) contend, enhancing children’s rights must occur simultaneously on a global, national and local level.



Understood not simply as a legal instrument but as an operational blueprint for redefining how childhood is governed, the Convention affirms the responsibility of states and institutions to create environments that promote children's dignity and participation rather than merely safeguarding them. "Child-friendliness" thereby becomes a normative horizon and a strategic guide for transforming governance structures. It conceptualises childhood not as a preparatory stage for adulthood but as a social condition of actual and present citizenship, one that recognises children as capable of shaping their environments, expressing preferences and engaging critically with their communities and the world around them.

In the decades following its ratification, the principle has gained traction across multiple spheres, signalling a broader paradigmatic shift toward child-centred institutional design. The child is no longer construed as a vulnerable object of protection but as a legitimate stakeholder and rights-bearing interlocutor among mediated public spheres. From this perspective, "child-friendliness" operates as a heuristic framework for reconfiguring pedagogical settings and civic infrastructures around the effective realisation of children's capabilities, preferences and motivations.

Among the most significant efforts to operationalise these aspirations is the UNICEF-led **Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI)**, launched in 1996. Building upon Articles 3, 12, 15 and 31 of the UNCRC, the CFCI articulates a governance model that fosters collaboration among municipal authorities, civil-society organisations, educational institutions and children themselves. Its purpose is to equip local governments with practical tools to integrate children's rights into public policy and administrative practice across sectors such as urban planning, education, culture and public service delivery.

These articles reaffirm the child's best interests alongside their rights to be heard, given due weight according to their age and maturity and to associate freely. They also enshrine the right to rest, relax, play and to take part in cultural and creative activities (UNCRC, Article 31). Extending far beyond recreation or physical safety, these rights affirm children's entitlement to well-being and inclusion, nurturing creativity, cultural participation and a sense of identity and belonging. In practice, they are translated into urban and cultural policies that shape inclusive public spaces.

Taken together, these provisions articulate a holistic vision of childhood as an active and participatory social condition. Children are not merely to be protected but recognised as social actors and co-creators of the environments they inhabit. This vision requires that institutions design inclusive environments balancing protection with agency, enabling children to rest, play, express themselves and participate meaningfully in the decisions that shape their everyday worlds.



According to UNICEF, a child-friendly environment ensures both material well-being and democratic inclusion. It guarantees access to essential services such as education, healthcare, mobility and recreation, not only in terms of proximity but also of affordability, inclusivity and cultural relevance. Such environments are further characterised by their commitment to safety, encompassing physical protection from harm, exploitation and abuse, as well as emotional security and protection from discrimination or exclusion.

Equally crucial is the creation of conditions in which children feel free and empowered to express their views and to be taken seriously by adults and institutions. This principle, codified in Article 12 of the UNCRC, is considered fundamental to the development of active citizenship and the realisation of children's full human potential. A child-friendly city or community, therefore, is not solely a physical or institutional configuration but a normative one, where rights are respected, well-being is prioritised and children's voices are woven into the fabric of public life.

Academic and policy discourses alike stress the importance of involving children in matters that affect them, from school governance to local planning and cultural programming. The notion of **present citizenship** departs from earlier developmental views that defined children primarily by their future potential. Instead, it foregrounds their lived experiences and the legitimacy of their perspectives. Participatory practices, youth councils, co-designed cultural events, school-based civic education, demonstrate how this conceptual shift is operationalised.

Alongside this civic role, children also emerge as **consumers** within increasingly global and digitally mediated cultural economies. They are not passive recipients of content but active participants who select, negotiate and co-create cultural products. Media industries, recognising the economic value of young audiences, have developed targeted content strategies and engagement ecosystems. This consumer role is ambivalent: it enables pleasure, identity formation and community-building, yet it also exposes children to commercial pressures and algorithmic logics. Scholars have highlighted these tensions, particularly regarding media literacy, branding and digital advertising.

Simultaneously, the figure of the **child as user** reflects children's navigation of complex digital environments, cinema, streaming, gaming, social media, where competence and vulnerability coexist. As users, children curate media experiences, participate in online communities and express creativity through digital tools, even as their data and attention are commodified. This dual identity underscores the need for digital rights, platform accountability and critical pedagogy.

These three figures, **citizen, consumer and user**, are not separate but interwoven, reflecting the complexity of children's contemporary social positions. Film engagement within educational



contexts, for instance, intersects all three: it nurtures civic agency, fosters aesthetic discernment and develops critical digital skills. Recognising children as citizens calls for institutional mechanisms that ensure their voices are heard and their influence acknowledged. Understanding them as consumers highlights the need for ethical regulation and safeguards. Appreciating them as users, finally, emphasises digital literacy and equitable access.

Across Europe, **film-literacy programmes** exemplify how these dimensions converge. Initiatives such as *Med Skolen i Biografen* in Denmark illustrate the potential for collaboration among schools, cultural institutions and market actors to create meaningful encounters between children and cinema. Such programmes enhance access to European cultural heritage while cultivating reflection, aesthetic appreciation and personal expression. They align with the broader objectives of the European Union regarding cultural diversity, youth empowerment and democratic engagement. Ultimately, a child-friendly policy environment recognises children as active participants in the construction of their social worlds, capable of contributing, creating, choosing and critiquing. Whether in policymaking, media regulation or cultural programming, commitment to child-friendliness demands a shift from adult-centred frameworks toward plural, situated understandings of childhood. In doing so, it lays the foundations for more inclusive, responsive and just societies.

3.2. The Child as Citizen, Consumer and User

The Child as Citizen: Participation and Agency

The representation of the child as a citizen has long been a central concern in political theory and the sociology of childhood. Historically, children were conceptualised as *citizens-in-waiting*, future participants in social and political life whose present was defined primarily by dependency and preparation (Marshall, 1950; Qvortrup, 1994). Contemporary scholarship, however, has decisively shifted this paradigm towards what is often termed *present citizenship* (Lister, 2007; Thomas, 2007; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). This perspective acknowledges that children are not merely *becoming* citizens but *being* citizens: social actors endowed with agency, capable of meaningful engagement in the public sphere and of contributing to the governance of their social environments.

From this standpoint, children's political and civic participation manifests in multiple, overlapping forms. Within institutional contexts, it includes school councils, youth parliaments and participatory budgeting processes through which young people are formally involved in consultation or decision-making (Percy-Smith, 2011). Beyond formal institutions, participation is enacted through co-design practices in education, urban planning and cultural programming, arenas in which children's lived



experiences inform the spatial and social design of their environments. These practices align with the participatory principles of Article 12 of the UNCRC, which stipulates that children capable of forming their own views must be given the opportunity to express them freely in all matters affecting them, with due weight accorded to their age and maturity.

Scholars such as Lundy (2007) and Thomas (2007) emphasise that the challenge is not simply one of formal inclusion, but of *meaningful participation*. The distinction lies between tokenistic practices, where participation is symbolic or instrumental and genuine engagement, in which children's input leads to tangible outcomes. As Percy-Smith (2010) observes, this distinction is crucial to prevent the reproduction of adult-centric power structures under the guise of participatory rhetoric. Meaningful participation, by contrast, entails a redistribution of communicative authority, enabling children to influence the frameworks and narratives through which their voices are integrated into governance and cultural processes.

Within the field of **cultural citizenship**, participation extends beyond formal politics to include engagement with the arts, film and media (Björk, 2022). Cultural citizenship, as conceptualised by Stevenson (2003) and Hartley (2010), denotes the capacity of individuals to access, interpret and produce cultural texts that contribute to identity formation and social belonging. For children, participation in cultural life (Article 31, UNCRC) thus becomes a core dimension of democratic agency. The consumption and creation of cultural and audiovisual content, including European cinema, constitute acts of cultural participation through which young audiences negotiate meaning, express identity and articulate belonging to local, national and transnational communities.

The conceptualisation of children as citizens emerges from the broader reorientation of childhood studies, which rejects deficit-based models and instead emphasises children's active presence in the social world (James & Prout, 2015; Qvortrup, 1994). Central to this framing is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), particularly Article 31, which guarantees children the right to participate in cultural and artistic life. This provision situates film not merely as entertainment but as a domain of cultural rights, where access, participation and representation become matters of citizenship.

Empirical studies across Europe corroborate this link between film participation and civic agency. Research in film literacy (Ercole et al., 2020; Veenstra et al., 2022) demonstrates that exposure to culturally diverse cinematic narratives fosters empathy, critical thinking and intercultural understanding among young audiences. When embedded in participatory educational frameworks,



such encounters allow children to explore ethical and societal issues through aesthetic experience, thereby contributing to civic formation. These findings echo the normative vision expressed in the Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec (2009) on Education for Democratic Citizenship, which positions cultural participation as both a right and a practice of democracy.

Empirical studies demonstrate how film functions as a space where children's cultural citizenship is enacted. Jevtić and Milošević (2021), in a study of Serbian adolescents, found that media preferences were closely tied to perceived value orientations, suggesting that engagement with film is not only about aesthetic enjoyment but also about moral and cultural frameworks. In Nigeria, Aniukwu (2025) argues that Nollywood productions play a central role in shaping children's behaviors and attitudes, underscoring the pedagogical dimension of media and its capacity to mold cultural norms. These findings illustrate how children's encounters with film often involve moral, civic and cultural dimensions that resonate with the broader discourse of citizenship.

Nonetheless, significant challenges persist in realising children's citizenship in practice. Studies reveal that institutional participation mechanisms often remain adult-directed and procedurally constrained, focusing on consultation rather than co-decision (Lundy, 2018). Moreover, social inequalities, class, ethnicity, gender and disability, continue to intersect with participation opportunities, reinforcing the need for inclusive and intersectional frameworks of engagement. In media and cultural policy, participation is frequently framed in educational rather than civic terms, privileging access and protection over agency and influence.

Recent approaches advocate for more deliberative and co-creative models of participation, grounded in communicative ethics (Habermas, 1984) and *affective citizenship* (Isin, 2009). Such models stress the importance of *listening infrastructures*: institutional mechanisms designed not only to gather children's views but to embed them within decision-making cycles. Examples include participatory evaluation practices in cultural institutions, youth advisory panels in public broadcasting and co-curated film education initiatives. The goal is to ensure that children's perspectives are not merely represented but shape the symbolic and practical conditions of public culture.

Participatory filmmaking projects further highlight how children can exercise citizenship through media. Davies et al. (2022), in research on participatory video projects in Kenya, showed how secondary school students were able to use film to articulate perspectives on health and social issues. Such projects function as platforms for dialogue, granting children not only a voice but also recognition as cultural participants capable of shaping institutional and community agendas.



Representation is central to cultural citizenship because it mediates whether children see themselves included in the cultural narratives that surround them. Supa et al. (2022) show that diverse representation in media validates children's identities, while underrepresentation or misrepresentation can contribute to feelings of marginalisation. Araújo et al. (2023) similarly found that children are acutely aware of representation, noting differences across ethnicity, gender and cultural markers.

In the European context, these debates intersect with policy. The Creative Europe program emphasises inclusivity and cultural diversity in audiovisual production (European Commission, 2020). Yet, as Trültzsch-Wijnen (2020) notes, European youth often consume US-based content more readily than European films. Moreover, children rarely spontaneously identify films as "European" unless prompted, raising questions about the effectiveness of policy discourses in shaping youth cultural identification. The gap between policy ideals and actual viewing habits demonstrates the tension between institutional framings of cultural citizenship and children's lived experiences as audiences.

Ultimately, conceiving the child as a citizen requires recognising their capacity to act, decide and create within the mediated public sphere. It calls for policies that enable young people to engage with media not only as consumers or users, but as communicative actors in democratic life. Within this framework, the principle of *child-friendliness* operates as a normative guide for reconfiguring cultural governance, not as a top-down provision of access, but as a participatory process of co-authorship in the social and aesthetic construction of the public domain.

The Child as Consumer: Navigating the Media Market

Since the 1980s, the child has increasingly been understood as an active consumer within a globalised media and entertainment economy. Scholars have highlighted several key dynamics shaping this condition. Children influence not only their own cultural consumption but also the purchasing decisions of their families, a phenomenon often described as *pester power*. They are simultaneously courted by commercial media industries and configured as strategic market segments across film, streaming, gaming and merchandising sectors. In this configuration, the child consumer occupies an ambivalent position at the intersection of citizenship and capitalism: expected to be autonomous and discerning, yet vulnerable to persuasion and exploitation.



David Buckingham and Henry Giroux, among others, have critically examined this ambivalence, questioning the ethics of addressing children primarily as market subjects and the implications of commodifying childhood itself. Within the cinematic and audiovisual domain, this tension is particularly visible in the enduring dominance of U.S. studios and global streaming platforms. The so-called “Big Five” (i.e. Disney, Warner Bros., Universal, Paramount and Sony) together account for a majority share of box office revenues and streaming catalogues accessible to young audiences. In contrast, European cinema, often associated with art-house, auteur, or socially reflective productions, persists in facing challenges regarding visibility and market penetration.

This structural imbalance has long justified regulatory interventions such as content quotas, selective funding schemes and tax incentives designed to safeguard cultural diversity and sustain local production. The *Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD)* and national frameworks such as France’s *Centre National du Cinéma et de l’Image Animée (CNC)* exemplify the European Union’s attempt to reconcile market logic with cultural policy, protecting young audiences’ right to diversity and to access European stories within an increasingly global media ecosystem.

At the same time, the exercise of *cultural citizenship* increasingly unfolds within digital environments where participation, expression and creativity are mediated through networked platforms. The boundary between civic engagement and media participation has therefore become increasingly porous. As Jenkins (2006) and Livingstone (2013) have observed, the capacity to act as a citizen in the twenty-first century is inseparable from the ability to navigate, interpret and contribute to digital cultures. Consequently, *film literacy* and *digital literacy* are now understood as complementary dimensions of democratic agency, bridging the gap between civic participation and creative media practice.

As digital distribution systems and algorithmic recommendation models shape access to cultural content, the distinction between consumption and participation continues to blur. The child no longer consumes film passively but navigates, curates and recontextualises it through interactive and social platforms. This evolving figure, the *child as user*, marks a new stage in the relationship between young audiences and European cinema, where digital agency, creativity and data governance emerge as central to contemporary cultural rights.

As digital participation increasingly unfolds through AI-driven and algorithmically curated environments, safeguarding children’s autonomy and data rights becomes a central challenge for cultural and media governance.



The Child as User: Digital Participation and Literacy

In digital contexts, children are no longer mere recipients of media but active users, producers and remixers. This figure of the *child as a user* has become central in contemporary media and communication studies, reflecting a profound shift in how agency, creativity and learning are conceived within networked environments.

Literature on *participatory culture* (Jenkins, 2006) emphasises how children and young people engage in creative fan practices, collaborative editing and online social interaction. These activities blur the boundaries between consumption and production, fostering what Jenkins terms “*produsage*”, a participatory mode of cultural creation in which users both consume and generate content. Through such practices, children develop expressive skills and digital competencies that position them as co-authors of online culture.

In parallel, research on *platform use* highlights the multiplicity of environments through which children navigate, ranging from YouTube and TikTok to gaming and streaming platforms. These spaces serve as sites of exploration, self-expression and social negotiation, where algorithmic curation and peer feedback shape visibility and participation. As Livingstone (2013) notes, children’s engagement across platforms is conditioned by complex trade-offs between autonomy, risk and datafication. While these environments enable creativity and connectivity, they also expose children to surveillance, targeted advertising and attention economies that commodify their interactions.

Within this ecosystem, *digital literacy* has emerged as a core educational and civic priority. Moving beyond models of passive media consumption, media education across Europe increasingly emphasises critical engagement, ethical awareness and the ability to navigate digital systems responsibly. Film and audiovisual literacy are now understood as integral components of digital citizenship, bridging cultural participation with democratic agency.

Empirical research (Veenstra et al., 2022) has confirmed that children utilise films and audiovisual content for multiple forms of meaning-making, including identity construction, emotional regulation, social bonding and moral reflection. These uses highlight the affective and cognitive dimensions of digital participation, showing how audiovisual media function as tools for self-understanding and interpersonal connection.

In sum, the *child as a user* embodies a complex intersection of autonomy and vulnerability. As users, children exercise creative and communicative agency, yet their participation is continuously



mediated by platform architectures and data governance regimes. Recognising this duality calls for policy frameworks that balance empowerment with protection, ensuring that digital participation remains both meaningful and safe. Within the broader logic of *child-friendliness*, the digital sphere thus represents not merely a domain of access, but a field of rights, requiring literacy, accountability and inclusive design as the foundation for equitable participation.

3.3. Policy Dimensions of “Child-Friendly”

While the notion of *child-friendliness* constitutes a multidimensional framework reflecting both the complexity of children’s lived experiences and the diversity of the environments in which their rights must be realised, as outlined in the UNCRC, its practical implementation takes shape through a broad spectrum of public policies that vary across sectors and governance levels. Translating this paradigm into practice requires institutional mechanisms, legislative instruments and programmatic interventions. The following section identifies the key policy domains where the child-friendly agenda has been embedded and outlines the tools mobilised to enact it.

Urban policy and the built environment are fundamental domains where *child-friendliness* manifests spatially. Policy frameworks increasingly advocate for cities and neighbourhoods designed with children’s everyday mobility, autonomy and safety in mind. The *Urban Agenda for the EU – Partnership on Urban Mobility* promotes child-inclusive infrastructures through walkability, access to green spaces and safe school routes. Local governments across Europe have adopted *Child Impact Assessments* in urban planning and piloted participatory design processes enabling children to co-design parks and public spaces. These ambitions aim not only to ensure safety but to foster spatial belonging and agency.

Cultural policy and education likewise constitute central arenas where child-friendly objectives converge. National curricula have gradually incorporated principles of participatory pedagogy, intercultural competence and media literacy. Film-literacy programmes such as Denmark’s *Med Skolen i Biografen* or France’s *École et cinéma* exemplify how public institutions can foster critical thinking, aesthetic engagement and access to cultural heritage from an early age. Co-funded by *Creative Europe*, these initiatives reflect broader EU strategies for cultural inclusion, social cohesion and lifelong learning.

Digital policy and media regulation present distinctive challenges for ensuring *child-friendliness* in online environments. The *European Strategy for a Better Internet for Kids (BIK+)* positions children not merely as vulnerable users but as active digital citizens. It calls for age-appropriate design standards, stronger data protection measures and the inclusion of digital literacy education within



national curricula. Legislative frameworks such as the *Digital Services Act (DSA)* (Chander, 2023; Del Gatto, 2023; Casolari, 2024; Husovec, 2024; Irti, 2024; Pascuzzi, 2025), the *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)* and the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2018) are of noteworthy importance as they impose obligations on platforms to mitigate risks to minors, enforce parental controls, promote content diversity and media literacy skills. Collectively, these instruments mark a shift towards the systemic safeguarding of children's rights online. One of the most important goals of this legislative provision is the creation of better protection of minors on the internet, e.g. enhanced protection against illegal and harmful content (i.e. pornography for instance).

Participatory governance represents an expanding field of experimentation for child-friendly policy implementation. Mechanisms such as youth parliaments, children's councils and child-led advisory boards are increasingly integrated into municipal and regional decision-making across Europe. In Finland, for instance, municipalities are legally required to consult children on matters that affect them. At the EU level, the *EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021–2024)* sets concrete commitments to strengthen child participation in policymaking. These mechanisms aim to move beyond symbolic inclusion, ensuring that children's contributions are embedded in legislative and administrative processes.

Finally, these sectoral domains are not isolated. Effective *child-friendly* policy depends on cross-cutting coordination, data collection and monitoring tools. *Child Rights Impact Assessments (CRIA)*, national observatories and EU-level benchmarking instruments are increasingly employed to evaluate the effectiveness and equity of child-oriented policies. In this way, *child-friendliness* evolves from a normative ideal into a transversal policy logic capable of transforming institutional cultures and everyday administrative practices. All reinforcing Livingstone and Bulger (2014) contention according to which, enhancing children's rights must occur simultaneously on a global, national and local level.

3.4. Child-Friendliness in European and National Policies

A rising number of scholars have opinionated the idea that media literacy and (governmental) regulation should function as a mutually reinforcing symbiosis (e.g. Labio-Bernal et al., 2020; Buckingham, 2007). To this effect, the EU has progressively adopted *child-friendliness* as a transversal objective across its rights, education, culture and digital strategies. Although the notion is not always explicitly delineated, its core principles: participation, protection, access to culture and inclusion, are deeply embedded in key EU policy frameworks. This is manifested as the EU indulges



in some regulations, incorporated in the European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP) and the Media and Audiovisual Action Plan (MAAP), to enhance media literacy (European Commission, 2023).

The EU has progressively adopted *child-friendliness* as a transversal objective across its rights, education, culture and digital strategies. Although the notion is not always explicitly delineated, its core principles: participation, protection, access to culture and inclusion, are deeply embedded in key EU policy frameworks.

The *EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021–2024)* constitutes a comprehensive roadmap developed by the European Commission in consultation with over 10.000 children. The Strategy reaffirms the EU's commitment to ensuring that children's rights are not confined to theory but realised in practice. To this end, it advances three key priorities: enhancing child participation in democratic processes; strengthening child protection systems; and securing safe and equitable access to the digital environment. It also outlines targeted actions to combat violence, support mental health and mitigate child poverty, while placing strong emphasis on listening to children's perspectives in shaping public policy.

Child-friendliness is further reinforced through sectoral programmes such as *Creative Europe*, the EU's flagship framework for the cultural and creative sectors. Within this programme, specific funding lines support initiatives that enhance children's access to and participation in cultural life. These include projects that promote cultural diversity, develop youth audiences and integrate artistic and audiovisual education into formal and non-formal learning contexts. Such initiatives embody the cultural dimension of *child-friendliness*, characterised by the interweaving of children's rights with identity-building, symbolic inclusion and equal participation in the public sphere.

At the national level, the dissemination of context-specific schemes has proven effective for localising and operationalising EU-level principles. A notable example is Denmark's *Med Skolen i Biografen (School Cinema)*, a long-standing collaboration between schools and cultural institutions. This initiative integrates film screenings into school curricula, encouraging discussion, interpretation and critical engagement during class time. Beyond fostering film literacy and analytical skills, it nurtures aesthetic sensibilities, social reflection and individual agency, cultivating a reflective relationship to media as both cultural artefacts and social instruments (Alves & Pereira, 2020). As recent research indicates (Hjort & Nørgaard, 2020), such programmes help reduce cultural inequality while reinforcing children's rights to education, cultural participation and freedom of expression.



Other Member States have adopted similar models. In France, the *École et cinéma* programme operates on comparable principles, offering curated film selections for schoolchildren and pedagogical resources for educators. In Belgium and Finland, national media education policies explicitly target digital citizenship, critical thinking and responsible online behaviour, linking digital literacy with democratic participation and personal development. In Sweden, the *Swedish Film Institute* has played a leading role in promoting children's active participation in audiovisual creation, supporting initiatives that empower young people to experiment with storytelling, filming and editing as creative tools of expression. In Belgium, the promotion of critical media literacy, particularly among adolescents, is driven by a variety of educational initiatives, including film clubs, school-based workshops and debate-driven screenings. The United Kingdom's *Into Film* programme has established a nationwide network that integrates film into formal education, encouraging discussion, cultural appreciation and reflective engagement with media.

Additionally, to provide for a child-friendly European film environment, film festivals focussing on children can be considered as important partakers in the obtainment of this particular objective-both on a national and a more pan-European-oriented level, although most of those film festivals are situated on the national level. Film festivals in, for instance, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands and Belgium could be distinguished. As research conducted by Yrjänä (2014) indicated, in some cases film festivals are working together with educational providers; although this collaboration could still be elaborated further. The same argument can be made for several organisations aiming to support initiatives for children's films - those are mostly situated on the national level as well, although again some pan-European initiatives could be demarcated. This is a good, supportive evolution given that research from Barth (2021) found that children's imagination can be fostered by creative implementations, especially in the educational system. But Barth also asserts that those implementations should encompass beyond the educational system; hence the importance of, among others, film festivals focusing on children as noted by the profound interest on the European continent to create film festivals especially designed for children (Sarikakis et al., 2025)

Taken together, these examples illustrate that *child-friendliness* is not a fixed model but a flexible, context-sensitive principle capable of informing diverse policy instruments across education, culture and digital governance. The most impactful initiatives are those that combine rights-based principles with meaningful institutional support, ensuring that child-friendly ideals are realised through sustainable, inclusive and democratically anchored action.



As we have aimed to demonstrate in this section, the European Union actively seeks to cultivate a child-friendly audiovisual industry. Over time, while the tools and platforms have evolved from cinema to television, video and digital streaming - the underlying objective of safeguarding minors has remained a consistent priority within European audiovisual policy.

However, in more recent years, the concept of child-friendly became more embedded in the legislative framework of the European Union - more precisely and primarily, by incorporating protection-oriented measures in the AVMSD and the DSA. Those legally rooted implementations are co-forged and inspired by the UNCRC, therefore grounded in an international appeal and providing the European Union's initiatives with a rigid regulatory framework that is internationally recognised. Nevertheless, those legislations often discounts the child's agency - conceiving them as passive instead of active constructors of meaning (Buckingham, 2007).

Notwithstanding the various implemented legislations, some voices propagate for a regulation transcending approach, asserting that co-regulation (i.e. both governmental and non-governmental regulations combined) is a more sustainable path towards a child-friendly European audiovisual industry (Lievens, 2018). Additionally, this assertion aligns with the allusion of the child's and parents' agency - which is often discounted by governments' paternalistic approach – (Buckingham, 2014; Büttner, 2017; Schultka et al., 2024), equipping both parties with the capacity to exercise independent decision-making instead of blindly following imposed governmental regulations. Therefore, the concept of child-friendly should inherently be intertwined with the concept of media literacy - which is a broad, film transcending concept. Nonetheless, a child-friendly film industry is not identifiable without media literate children. Hence, we posit that media literacy should be integrated into every European school curriculum, as it equips children with a solid framework for critically assessing a wide range of audiovisual content. Although several initiatives have been launched to foster media literacy, the European Union can still adopt a more prominent actor in acquiring said objective. For instance, they can tackle the European fragmentation in terms of legal implementation - as evidenced by, for instance, the amalgam of heterogenous applications of the AVMSD across differing European nation states.

Finally, several initiatives were identified that aim both to foster media literacy and to bring film to children. This reflects a growing awareness that cinephilia and film literacy are cultivated from an early age. However, this does not imply that the development of film appreciation and critical understanding is unattainable at later stages in life. Rather, it underscores the importance of introducing film education during the formative years. Early exposure to film as an art form and medium of communication can lay the foundation for a more engaged, reflective and media-literate



audience. Cultivating such an audience is particularly vital in the context of supporting independent film production, as it not only sustains diverse cinematic cultures but also inspires and motivates emerging filmmakers from a young age (Halverson et al., 2014). The following section expands on these three conceptual figures to explore how children's roles as citizens, consumers and users shape their relationship to European film and audiovisual culture.



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4. STATE OF THE ART

4.1. Film Preferences and Taste Cultures

Research on children's film preferences reveals how taste is structured by social, psychological and cultural factors. Veenstra, Meers and Biltereyst (2020), in a large-scale survey of Flemish adolescents, demonstrated that genre preferences remain strongly differentiated by gender and educational background. This finding challenges the assumption that digital convergence has flattened taste cultures, showing instead that structural determinants continue to shape media choices.

Psychological factors also play a role. Infortuna et al. (2021) found that affective temperament traits in Italian adults correlated with film preferences—for example, cyclothymic and depressive temperaments were linked to horror films, while hyperthymic traits correlated with comedy and musicals. Though the study focused on adults, the findings suggest avenues for exploring how adolescents' emotional dispositions may similarly influence their film tastes.

Wühr, Lange and Schwarz (2017) further complicate stereotypes about gendered preferences. Their study of German young adults revealed that while real gender differences exist, stereotypes tend to exaggerate them. This points to the importance of examining how adolescents' preferences are shaped not only by personal taste but also by societal expectations and identity performances.

Global vs. Local Consumption

Children's consumer roles are situated within global flows of media. Hollywood continues to dominate international markets, but local industries such as Nollywood and Bollywood remain vital. Akinsola (2025) found that Nigerian secondary students often preferred non-Yorùbá films to Yorùbá productions, reflecting a preference for perceived higher production quality and wider cultural appeal. Olamide, Sonayon and Olayinka (2020) reported similar findings in Lagos, where youth favored foreign films over local productions due to narrative sophistication and production values. Safdar and Abbasi (2023), studying Pakistani youth, likewise found preferences for action, thriller and drama genres heavily influenced by peer networks and global media exposure.

In India, Chawla and Srinivas (2021) documented how the pandemic accelerated the shift toward OTT platforms, with young adults prioritising storytelling quality over traditional star-driven marketing. In Europe, Tintel and Raats (2022) found that streaming and cinema-going coexisted,



though cost remained a major factor influencing consumption patterns. Together, these findings suggest that global and local consumption are not mutually exclusive but are negotiated in relation to production quality, affordability and peer culture.

Consumer Agency and Peer Cultures

Children are not passive recipients of industry offerings. Buckingham and Sefton-Green (2003) describe how adolescents use films as markers of social capital, exchanging preferences and knowledge within peer groups. Safdar and Abbasi (2023) confirm that peer recommendations are central in shaping Pakistani youths' choices, while Zilka (2018) demonstrates that Israeli children prioritise interactivity and convenience in their selections. These findings align with theories of consumer culture that frame consumption as an active process of meaning-making (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Participatory Cultures and Fan Practices

The rise of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006) has redefined children as users and creators. Studies document practices ranging from fanfiction (Black, 2008) to memes and alternative endings shared on platforms such as TikTok and Wattpad (Tkachuk, 2021). Langlais, Thaler and West (2025) found that US adolescents primarily used TikTok for entertainment and social connection, with content creation functioning as a key part of peer interaction.

Yet participation is not without risks. Chao et al. (2023) and Guo and Chai (2024) warn of negative psychosocial outcomes linked to addictive short-video use among Chinese adolescents, including anxiety and academic decline. Thus, while participatory platforms empower creativity, they also present vulnerabilities that must be acknowledged.

Informal Learning and Film Production

Beyond fan practices, children engage directly in filmmaking. Zilka (2018) documented how Israeli children gravitate toward interactive media, with music and video central to their creative routines. Klaysung (2024) proposed a digital filmmaking model for Thai youth that emphasises short-form video, cultural representation and integration with social media. Such findings resonate with Sefton-Green and Sinker's (2012) argument that media literacy and creative skills often emerge through informal learning contexts, peer collaboration and self-directed experimentation.



Participatory video projects, such as those studied by Davies et al. (2022), highlight how filmmaking can serve as civic engagement, empowering youth to articulate perspectives and influence institutional dialogue. These examples demonstrate the potential of media production to function as both creative play and cultural participation.

Aspirations and Professionalisation

Digital platforms blur the boundary between amateur and professional production. Abidin (2016) notes that many young people aspire to become influencers or filmmakers, motivated by visible role models online. Klaysung (2024) similarly emphasises how Thai youth envision digital filmmaking as both self-expression and career pathway. Yet, as Cateridge et al. (2024) argue, inequalities in access to resources, mentorship and networks mean that opportunities for creative professionalisation are unevenly distributed.

4.2. Media literacy

Media literacy has emerged as a pivotal concept in contemporary efforts to safeguard children within an increasingly digitised and media-saturated environment. In light of the pervasive presence of digital technologies and mediated content, the capacity to critically engage with media texts—including film—has become essential. This imperative is further underscored by the rapid proliferation of novel technological forms and platforms, which continuously reshape the media landscape and the ways in which young audiences interact with it (Ciurel, 2016; Kamerer, 2013; Silverblatt, 1996; Willett, 2007; Lieberman et al., 2009). As Sonia Livingstone (2014, p. 285) argued, the benefits of media literacy are the “recognition of the complexity of the media world, with its media institutions, regulations, technologies, texts and meanings.” Consequently, to ensure comprehensive protection of children in the digital era, media literacy should be systematically integrated into educational curricula. This approach acknowledges the increasing significance of digital media and moves beyond reliance on governmental regulation alone. By doing so, it challenges paternalistic frameworks and instead promotes the empowerment of young media users, granting them greater agency in navigating and critically engaging with media environments (Labio-Bernal et al., 2020; Buckingham, 2007). Children’s film—despite lacking a universally accepted definition (Ebert, 2019)—is increasingly recognised as a valuable medium for fostering media literacy (Gabrielli & Albers, n.d.). Brown (2017) identifies two distinct forms of children’s film: the commercially driven variant, which primarily seeks to entertain and the non-commercial form, which is more pedagogically oriented. Both types, however, contribute to the development of critical media



engagement. Importantly, the responsibility for cultivating media literacy does not rest solely with formal education systems; it also involves the active participation of parents. Media education should therefore extend beyond institutional settings and be embedded within everyday parenting practices (Labio-Bernal et al., 2020). Additionally, a mismatch in media literacy levels between children and their parents may lead to misunderstandings or challenges in navigating media content effectively (Buckingham, 2007).

This indicates media literacy's paramount place, both on the local, national and the international level, as well as for young and old, with UNESCO as an important partaker in the enhancement of the objective to foster global media literacy (Ciurel, 2016). This idea is shaped by the Grünwald Declaration of 1982 which promotes educational and political mechanisms to enhance the critical skills of societies' citizens. In other words, according to key voices in this debate (Livingstone, 2004; Koltay, 2011; Ciurel, 2016), a society with a high-level of media literacy mimics a democratic society.

As will be discussed below, UNESCO is not the sole institutional actor engaged in the promotion and development of media literacy. Numerous initiatives have also been undertaken by the European Union and other institutions across Europe, reflecting a broader, multi-level commitment to advancing media education. Before turning to this overview of exemplary initiatives, it is notable to assert that media literacy remains a rather young field of study that still needs to reach its full maturity (Ciurel, 2016). Furthermore, many scholars address fostering critical thinking in relation to differing media formats as one of the key elements of media literacy and concurrently contend that media literacy is something that needs to be educated (e.g. Koltray, 2011; Brown, 1998; Kamerer, 2013; Ciurel, 2016; Livingstone et al., 2012; Livingstone, 2004; Silverblatt, 1996; Potter, 2010; Lewis & Jhally, 1998; etc.), hence, it should be incorporated in educational programs. Additionally, Koltay (2011) describes three different forms of literacy to critically assess differing messages in relation to media: media literacy, digital literacy and information literacy. Nevertheless, these three forms of literacy are not the only possible determinations according to Koltay. Emerging technology literacy and reproduction literacy can function as other possible examples. Thus, Koltay considers media literacy as an – important – umbrella term, which serves as an indication for the corresponding fragmentation of its various meanings.

Now, what connotations does the concept of media literacy evoke? According to Potter (2010), this concept entails differing nuances depending on who's defining the concept. In concreto this implies that media literacy is missing an adequate, fixed, coherent and universally accepted definition. However, some communalities can still be distinguished. What follows is a non-exhaustive overview



of some distinguished definitions and similarities of media literacy. A first similarity – and perhaps the most important – is, as stated before, that all definitions of media literacy – in one way or another – aim to foster critical thinking. Adams and Hamm (2001, as cited in Potter, 2010) assert that media literacy transcends merely decoding information. They argue that media literacy is critically assessing and consequently creating meaning of the respective media product. Livingstone (2004), however, stresses that the idea media literacy entails is depending on the particular industry and its corresponding purpose. This, thus, means that a definition of media literacy is depending on – and consequently various according to – the specific industry it refers to. Furthermore, Hobbs (2001, as cited in Potter, 2010, p. 676) defines literacy as follows: “literacy is the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms.” It is obvious that Hobbs places paramount emphasis on the ability to gain a rigid understanding of the media form in this definition. A similar – general – definition can be encountered in Livingstone’s (2004, p. 18) work where she elucidates media literacy as follows: it is “the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts,” while simultaneously asserting “the *relationship* among textuality, competence and power” (p. 20). Another focal point can be distinguished by Sholle and Denski (1995, as cited in Potter, 2010), who emphasise the symbiotic relationship between the cultural, social and political practice. Koltay (2011, p. 212), then, places paramount emphasis on the ability to “decode, evaluate, analyse and produce both print and electronic media.” In general terms, Koltay defines it “as the ability to access the media, to understand and to critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media content and to create communications in a variety of contexts” (p. 213). Furthermore, Lewis and Jhally (1998) propose a contextual approach in order to fully understand media. And, finally, Kamberer (2013, p. 5) accentuates profoundly “the knowledge, skills and competencies in order to use and interpret media.”

To summarise the above, media literacy is a multifaceted concept that fosters critical thinking by promoting a robust understanding of various forms of media—among which, but not limited to, film. It goes beyond the mere decoding of information; rather, it provides a structured framework for analysing, interpreting and even creating media messages across different formats. Media literacy encourages individuals to engage with content critically, taking into account not only the message itself but also the broader context in which it is produced and consumed. This includes reflecting on who created the message, for what purpose and under what social, cultural, or political conditions. In doing so, media literacy equips individuals with the tools to navigate an increasingly complex media landscape, fostering informed and reflective engagement with media in all its forms.



Additionally, it is noticeable that Livingstone (2004) identified that children's media literacy is differing from their parents, especially in relation to the internet, which children seem to better understand compared to other aspects of media literacy. Buckingham (2007), therefore, warns for emerging difficulties when this discrepancy occurs. This implies that media literacy should not only be considered as a significant part of children's education, but for caretakers as well in order to avoid said discrepancies. Additionally, the appropriate attainment of media literacy acquired by the child is also differing according to their age (Diergarten et al., 2017). Consequently, Kamerer (2013) describes a model, which was cultivated by a high school teacher, Joanne McGlynn and shared by Hobbs, to critically gauge media. This model poses critical questions in relation to the sender and author of the message, the used techniques, the hidden values etc. in the message, the possible different interpretations and what is and is not stated. This model is aligned to Lewis and Jhally's (1998) argument that media messages should be decoded in relation to its underlying motives and those corresponding to its creators. However, although the authors do not contest the argument that children should be educated in media literacy, they still assert parents' responsibility to enhance children's protection online (Labio-Bernal et al., 2020). Additionally, they believe that children, starting from a young age, as well should partake profoundly in the acquirement of media literacy. In this matter, child films can provide an important contribution to this ambition (Gabrielli & Albers, n.d.; Leinonen & Sintonen, 2014).

Furthermore, the authors assert the idea that both film and media literacy should entail a profound place in the European educational program. This stipulates the idea of film and television media literacy as a strategy to improve knowledge regarding cultural affairs (Yang, 2020). In this regard, Silverblatt (1996) postulates and further elaborates the idea that media literacy should be an inherent part of college and university curriculums as well. Additionally, the attainment of more film literacy can further enhance audience development in terms of film attendances, hence being advantageous for the overall European film industry (Gabrielli & Albers, n.d.). And, according to Drotner (2020), one of the best ways to obtain this objective is by creating content yourself.

Underneath, a non-exhaustive list of European initiatives to foster media literacy can be consulted. And, from this list, two examples will be discussed in more detail:



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- The **European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)**¹ is supposed to investigate best practices in terms of media literacy (European Commission, 2024). This way, they hope to further foster media literacy and promote it widely;
- The **European Association for Viewers Interests (EAVI)**² is the leading expert regarding policy and research in terms of media literacy and aims to foster critical approaches towards media;
- The **European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA)**³ was established in 2014 and assembles various representatives of several national independent regulatory bodies related to audiovisual services;
- The **Media Literacy Expert Group (MLEG)**⁴ aims to spotlight good practices in relation to media literacy and is not limited to one specific kind of media;
- The **Media & Learning Association (MLA)**⁵ its mission is to build a community of likeminded sympathisers in order to enhance the media's benefits;
- **Cinemini Europe**⁶ aims to provide a meaningful film watching experience for children by enhancing their film education;
- The **Psaroloco Media Literacy Project I Labs**⁷ is a media literacy program that aims to enhance audiovisual media understanding through cinema by organising workshops intended for children, caretakers and teachers. It provides exceptional care for vulnerable groups of youngsters;
- The **'Film Literacy' scheme**⁸, introduced by Creative Europe MEDIA, aims to fund 30 film projects that foster film literacy, ranging from children films and animation to documentaries;
- The **CinEd Project**⁹ is developed to provide access to European cinema for young European audiences. Therefore, this project aims to develop a rigid understanding of film literacy.

¹ <https://edmo.eu/areas-of-activities/media-literacy/media-literacy-overview/>

² <https://eavi.eu/about-us/>

³ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/erga>

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?lang=en&groupId=2541&fromMeetings=true&meetingId=24820>

⁵ <https://media-and-learning.eu/>

⁶ <https://cinemini-europe.eu/about-cinemini-europe>

⁷ <https://www.psaroloco.org/>

⁸ <https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/discover/news/film-literacy-developing-young-peoples-cultural-identities-and-understanding?prefLang=es>

⁹ <https://www.cined.eu/about-project>



The **Media Literacy Expert Group** (MLEG) plays a central role in facilitating the exchange of diverse perspectives on media literacy among the member states of the European Union. According to the group's official website, media literacy is regarded as an “overarching concept” (European Commission, 2025a). In this context, the group defines its benefits as follows: media literacy enables “citizen[s] to participate in the economic, social and cultural aspects of society as well as to play an active role in the democratic process. It refers to all kind of media (television, radio, press), through all kind of channels (traditional, internet, social media) and to all ages.” The website also acknowledges the varying interpretations of media literacy across EU countries and emphasises its evolving nature in response to technological developments. In this sense, the consortium views media literacy as a dynamic, context-dependent concept without a fixed definition—an understanding that aligns with the findings discussed earlier. Furthermore, the group convenes annually to “identify, document and extend good practices” (Goodman, 2021, p. 6), fostering collaboration among stakeholders and exploring synergies between policies, support mechanisms and broader media literacy initiatives. This ongoing dialogue underscores the EU's commitment to promoting media literacy as a key component of democratic participation and cultural engagement in an increasingly complex media environment.

A second initiative is the **European Digital Media Observatory** (EDMO), intending to tackle disinformation by attending a prominent position in the European media literacy ecosystem (European Digital Media Observatory, n.d.). As Goodman (2021, p. 1) stated, “media literacy is undoubtedly a crucial tool in the fight against disinformation. A public that is both critically and digitally literate is much more likely to be able to assess the information they encounter online, to identify sources they can trust and make well-informed decisions as citizens, consumers and more. Being media literate opens up opportunities to engage more fully and more creatively with the online (and offline) media world.” So, in other words, what Goodman posits, is that being media literate results in the necessary abilities to critically analyse a wide formation of media messages—which then helps distinguish the rightfully decoded messages from the maliciously intended ones.

4.3. Film festivals, public broadcasters and organisations supporting young film audiences

In order to provide for a child-friendly European film environment, film festivals focussing on children can be considered as important partakers in the attainment of this particular objective—both on a national and a more pan-European-oriented level, although most of those film festivals are situated



on the national level. Film festivals in, for instance, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands and Belgium could be distinguished. As research conducted by Yrjänä (2014) indicated, in some cases film festivals are working together with educational providers; although this collaboration could still be elaborated further. The same argument can be made for several organisations aiming to support initiatives for children's films—those are mostly situated on the national level as well, although again some pan-European initiatives could be demarcated.

In this respect, the **European Film Academy** (EFA)¹⁰ is of the utmost importance in terms of (young) audiences' education and can be considered as a pan-European initiative to assemble European film lovers—therefore obtaining an important position in cultivating a child-friendly European audiovisual ecosystem. Furthermore, EFA founded the **European Film Club**¹¹, a place where like-minded young people and young film lovers across all Europe can gather and talk about European films. Another important organisation is the **European Children's Film Association** (ECFA)¹², which was established in 1988 and focuses on providing youngsters with qualitative films—the **Children Cinema Awards** (CCA)¹³ is, for instance, part of ECFA. Currently, according to their website, the organisation exists out of approximately 150 members originating from 41 various countries—which implies that this initiative transcends the pan-European sphere.

Moreover, we distinguished some distinctive pan-European programs that helps fostering the cultivation of films aimed at young audiences:

- The **Youth Doc Training**¹⁴ program can serve as an ample example and aims to support and educate directors and producers who share the ambition to create documentaries specifically aimed at children;
- The aforementioned program is shaped by the consortium surrounding the **D4K-Alliance**¹⁵, which consists of various European film creatives and who are willing to foster the viability of documentaries specifically crafted towards children and young audiences in general;

¹⁰ https://www.europeanfilmacademy.org/membership/enter_your_film/children-and-youth-films-list-of-festivals/

¹¹ <https://europeanfilmclub.com/>

¹² <https://www.ecfaweb.org/>

¹³ <http://kids.cawards.org/>

¹⁴ <https://www.doxs-ruhr.de/projekte/d4k-training/>

¹⁵ <https://www.doxs-ruhr.de/projekte/d4k-english/>



- The **Generation Z project**¹⁶ has a similar aspiration, although it is slightly more tailored to reshaping younger audiences from solely being considered as merely spectators towards creators and programmers as well (Creative Europe Media, n.d.);
- The **KIDS Regio network**¹⁷ provides children with a wide variety of film, therefore elaborating their framework of what is deemed as a qualitative film;
- The **European funded CinEd project's**¹⁸ main objective is to foster children's knowledge about film;
- The **KineDok**¹⁹ initiative is a pan-European film collective that organises film screenings in a wide range of venues across Europe.

The **Youth Doc Training** program is part of the D4K-Alliance and is constituted in accordance with the International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam (IDFA). This initiative primarily concentrates on providing training programs in relation to documentaries aimed at children. It is open to participants from Flanders, the Netherlands, Poland and Germany. By organizing this, the initiators primary intention is to provide the networking, the necessary inspiration and project development. They hope to facilitate an enhancement in cross-border co-operations (Doxsruhr, n.d.).

Additionally, the **Kinedok** initiative can be considered as a pan-European cinema initiative that provides documentary film screenings across different places in Europe at different venues, hereby transcending cinema venues. The collective organises film screenings in 202 different venues, spread across bars, galleries and even open-air cinemas. It even foresees the provision of an online catalogue to watch films online. The five participating countries are Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia and Romania. By doing so, their aim is to foster critical thinking in relation to extra-curricular topics among their targeted audience. In financial terms, this initiative is supported by the MEDIA program of Creative Europe and the Czech Audiovisual Fund (Kinedok, n.d.).

In general, we can conclude that there is profound interest on the European continent to create film festivals especially designed for children.²⁰ This is a good, supportive evolution given that research

¹⁶ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/cinemas-innovation-hubs-eu-empowers-cinemas-innovate-local-communities>

¹⁷ <https://kids-regio.org/>

¹⁸ <https://www.cined.eu/about-project>

¹⁹ <https://kinedok.net/>

²⁰ See for instance the REBOOT report *Recommendations on innovation for European film creators* (Sarikakis et al., 2025).



from Barth (2021) found that children's imagination can be fostered by creative implementations, especially in the educational system. But Barth also asserts that those implementations should encompass beyond the educational system; hence the importance of, among others, film festivals focusing on children.

In this regard, several national film initiatives and institutions supporting the production of youth film exist. Underneath, some limited examples can be consulted:

- The **Dutch Film Fund** has a special application section specifically designed for the support of youth film;²¹
- The **Flemish Audiovisual Fund (VAF)** provides financial support for the development, the scenario and the production of child- and youth films;²²
- The **Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel (CCA)** has several financial supporting mechanisms in relation to films targeting children and youngsters, among which financial aid for distributors who distribute films towards young audiences, for exhibitors aiming to engage young audiences and extra financial aid for educational oriented movies;²³
- The **Young Talent Foundation Berlin (YTF Berlin)** is a rather young, non-profit German initiative (emerged in 2022) that aims to launch young filmmakers' careers;²⁴
- The **Danish Film Institute** dedicates at least a quarter of its available amount of subsidies towards youth films and provides overall (youth) media education in relation to film;²⁵
- The **Isbjørn Project Scheme** focuses on film talents experimenting with the possibilities of specific newer technologies in order to eventually let the overall education system benefit from it;²⁶

Besides national film funds, public broadcasters are also important providers for content aimed at children and youngsters. Especially given that their market share remains substantial despite the rise of VOD platforms and that the public trust continues to be favourable toward them. Moreover, public broadcasters obtained an educational and leisurely assignment, which they must operationalise. Therefore, the 2025 report by Raats and his colleagues identified several European

²¹ <https://www.filmfonds.nl/jeugdfilm>

²² <https://www.vaf.be/subsidies/ontwikkelingssteun-voor-fictie-kinder-en-jeugdfilm-single> ;
<https://www.vaf.be/subsidies/scenariosteun-voor-fictie-kinder-en-jeugdfilm-single> ;
<https://www.vaf.be/subsidies/productiesteun-voor-fictie-kinder-en-jeugdfilm-single>

²³ <https://www.cnc.fr/>

²⁴ <https://www.ytfberlin.de/en/ytf/>

²⁵ <https://www.dfi.dk/en/english/funding/feature-film-supported-children>

²⁶ <https://nordiskfilm.com/project-scheme>



public broadcasters that maintain subbranches or specialized brands targeting children and young audiences (Raats et al., 2025):

- Finland constituted the **YLE Areena** brand which offers an extensive amount of content transcending film and television series²⁷;
- Norway has **NRK3**²⁸ and **NRK P3**²⁹, which are radio stations aimed at youngsters and **NRK Super**³⁰ which is more tailored towards children;
- The Netherlands founded **Zapp**³¹ and **NPO Zappelin**³², which both can be situated under the supervision of the National Public Broadcaster (NPO);
- Germany has **ARD**³³ and **ZDF**³⁴ who focus on children and teenagers, while **FUNK**³⁵ (a co-operation between ARD and ZDF) incorporates content specifically aimed at youngsters between the age of 14 and 29 years;
- Flanders (the Dutch speaking part of Belgium) incorporated **Ketnet**³⁶ under its public broadcaster VRT and this platform specifically is fully dedicated towards children with an extensive content offer available.

4.4. Challenges and Inequalities

Digital Divide and Structural Barriers

Despite the ubiquity of digital media, access remains uneven. Livingstone and Helsper (2007) describe persistent divides along socioeconomic lines, which Zilka (2018) confirms in her study of Israeli children. Even where access exists, usage differs significantly across gender and age, shaping opportunities for participation. Guo and Chai (2024) further show how addictive short-video use among Chinese adolescents reflects broader pressures of social identity and academic stress, highlighting the ways in which social structures inflect digital practices.

²⁷ <https://areena.yle.fi/tv>

²⁸ <https://tv.nrk.no/direkte/nrk3>

²⁹ <https://p3.no/>

³⁰ <https://nrksuper.no/>

³¹ <https://www.zapp.nl/>

³² <https://www.zappelin.nl/>

³³ <https://www.ard.de/>

³⁴ <https://www.zdf.de/>

³⁵ <https://www.funk.net/>

³⁶ <https://www.vrt.be/vrtmax/ketnet/>



Cultural Inequalities and Representation Gaps

Representation gaps persist despite policy efforts. Trültzsch-Wijnen (2020) demonstrates how minority voices remain underrepresented in European media, while Akinsola (2025) raises concerns about the erosion of linguistic and cultural heritage as Nigerian youth favor non-Yorùbá films. Aniukwu (2025) adds that Nollywood lacks adequate regulation, exposing children to inappropriate content without guidance. These examples underscore how cultural inequalities remain embedded in both global and local film cultures.

Risks of Participation

Children's active participation exposes them to risks of exploitation. Platforms often monetise children's content without equitable returns (Abidin, 2016). Overuse of participatory platforms can harm mental health (Langlais et al., 2025; Chao et al., 2023), while online harassment and copyright concerns add further vulnerabilities (Lessig, 2008).

Pandemic Disruptions

COVID-19 accelerated shifts in film consumption. Tintel and Raats (2022) found that Flemish youth balanced nostalgia for cinema with the convenience of streaming, while Chawla and Srinivas (2021) documented similar shifts in India. These disruptions reveal both the adaptability of youth audiences and the uneven infrastructural capacities across regions.

Emerging Trends

Several studies identify trends shaping the future of children's film culture. First, short-form video and interactivity dominate youth practices (Klaysung, 2024; Langlais et al., 2025). Second, cultural hybridity is increasingly valued, as young people navigate both global blockbusters and local narratives (Olamide et al., 2020; Safdar & Abbasi, 2023). Third, consumption is becoming platform-agnostic, with streaming, cinema and social media coexisting as complementary modes (Tintel & Raats, 2022). Finally, algorithmic personalisation and artificial intelligence are reshaping access and discovery (Lobato, 2019), raising new questions about cultural diversity and representation in children's film experiences.



5. POLICY MAPPING: CHILDREN AND THE EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRY

5.1. Strategies on the Rights of the Child and Film Industry

Children constitute a relevant percentage of customers of film industry products. For this reason, the challenge to address enablers for a child-friendly approach in the sector becomes more urgent. General and tailored initiatives from Institutions and Policy makers are addressing specific vulnerabilities but also opportunities provided by the film industry to enhance children's rights.

To set up an EU competitive and child-friendly film industry the rights of the child shall be enhanced and promoted by institutional and private stakeholders. To this end, it is essential to analyse the main features of the international and EU strategies on the rights of the child that are impacting on the design and implementation of the film industry ones.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter also "UN Convention") signed in New York in 1989 is the key Convention to address children's rights in every scenario. It recognizes the child as a subject with his or her own fundamental rights, providing broader and more incisive protection for children's rights. The UN Convention consists of a Preamble and 54 articles and puts in place a true statute of children's rights, with considerable repercussions on the legal systems of the states that have signed the Convention.

Some of the Convention's main innovations concern the conception of the child no longer as a subject incapable of providing for himself or herself and necessarily the object of others' decisions, but as a person with a set of rights and an active protagonist of his or her own life choices. For example, the Convention provides for (mandatory) listening to the views of the child from an age identified through the screening of his or her capacity for discernment and lays the groundwork for the child's active participation within the proceedings in which he or she is involved.

In fact, the UN Convention radically changes the very legal conception of the child, who is no longer considered as a mere object of protection and safeguard, but as a person with his or her own value and dignity. The right to be heard and the dimension of the child as an autonomous subject emerge clearly from Article 12, which for the first time enshrines the right of the child with discernment to be questioned about the events of his or her life, but it is also clearly stated in the subsequent articles that recognize the child's right to freedom of expression (Article 13), the child's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 14) and the child's rights to freedom of association and



freedom to assemble peacefully (Article 15), respectively. These provisions deal with the child as an active protagonist also in social life, in which he or she intervenes individually or within groups.

The Convention also provides for the indication of additional rights of the child, such as: the right to life (Art. 6), to name, identity and nationality (Art. 7), the right to family (Art. 8) and the right to health (Art. 34).

The UN Convention also proclaims the principle of equality of children against all discrimination related to race, colour, sex, language, religion and political opinion (Art. 2, para. 1) and, above all, the principle of the preeminent protection of the best interests of the child, set forth in Art. 3, which provides that in all decisions concerning children within the jurisdiction of public or private social welfare institutions, courts, administrative authorities and legislative bodies, the best interests of the child must be in the pre-eminent consideration. Finally, it should be noted that Article 21 also states that the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration in matters of adoption by States that admit and/or authorize it.

In the context of an increasingly complex social, health and environmental challenges, the Council of Europe has adopted for the period 2022-2027 an ambitious and innovative Strategy for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child, titled Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (hereinafter “CoE Strategy”). The CoE Strategy stands as a key policy and operational tool to support Member States in ensuring that every child, wherever they are and whatever their condition, can fully enjoy their rights and pursue their best interests.

This document is a framework that reflects a broad view of children's rights and best interests as fully recognized human rights, in line with the UN Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights. The child is not only as a recipient of protection, but as an active subject, a bearer of opinions, needs and skills.

The added value of the CoE Strategy lies in its integrated and participatory approach: it is the result of a co-creation process that involved institutions, experts, civil society and, above all, children from ten European countries, who were listened to and consulted so that the document would truly be “*for and with* children”. It is the result of a broad and participatory process launched between 2020 and 2021, which involved not only public institutions and international organizations, but also 220 children, heard from in ten European countries, who helped define concrete priorities and proposals. Children's contributions were included in the various chapters, highlighted under the heading “What children suggest”.



Through six priority areas - from protection against violence to social inclusion, from child-friendly justice to protection in crisis contexts - the CoE Strategy aims to translate the rights enshrined in international treaties into practice, overcoming the regulatory, cultural and operational barriers that still prevent too many children from living a life of dignity, safety and full inclusion in the current society.

The CoE Strategy aims to address structural fragilities in legislative, judicial, educational and health systems that put children's rights at risk, especially in times of social, economic, or health crises. The added value lies in fostering integrated action among public, private, international and local actors within the 46 Member States. It aims to overcome sectorial work by promoting a systemic and participatory approach to addressing the complex and intersectional challenges affecting children.

The CoE Strategy is divided into six priority areas: 1. *Freedom from violence for all children*; 2. *Equal opportunities and social inclusion*; 3. *Safe access to and use of technology*; 4. *Child-friendly justice*; 5. *Giving every child a voice*; 6. *Children's rights in crisis and emergency situations*. Alongside these areas, there are three cross-cutting approaches: gender approach, anti-discrimination approach and children's active participation.

The table below illustrates for each priority area the key actions of the CoE Strategy.

Priority Area	Key Actions
<i>Freedom from violence for all children:</i> violence against children is a serious violation of human rights and undermines children's mental and physical development. The Strategy considers all forms of violence-physical, psychological, sexual, online, peer, or perpetrated by adults-a phenomenon to be countered with a zero-tolerance policy.	• the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention; • the promotion of awareness-raising campaigns; • the strengthening of prevention and reporting systems; • the participation of children in the design of services.
<i>Equal opportunities and social inclusion for all children:</i> the goal of this priority is to ensure that every child, regardless of his or her socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, disability, or migration status, has access to the same rights and services.	• the fight against child poverty; • the support of vulnerable families; • the promotion of school and social inclusion; • access to mental health services for children;



<i>Safe access and use of technologies for all children:</i> this priority aims to ensure that children can benefit from digital technologies in safe, inclusive and participatory ways, preventing risks such as misinformation, cyberbullying, online grooming and access to inappropriate content.	• the development of digital skills; • digital citizenship education; • the creation of safe online environments • promoting accountability of digital service providers.
<i>Child-friendly justice:</i> access to justice must be ensured so that children are heard, respected and protected within judicial proceedings, both civil and criminal.	• the training of professionals; • the protection of child victims or witnesses; • the adaptation of legal language; • the promotion of alternative means to detention.
<i>Give every child a voice:</i> this priority is based on Article 12 of the UN Convention: every child has the right to freely express his or her opinion on all matters affecting him or her.	• the meaningful participation of children in decision-making processes; • the creation of permanent structures for child consultation; • the inclusion of their proposals in policy documents and public services.
<i>Children's Rights in Crisis and Emergency Situations:</i> following the COVID-19 pandemic, climate crisis and armed conflicts, this priority area aims to ensure the protection of children's rights even in exceptional and unpredictable contexts.	• the emergency preparedness of protection systems; • the safeguarding of access to education and health; • the protection of migrant, refugee or displaced children; • the integration of children's rights into humanitarian responses.

Table 1: CoE Strategy priority areas and actions.

In conclusion, the CoE Strategy is based on a comprehensive approach to human rights, recognizing that all children's rights are inviolable and interdependent. It pushes for policy and regulatory innovation to respond to emerging challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, forced migration and digital inequalities, including monitoring and evaluation tools to ensure transparency and accountability. The overall goal is to bring about lasting change in children's lives, recognizing children as effective rights holders and autonomous subjects whose individuality and dignity should be valued.

In parallel, in March 2021, also the European Commission unveiled the first comprehensive EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter “EU Strategy”), addressed, therefore to the 27 EU



Member States. It is an ambitious and integrated policy framework that aims to strengthen the protection of children and adolescents' rights inside and outside the European Union, in line with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the UN Convention.

The EU Strategy stems from the realization that children, despite having rights from birth, continue to face serious inequalities, discrimination, poverty, violence and social exclusion. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated conditions for many children, making clear the urgency of structured and coordinated action at the European level. Also in this case, one of the key elements is a willingness to listen to children's opinions and involve them directly in decision-making processes that affect them. The EU Commission consulted more than 10,000 children across Europe and collaborated with organizations such as UNICEF and the European Children's Parliament to shape the contents of six thematic priority areas - likewise the CoE Strategy - aiming to address the main challenges to children's rights in an integrated way.

Children's participation in democratic life

The EU promotes children's meaningful participation in decision-making processes, both at the local and European level. Tools must be developed to facilitate their expression and access to information, such as creating accessible digital platforms and translating official documents into plain language. The European Commission is also committed to supporting all forms of youth representation, strengthening civic education and consultation mechanisms.

Violence-free childhood

This area aims to prevent and counter all forms of violence against children, including abuse, trafficking, domestic violence, online grooming and bullying. It includes adopting specific legislation on combating sexual abuse, strengthening the capacity of the police and judiciary and developing safe and accessible reporting tools for children.

The EU will also establish a European centre for child sexual abuse prevention and response.

Inclusive and equal societies

This priority focuses on combating child poverty, ensuring access to education, health, nutrition, housing and inclusion of children with disabilities, migrants, ethnic minorities, or LGBTQ+.

It is closely linked to the European Child Guarantee, a parallel initiative that aims to ensure essential services for all vulnerable children.

Children's rights in a digital world

The EU recognizes that the digital dimension is an integral part of children's lives. The goal is to ensure safe, equitable and meaningful access to digital, while protecting children from risks such



as misinformation, screen addiction, surveillance and exposure to harmful content. Actions include: supporting digital literacy, regulating online platforms and promoting age-appropriate digital tools.
Child-friendly justice It promotes a justice system that is accessible, fair and sensitive to the needs of children. This includes both civil and criminal proceedings, as well as protection and asylum systems. It proposes to update existing guidelines on child-friendly justice and monitor compliance with children's procedural rights in conflict with the law.
Children's Rights in the Global World The external dimension concerns the promotion of children's rights in EU partner countries, particularly in emergency situations, armed conflicts, forced migration and humanitarian crises. The Commission will strengthen support for education, protection and health programs in third countries and integrate a child rights perspective into all external policies.

Table 2: EU Strategy for Child's Rights thematic priorities and activities.

Implementation of the EU Strategy requires close cooperation between EU institutions, Member States, local authorities, civil society, professionals and the children themselves. The EU Commission wants to develop evaluation and monitoring tools and publish regular progress reports.

The EU Strategy is not legally binding, but it provides a basic policy framework that each Member State is called upon to adopt, adapt and strengthen through its own national and local policies. It represents an important step forward in building a more equitable, inclusive and child-friendly European Union. It reaffirms the principle that every child should be recognized as a rights-holder, heard, protected and empowered to develop their full potential - now and in the future.

In this regard, the EU Strategy also represents a turning point in European policies for children, renewing the commitment, proposing a comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach to ensure the full implementation of children's rights also in creative industries, as within the EU Strategy, cultural and artistic participation is listed among the rights for the well-being and development of children, including the audiovisual sector.

The strategy envisages the participation of children in political and democratic life to promote the creation of an European Union that enables children to be active citizens and members of democratic societies. It also provides for socio-economic inclusion, health and education, aiming to combat child poverty and promote child-friendly societies, health and education systems. The EU Strategy encourages combating violence against children and ensuring child protection, preventing



and combating all forms of violence against children and strengthening their protection through tailored mechanisms. It also ensures that legal systems respect children's rights and needs and promotes a safe and inclusive digital environment for children, with a focus on the protection of children online (para. 5). It also emphasizes the global dimension of the issue and focuses on the promotion of children's rights also through international cooperation (para. 6). The EU Strategy highlights the importance of safe and inclusive digital environments, with regard to the enjoyment of audiovisual online content and promotes the meaningful participation of children in decision-making processes, including in the creation of cultural content. Furthermore, it aims to protect children against harmful content, aggressive advertising, or misinformation, in line with European media rules.

COVID-19 pandemic implications are addressed as well. In fact, it had severely increased social isolation, anxiety and psychological distress among children (pp. 2-3) and also emphasizes that children are not only beneficiaries of protection but active agents of change, promoters of democracy, sustainability and inclusion. Key actions include promoting environments that encourage artistic expression, play and creativity, particularly for children at risk of social exclusion, such as Roma children, migrants, or children with disabilities. By recognizing children's right to culture and their active role in its production, the Strategy indirectly recognizes the role of minors in the film industry, finally calling for greater investment in equitable access to culture, including through the establishment of *ad hoc* bodies.

As stated, activities that the Film Industry offer in terms of cultural participation and recreational ones, are explicitly recognised under Article 31 CRC, as rights of every child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age and to participate freely in cultural and artistic life. This recognition implies that children should have access to cultural and audiovisual content appropriate to their age and sensitive to their needs and interests: the quality of the contents addressed to children shall meet the purposes of the mentioned policy making strategies. States have thus an obligation to promote and support the production of content that encourages children's cultural expression and to protect them from content that may harm their physical, mental, or moral development. This article reflects the awareness that play, leisure and cultural participation are fundamental components for the harmonious development of children, from a cognitive, emotional and social point of view. Recreational, artistic and cultural activities contribute to identity building, emotional expression, socialization and non-formal learning. The second paragraph of Article 31 commits States Parties to “*respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural,*



artistic, recreational and leisure activity". The wording is particularly significant because it excludes any passive approach to cultural enjoyment, affirming the right to active and full participation. This right must be guaranteed without discrimination of any kind and in accordance with the principle of the best interests of the child (Art. 3, UNCRC).

The film industry plays a strategic role in the realization of the right to cultural participation enshrined in Article 31, not only because of its impact on the collective imagination, but also because of the opportunities it offers in terms of access and active involvement of children. Cinema can be a powerful tool for promoting cultural pluralism, linguistic diversity and the representation of minorities. It is therefore essential to encourage the production and distribution of film content aimed at children that respects children's rights, is accessible and is representative of different social realities. In addition, the direct participation of children in film workshops, school projects, or festivals strengthens their critical skills and cinematic awareness, while also developing their creativity. The EU supports such initiatives that respond to the EU's strategic objective of normalizing the participation of minors and creating a child-friendly cultural environment.

Despite efforts to establish a favourable regulatory framework, the effective realization of the right to cultural participation faces numerous obstacles, such as socio-economic inequalities, which are one of the main barriers. Indeed, many children do not have access to cinemas, theatres, museums, or extracurricular courses due to high costs or a lack of facilities. Territorial differences, particularly between urban and rural or peripheral areas, amplify these disparities. In addition, there are cultural and linguistic barriers affecting foreign, migrant, or refugee children, as well as a lack of representation in the media of LGBTQIA+ children, children with disabilities, or children belonging to ethnic minorities. The EU Strategy addresses these critical issues by proposing systemic interventions, such as the inclusion of the cultural dimension in social, educational and health policies. In addition, children and adolescents are to be involved in decision-making processes that affect them through specific consultations and participation platforms at the local, national and European levels. Only an integrated approach, involving institutions, schools, cultural bodies, families and the third sector, can make the right to culture effective for all children, without discrimination, while at the same time enhancing their characteristics so that they become active participants in the cultural sphere and, in particular, in cinema.

Therefore, participation in cultural and recreational activities constitutes a fundamental right of children, suitable to be enforced and not a privilege. This right, enshrined in Article 31 of the UN Convention and strongly promoted both by the EU and CoE discussed Strategies on the Rights of



the Child, must be guaranteed in a universal, equitable and accessible manner. Cinema, as a pillar within cultural industries, has the potential to educate, inspire and give voice to children. This is true, but only if it is oriented towards inclusion, pluralistic representation and active participation. Achieving this goal means building a more just, creative and supportive society, capable of valuing the perspective of the younger generations, who are the inevitable drivers of cultural renewal and progress at the transnational level.

5.2. An Overview of the Sectorial legal Frameworks with the Lenses of Child's Law

In our discussion we illustrated the main strategies that the Council of Europe and the European Commission are developing to protect and promote children's rights in the current agendas.

In the following paragraphs, we address the digitalisation of services and products, including the ones generated by the film industries, in order to provide a critical interpretation of the EU legal frameworks in light of the rights of the children in order to develop legal enablers to promote a competitive and child-friendly EU film industry.

In particular, we analyse measures and safeguards that are introduced in sector regulations concerning media and audiovisual contents, personal data and profiling, digital services and AI-based systems, considering – in a comparative approach – possible best practices emerging from some extra-EU experiences that are taking care of the child's perspective in the information society.

Principles stated on Media and Audiovisual Content in EU

The Directive (EU) n. 2018/1808 “*amending Directive 2010/13/EU on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services Audiovisual Media Services Directive*” (hereinafter AVMSD), is the EU's main legal instrument to regulate audiovisual media (European Commission, 2016). The Directive aims to create a modern legal framework reflecting market realities and technological developments, ensuring the protection of consumers and minors, promoting cultural diversity and strengthening the competitiveness of the European audiovisual sector.

The AVMSD introduces specific measures to protect minors from content that may harm their physical, mental, or moral development. These measures include the prohibition of content that could seriously harm minors, such as pornography or gratuitous violence, the obligation to adopt content rating, age warning and parental control systems and the responsibility for video-sharing



platforms to take effective measures to protect minors, such as reporting mechanisms for inappropriate content, filtering systems and age verification (Fortuna & Patti, 2025).

The AVMSD requires on-demand audiovisual media service providers to ensure that at least 30% of their catalogues consist of European content and that this content is adequately promoted. This aims to support the production and distribution of European works, promoting cultural and linguistic diversity (Art.13).

The AVMSD lays down rules for audiovisual advertising, prohibiting, among other things, advertising for cigarettes and tobacco, including heated tobacco products and advertising for alcoholic beverages specifically aimed at minors or encouraging excessive consumption. It also prohibits advertising that exploits the inexperience or credulity of children and advertising that shows them in dangerous situations without justification (Art. 9).

It emerges that the European and international legal framework recognizes the importance of the media, including cinema, in ensuring the well-being, protection and cultural participation of minors. Existing legislation places obligations on both States and audiovisual professionals to ensure that children's rights are respected and promoted in all aspects of media content production and distribution.

In any case, it bears mention that the audiovisual sector has undergone significant changes that the EU Commission must take into account. Indeed, the dynamics of service consumption have evolved: there is a shift from a passive experience, typical of linear television viewing, to an active mode of engagement made possible by the use of smartphones, tablets and other connected devices that enable continuous interaction among users (Hamming, 2020).

In considering whether the AVMSD is capable of addressing these changes brought about by increasing digitalisation, several key factors have been identified. These include: the need to strengthen the protection of minors on video-sharing platforms (VSPs); the regulatory imbalances between traditional television and on-demand services; and the inadequacy of current rules on audiovisual advertising in light of today's digital reality (new media, social networks, video-on-demand services).

Moreover, there is a growing recognition of the need to promote and safeguard media independence and pluralism, which have recently been threatened by disinformation dynamics and foreign interference. In this context, the recently approved EU Regulation 2024/1083 “*establishing a common framework for media services in the internal market (European Media Freedom Act)*” seeks



to improve the functioning of the internal media market and refers in its recitals to children's protection *"when accessing content on video-sharing platforms and that they can rely on an appropriate level of transparency when it comes to online commercial communications"* (Recital 45).

In addition, the AVMSD is particularly relevant as in its art. 33a it introduces the principle of "media literacy", as a key component of information policies, emphasising the importance of promoting media literacy in all sectors of society and monitoring its progress. According to the Recital 59, in particular, it refers *"to skills, knowledge and understanding that allow citizens to use media effectively and safely"*, including the ability to responsibly get access and critically assess content in terms of "critical thinking skills (...) *"to recognise the difference between opinion and fact"*. This is true *"for citizens of all ages and for all media"*. The subsequent document by the European Commission (2025b), *"Communication from the Commission Guidelines pursuant to Article 33a(3) of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive on the scope of Member States' reports concerning measures for the promotion and development of media literacy skills 2023/C 66/02"* provides Member States with guidelines for preparing national reports on measures to promote and develop media literacy, as required by the AVMS Directive (Directive 2010/13/EU amended by 2018/1808).

The document emphasises the critical role of media literacy in enabling citizens to make informed decisions, identify disinformation and participate actively and consciously in democratic life. It goes beyond simple technological proficiency to include the critical ability to analyse content, distinguish between facts and opinions and comprehend how the media works. Improving media literacy is regarded as strategic in the context of initiatives such as the Action Plan for European Democracy, the Media and Audiovisual Action Plan and the Digital Education Plan 2021-2027.

Particular emphasis is placed on the role of video-sharing platforms and social media, which, when the audiovisual component of their service is operational, must implement effective media literacy measures and raise user awareness. Member states must also evaluate the efficacy of these measures.

Finally, the document promotes communication among national regulators and the dissemination of best practices through the publication of state reports. The guidelines are non-binding, but they aim to promote consistent implementation of the AVMS Directive and facilitate the achievement of the EU Digital Decade 2030 goals.

In conclusion, the Directive has the privilege to set principles in favour of minors within a sector as significant and influential as the audiovisual one.



Given its technical nature, requiring each Member State to independently transpose it into national legislation, there is a potential risk of a lack of harmonisation. To address this risk and to monitor the progress made by all Member States, the European Audiovisual Observatory was established, with the task of tracking all relevant developments.

The transposition of the Directive took the form of laws, decrees, or amendments to existing legislative instruments, depending on the country. From a substantive perspective and with specific regard to the protection of minors, each Member State adopted targeted measures.

Overall, the Directive was transposed by the Member States in the manner outlined in the table below, that illustrates few of the most interesting measures. The table has been drawn up based on the AVMSD tracker by the European Audiovisual Observatory (available on AVMSD Tracker - European Audiovisual Observatory, last updated on 11/07/2025).

Country / Acts	Measures
Austria Federal Act amending the Audiovisual Media Services Act; KommAustria Act; ORF Act; Private Radio Act.	• No harmful content can be broadcasted in such a way that persons under the age of 18 view it; • Age verification tools should be used to prevent minors from accessing harmful content; • Non-encoded TV programmes: acoustic or visual announce throughout the broadcast • Audible and visual warning throughout the news and political information broadcasts; • Specific funds can be allocated to recognised self-regulatory institutions for the protection of minors.
Belgium (French speaking community) Decree of 4 February 2021 on audiovisual media services and video-sharing services.	• Appropriate measures may include selecting the time of the broadcast, age verification tools through access code and other technical measures; • Acoustic warnings or a visual symbol should be used to provide information on the potentially harmful nature of the content of the programme; • A Decision sets out specific protection measures and rules for labelling harmful content.
Bulgaria Amendment to the Radio and Television Law.	• No harmful content can be broadcasted in such a way that persons under the age of 18 view it; • 06.00 - 23.00: making available for distribution of harmful programmes is prohibited;



	• 23.00 - 06.00: Warning or visual symbol to be displayed during whole duration of programmes; • The Council for Electronic Media developed a Code of Conduct for measures to assess, flag and restrict access to potentially harmful programmes for minors.
Cyprus Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation Act 196(I) of 2021; Broadcasting and Television Broadcasters Act 197(I).	• Appropriate measures may include selecting the time of the broadcast, age verification tools or other technical measures; • Programmes which are potentially harmful to minors broadcast free-to-air shall be preceded by an acoustic warning or identified by the presence of a visual symbol throughout their duration.
Germany Media State Treaty (MStV).	• Contents which are evidently liable to seriously impair the development of children and young people or their education to become autonomous and socially competent individuals are prohibited; • Appropriate measures include categorising the broadcast, scheduling the time of the broadcast, or using technical measures that make it impossible or very difficult to access the content; • Technical systems for the protection of minors are software programmes which are designed to identify only individual age groups or allow access to telemedia in closed systems.
Denmark Act amending the Radio and Television Act; Film Act.	• No harmful content can be broadcasted in such a way that persons under the age of 18 view it; • Age verification tools, selecting the time of the broadcast, or other technical measures can be used to prevent minors from accessing harmful content; • Media service providers (both commercial and public broadcasters) are responsible for programme classification and must label programmes with their age rating, with some exceptions such as news and current affairs programme, music and sports programme and live broadcast; • For the age rating, the programmes are divided into three age groups: 7,11 and 15; • A public service broadcaster must provide clear and neutral age ratings information orally before to the start of the programme or clearly displayed during the programme, or at least the first 5 minutes.
Estonia Act Amending the Media Services Act and amending other acts in connection	• Programmes with scenes of indecent content, violence or cruelty, or unlawful conduct, likely to impair the physical, mental or moral development of minors must not be broadcasted between 06.00 and 22.00;



therewith of 16 February 2022.	The prohibition may be waived if broadcasters have put in place a system of personal identification codes or other appropriate technical solutions which prevent minors from accessing such content.
Finland Law amending the Act on Electronic Communications Services.	- The notion of harm also includes violent, sexual, or anxiety-inducing content; - A visible sign to be displayed for 7, 12, 16 and 18 on or in connection with the programme; - Possibility for an exception for minors 3 years younger than the minimum age limit if accompanied by an adult.
France Ordinance No. 2020 1642 of 21 December 2020.	- General measures can include selecting the time of the broadcast or other appropriate technical measures; - Programmes likely to impair the physical, mental or moral development of minors shall be preceded by visual warnings throughout their duration.
Greece Law 4779/2021.	- Appropriate measures may include labelling the broadcast, selecting the time of the broadcast, using personal identification numbers, age verification tools or other technical measures; - All programmes, except advertising and teleshopping spots and news programmes, should be classified in categories based on their potential to impair the physical, mental or moral development of minors; - The ESR has adopted Directive 1/2023, which contains detailed rules on the labelling of audiovisual programmes transmitted by AV service providers on the protection of minors.
Croatia Electronic Media Act.	- Appropriate measures may include selecting the time of the broadcast, age verification tools or other technical measures and have been specified in an ordinance adopted by AEM; - Advertising for games of chance and other AVMS programmes broadcasted in unencoded form must be preceded by acoustic warning or identified by visual symbols for their entire duration.
Italy Legislative Decree No 208 of 8 November 2021	- The TV and minors self-regulation Code, binding to all broadcasters, set out specific measures including a differentiated time slot protection and rules pertaining to the participation of minors in TV programmes; - Specific AGCOM regulations define the technical procedures for classifying potentially harmful programmes and preventing minors from accessing them.
Latvia	No harmful content can be broadcasted in such a way that persons under the age of 18 view it;



Amendment to the Electronic Mass Media Law.	• 07.00 – 22.00: the dissemination of harmful audiovisual works is prohibited; • 22.00 - 07.00: Visual or audible signs to be displayed prior to the broadcast.
Lithuania Various legislative amendments.	• Must be marked with 'N-7' if it has negative impact on < 7; • 21.00 - 06.00: "N-14" to be displayed if it has a negative impact on < 14; • 23.00 – 06.00: index 'S' to be displayed if it has a detrimental effect on minors; • Audible warnings, pictorial signs to be displayed; • Public computer network providers must ensure the use of harmful content filtering tools.
Luxembourg Act of 26 February 2021 amending the amended Act of 27 July 1991 on electronic media.	• Age verification tools, time selection or other technical measures used to prevent minors from accessing harmful content will be defined by a Grand-Ducal regulation; • This regulation may also define the different age categories, the prohibition of certain programmes and the conditions for identifying the potential harmful character of programmes by visual and acoustic signals.
Malta Act No. LVI of 2020 - Broadcasting (Amendment) Act.	• Harmful content can only be made available in ways that prevent minors from hearing or seeing it; • No harmful content can be broadcasted to the persons under the age of 18; • No detail on how broadcasters would warn viewer about potentially harmful content.
Netherlands Amendment to the Media Act 2008.	• No harmful content can be broadcasted in such a way that persons < 16 view it unless the institution responsible for the content uses classification and prevention mechanisms; • The most harmful content must be inaccessible to < 16; • The Minister of Education, Culture and Science may recognise an organisation that makes arrangements for the classification, distribution and monitoring of harmful content.
Poland Act of 11 August 2021 on amending the Broadcasting Act and the Cinematography Act.	• Broadcasters and VOD service providers must rate and label programs with an appropriate symbol and a verbal announcement indicating the type of content that may negatively impact minors; • KRRiT has developed three regulations prescribing the manner in which potentially harmful programmes for minors may be made available by AVMS providers.
Portugal Law (Law No. 74/2020)	• The notion of harm also includes impairment to the free development of the personality of children and young people or their right to respect for their personal and family life;



	• No harmful content can be broadcasted in such a way that persons under the age of 18 view it; • 24.00 - 06.00: permanent appropriate visual identifier displayed throughout programme; • VOD services: permanent display of an appropriate visual identifier and parental control mechanisms.
Romania Law no. 190/2022 of 28 June 2022 for the modification and completion of the Audiovisual Law no. 504/2002.	• No programmes involving serious physical, mental or verbal violence, or sex scene, can not be broadcasted between 6 AM and 11 PM; • Programmes likely to impair the development of minors must be restricted by conditional access system or according to an appropriate classification system.
Slovakia Law of 22 June 2022 on media services and on amending and supplementing certain laws	• Appropriate measures may include encryption, effective parental control and scheduling the time of the broadcast; • AVMS providers must determine and consistently apply a tagging system to determine whether a program is age appropriate and the type of potentially harmful content it contains.; • A decree specifies the standardised labelling system to be used to indicate content descriptors and the associated age-suitability classification.
Sweden Modernised Radio and Television Act.	• The notion of harm also includes realistic and detailed depictions of violence or pornographic images; • Ex-post monitor of the programmes by the Chancellor of Justice and the Swedish Broadcasting Commission to check whether they contain depictions of violence or pornographic images; • Warning of the presence of harmful content to be displayed; • No harmful content can be broadcasted in such a way that persons under the age of 18 view it.

Table 3: National safeguards implemented for children in light of AVMSD

As illustrated in the table, many Member States introduced provisions concerning age verification tools and other technical measures (e.g., Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czechia, Croatia, Denmark, Luxembourg). Others implemented measures related to time slots (e.g., Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal) or considered age classifications (e.g., Denmark, Finland, Lithuania).

Notably, some countries have taken steps to expand the notion of harm in the context of the Directive. For instance, Portugal includes in its definition the impairment of the free development of children's and young people's personalities or their right to respect for private and family life; Sweden refers to realistic and detailed depictions of violence or pornographic imagery; Finland mentions violent, sexual, or anxiety-inducing content. Finally, certain Member States have provided for the



involvement of independent authorities (e.g., AGCOM in Italy, AEM in Croatia, KRRiT in Poland, AKOS in Slovenia).

Children as digital users

Considering the impact of digital transition of cinematic services and products, to protect and promote minors, as consumers of film industry requires to primarily address their rights as digital users (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2021). Consequently, the legal framework must be broadened to include EU laws aimed at enhancing and safeguarding children and adolescents as they navigate the internet, from multiple perspectives in order to meet in the concrete case their best interests: the protection of their personal data, the mitigation of risks of profiling and manipulation of their behaviours and the risks and opportunities related to the human-interaction with systems based on artificial intelligence (Cortesi et al, 2021; Custers, 2022).

To this end, in order to define policies and recommendations for a more competitive EU film industry, we will need to identify ethical, legal and technical enablers emerging from the existing sectorial frameworks, highlighting the specific provisions related to child protection that might be relevant for our purposes in addressing REBOOT challenges.

GDPR and Age-Appropriate Design

In line with the participatory approach promoted by the BIK+ strategy, children and young people may be invited to attend group meetings.

As of now, the Code is still under development. The first meeting of the Group took place in July 2023, with the aim of taking stock of the progress made.

Once finalised, the Code may be adopted by companies on a voluntary basis, thereby enabling them to demonstrate their commitment to the protection of minors online. However, it is important to underline that this Code does not replace the binding legal obligations laid down in the DSA. Also in this domain, the EU legislator thus envisages and promotes the implementation of soft law instruments, aimed at complementing the regulatory framework through flexible and participatory forms of governance (Rigazio, 2024).

Among the core objectives of the Digital Services Act (DSA) (Finocchiaro, 2023; Hofmann & Raue, 2025; Fortuna, 2025) is the protection of users from invasive profiling and targeted advertising



practices, particularly when it comes to vulnerable individuals such as minors (Amram, 2022; Amram, & Patti, 2024; Malgieri, 2023; Crea & De Franceschi, 2024). The Regulation introduces specific restrictions and transparency obligations aimed at limiting the use of personal data for commercial purposes, thereby fostering a more equitable, safe and rights-respecting digital ecosystem. This focus examines the main provisions on profiling and personalised advertising, highlighting the legal implications and the measures foreseen to enhance user protection online.

Just as age classification systems exist in the film industry, certain online content and digital services are equally inappropriate for younger age groups. For this reason, the DSA requires platforms, particularly Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs), to adopt specific measures to mitigate risks to minors, depending on the nature and scope of the service.

These measures include, first and foremost, parental control systems, tools enabling parents or legal guardians to monitor and, where necessary, restrict minors' access to potentially harmful content or functionalities. These instruments fall within the systemic risk mitigation measures outlined in Article 35(1)(d) DSA, which explicitly includes risks to the fundamental rights of minors.

Age verification systems are also envisaged, mechanisms designed to verify the age of users prior to granting access to certain services or content, in order to prevent minors' exposure to inappropriate material. These systems are likewise among the mitigation measures referred to in Article 35(1) and align with the risk assessment obligations related to minors under Article 34(1).

Reporting and support tools are another key requirement, accessible functionalities that allow minors to report illegal content, abuse, or harmful experiences and to access assistance and support services. These tools are an integral part of the design and accessibility obligations applicable to reporting mechanisms under Article 16 for hosting service providers and are reinforced under Article 20(1) for online platforms. Additionally, Article 14(4) requires that user interfaces will be designed safely and, in a manner, appropriate to the age of users.

With regard to profiling and targeted advertising, further relevant DSA provisions concern transparency requirements and terms of service adapted for minors. Specifically, Article 14 mandates that terms of service be clear and comprehensible for all users, including minors. They must be structured in such a way that minors can understand what they are agreeing to when using the service.



Article 39 DSA further obliges VLOPs to publish detailed information on advertisements, including both the content and targeting specifications of ads and information on the sponsors behind them—with particular attention to ads directed at minors.

Finally, the DSA prohibits the use of deceptive interface designs, commonly known as dark patterns (Recital 67). These refer to user interface design strategies deliberately intended to nudge, deceive, or manipulate users into making unintended choices, such as unintended purchases, decisions under pressure, or facing undue difficulty in unsubscribing from a service. Such practices are considered incompatible with the principles of transparency, fairness and freedom of choice underpinning the EU's regulatory framework for digital services.

This prohibition assumes particular significance in the context of the protection of minors, who, due to their cognitive and experiential vulnerability, are especially susceptible to the manipulative effects of dark patterns (Hamming, 2020).

The EU AI Act

The most recent step in the European Union's legislative process regulating the presence of minors online is Regulation (EU) n. 2024/1689, which establishes harmonised rules on artificial intelligence, commonly known as the AI Act.

Artificial intelligence is a rapidly expanding and evolving field that is increasingly influencing various sectors, including the film industry. This growing influence has prompted the need to regulate a technology that is highly pervasive in daily life and capable of interacting directly with users.

In particular, the AI Act introduces specific safeguards for groups considered vulnerable, including minors. By addressing the specific needs of children in the digital environment, the legislation marks a significant advancement in the protection of their fundamental rights (see Malgieri et al., 2026).

First and foremost, the AI Act explicitly identifies children as a distinct vulnerable group requiring specific protection (Recital 28). This recognition reflects a shift from a product-safety-oriented approach to one that prioritises fundamental rights, aiming to ensure that AI systems uphold human dignity, equality and the interests of vulnerable groups, particularly children.

Secondly, the AI Act prohibits the exploitation of vulnerabilities linked to age. Article 5(1)(b) bans the placing on the market or use of AI systems that exploit such vulnerabilities, such as manipulative toys or applications designed to distort behaviour or decision-making in ways that cause significant harm. This provision mitigates the risks posed by prolonged exposure of minors to screens and



digital platforms, particularly the danger of developing addictive behaviours. Moreover, generative AI may negatively impact the creativity and critical thinking autonomy of young users.

Another scenario addressed by the AI Act concerns the use of AI in educational contexts. AI systems used in education are classified as high-risk and are therefore subject to strict oversight and risk management obligations to protect children's rights (Annex III, Article 6). The EU legislator's intention is clear: AI should enhance educational and learning opportunities without infringing on fundamental rights or exploiting the vulnerabilities of younger or weaker population groups.

In general, Article 7 *sub h*) of the AI Act includes age as a factor in the risk assessment of high-risk AI systems, alongside other criteria such as power imbalances, socio-economic conditions and authority dynamics.

The Regulation also emphasises the principle of transparency, requiring clarity about how AI systems function to ensure that users, particularly in high-risk contexts, understand their nature and purpose. As a result, the law mandates clear labelling and disclosure of AI-generated content, including deepfakes, to ensure that users, especially minors, understand the artificial nature of such content (Recitals 133 and 134). Given the importance of users, both adults and minors, knowing when they are interacting with AI technologies, Article 50 of the AI Act imposes transparency obligations on both providers and deployers of AI systems designed to interact directly with individuals.

More broadly, the Regulation adopts a risk-based approach, aiming to tailor obligations to the level of risk posed by AI systems. This entails stricter oversight for applications impacting children, particularly with respect to their rights under General Comment No. 25 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Accordingly, the AI Act provides for continuous monitoring and compliance mechanisms and establishes procedures for ongoing risk assessment and enforcement to mitigate harms to vulnerable groups, including children (Articles 7 *sub h*), 27, 79(2) and 90). For the same reason, Article 60, concerning the experimentation of new AI systems, stipulates that regulatory sandboxes must ensure adequate safeguards for individuals in vulnerable situations, including minors, during the testing phases of new technologies.

In conclusion, the AI Act introduces a set of key principles that collectively aim to strengthen the protection of children and adolescents as they engage with emerging technologies that are increasingly embedded in daily life. Although such technologies can support the development of civil



societies, they may also profoundly affect vulnerable individuals, minors in particular, who are more susceptible to the effects of technological bias. The protection afforded by the EU legislator is thus of paramount importance in setting limits and implementing effective safeguards to respond to the challenges posed by artificial intelligence.

These core principles include not only the protection of fundamental rights and the principles of transparency and accountability, which require clear obligations for AI developers and users to assess and mitigate risks through compliance and enforcement mechanisms, but also the principle of inclusion, aimed at preventing discrimination and ensuring that AI systems do not reinforce social inequalities but rather respond to the specific needs of children and other vulnerable groups.

Together with the risk-based approach and the protection of personal data, these principles play a crucial role in building a comprehensive legal framework for the effective protection of minors in digital environments. These principles shall be taken into account also in the film industry supply chain.

5.3. Digitalisation of Film Industries and The Role of Contractual Clauses to Protect Children's Rights

Digitalization has profoundly transformed the way young people access, engage with and assign meaning to cinematic experiences. Theatres, once privileged spaces for collective participation and social gathering, have been partially replaced by domestic, individual and mobile viewing modes, enabled by streaming platforms and audiovisual content also disseminated via social media. In this new ecosystem, the cinematic experience merges with the digital one, reshaping the boundaries between artistic content, entertainment and algorithmic consumption.

This transformation carries significant cultural and legal implications. In this context, Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is of primary relevance, recognizing the right of every child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life. This right is also reflected in the European Union's commitment to promoting cultural diversity and equitable access to content (Article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU). However, cinematic consumption in the digital environment raises questions about the real ability of platforms to guarantee pluralistic access and the development of taste—especially in relation to independent or culturally non-standardized works.



Digital platforms structure their offerings through algorithmic recommendation systems that, while enabling personalization of the user experience, tend to prioritize mass-market content, leading to phenomena of cultural homogenization and selective visibility. In this scenario, minors risk of being exposed to increasingly filtered and standardised content, with a significant impact on their cultural literacy and their ability to explore narratives outside the dominant mainstream.

Moreover, major streaming platforms (Netflix, Prime Video, Disney+, but also hybrid environments like YouTube and TikTok) also mentioned in the focus groups held in the project are not merely repositories of films, but audiovisual ecosystems that integrate forms of interaction, commentary, sharing and social participation. Viewing becomes a transmedia experience, often mediated by viral dynamics and engagement mechanisms typical of social networks. In this regard, the viewing experience becomes also an exercise of playing and associating.

In the past, cinema was not only an artistic experience but also a public space for collective dialogue and participation, where shared viewing fostered reflection, debate and cultural sedimentation. Today, that dialogic function has partly shifted to social media, where cinematic content — or fragments thereof — is discussed, reinterpreted and amplified. On the one hand, this allows for wider, more transversal and generative participation; on the other, the ephemeral, fragmented and performative nature of online interaction risks undermining the depth of critical discourse, privileging short content, quick reactions and engagement-driven logic. This shift is not neutral: it redefines not only the ways in which content is consumed, but also the quality of cultural engagement itself.

This transformation appears even more significant when compared with earlier assessments of the audiovisual landscape for children. For example, the 2011 report *Audiovisual Media for Children in Europe*, produced by the European Audiovisual Observatory (Kanzler & Newman-Baudais, 2011; see also Cappello, 2021; Lacourt, Munch, & Radel-Cormann, 2024), focused primarily on the circulation of European children's films and on the structure of television programming across the continent. The report highlighted key concerns such as the limited cross-border dissemination of European productions, the market dominance of U.S. films and the marginal presence of nationally produced animation within children's broadcasting. Its regulatory concerns were largely framed within the context of territorial distribution, public funding and programming quotas.

Today, as already discussed, the scenario has shifted profoundly. Theatres and scheduled television channels (once the main conduits for children's cinematic exposure) have been partially supplanted by streaming platforms, on-demand content and social media ecosystems. These new modes of access have radically transformed not only how content is consumed, but also how it is selected,



shared and interpreted. While the 2011 report focused on questions of availability and circulation, the current challenge is one of *visibility* and *curation*: content is now algorithmically filtered, creating personalized yet potentially homogenized viewing environments, particularly for minors.

Moreover, the boundaries between audiovisual media and digital interaction have blurred. Streaming platforms are no longer just passive distributors of films, but immersive and participatory ecosystems, often connected to social media dynamics. Viewing has become a transmedia experience, shaped by likes, comments, short-form reactions and viral fragments. This marks a radical departure from the collective, reflective space of the cinema theatre. At the same time, the legal framework has evolved: while earlier debates focused on national quotas and market access, today's regulatory landscape must contend with algorithmic transparency, data-driven personalization and the risk of cultural narrowing within platform-driven environments.

In this light, the digitalization of the cinematic experience does not merely concern the transition from analogue to digital media. It involves a deeper reconfiguration of the relationship between children, culture and technology—calling for new models of governance that are able to safeguard diversity, critical engagement and the cultural rights of younger generations in the age of platforms.

From a regulatory perspective, this scenario calls for strengthened guarantees of safe, transparent and culturally meaningful access to content intended for minors.

In summary, the cinematic experience in the digital era represents an ambivalent frontier: on one hand, it offers extraordinary opportunities for access, creativity and participation; on the other, it exposes minors to potentially passive, homogenizing and market-driven forms of viewing. In this context, public policies and regulatory models—including cooperation among institutions, platforms and schools—must address not only the protection of young users, but also the active promotion of their right to culture, as recognized in Article 31 of the aforementioned UN Convention, in its fullest sense.

Risks of addiction, manipulation and algorithmic influence: lessons from GDPR, DSA and AI Act

The cinematic experience of young people within the digital ecosystem goes far beyond passive content consumption. It increasingly intersects with forms of interaction, recommendation and personalization which, if not properly regulated, may pose significant risks to the physical and psychological well-being and decisional autonomy of underage users. Social networks can expose minors to film clips and content that is potentially unsuitable for their age and influence their decision-



making about what content to view. Among the most relevant risks are addiction to audiovisual content, exposure to manipulative mechanisms and the distorting influence of opaque algorithmic systems. The mentioned DSA explicitly acknowledges that the design of digital services may affect the physical, mental and moral development of minors (Recitals 81 and 83). Online platforms are required to carry out annual assessments of systemic risks arising from the use of their services by minors (Art. 34 DSA), including risks related to excessive use, persuasive design and profiling for commercial purposes. Article 35 mandates proportionate corrective measures, such as modifying user interfaces, recommendation systems, or advertising mechanisms.

These obligations apply to online platforms within the meaning of the DSA, particularly Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. These services not only allow users to upload and share content, but also play a key role in disseminating short-form video clips and audiovisual materials, including film-related content, often targeted at or accessible to minors.

By contrast, services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Disney+ do not fall under the definition of online platforms under the DSA, as they do not host user-generated content or enable user interaction. Therefore, they are not subject to the risk assessment and mitigation obligations outlined in Articles 34 and 35. This distinction will be further examined in the following section.

One of the main vectors of influence is the use of recommendation algorithms, which select and suggest content based on users' browsing data and preferences. For minors, these systems—when not transparent or responsibly designed—may result in repetitive and polarized exposure, reducing cultural variety and encouraging compulsive viewing. In some cases, suggested content may be of low educational value or even reinforce addictive behaviours (e.g. binge-watching, viral trends).

A particularly critical issue is the widespread use of dark patterns in digital interfaces—deceptive design techniques meant to subtly manipulate user behaviour, nudging them into making unintended choices. Common examples include autoplay systems, pop-ups pushing content sharing, fake countdown timers, convoluted unsubscribe processes, or interface designs that make it difficult to refuse data processing. These practices are particularly harmful to minors, who, due to their age, cognitive development and limited digital experience, are especially vulnerable to manipulation.

The European regulatory framework imposes strict limitations when minors are the target of such practices. Article 22 of the GDPR prohibits automated decisions producing significant effects and Recital 38 highlights the need for enhanced safeguards for vulnerable data subjects.



The DSA further reinforces this framework by expressly banning profiling for advertising purposes where minors are concerned (Art. 28), but only for platforms that fall within the scope of this provision. Similarly, dark patterns are banned under Article 25 DSA, as manipulative practices that undermine user autonomy. While this prohibition applies to all users, it carries particular weight in the case of minors, who are more likely to be exposed to opaque interfaces and persuasive dynamics. Additionally, the AI Act prohibits the use of systems that exploit age-related vulnerabilities (Art. 5.1.b), banning techniques designed to distort or unduly influence the behaviour of children and adolescents.

In the context of digital cinematic consumption, such techniques amplify pre-existing risks: minors may be induced to continue viewing content passively, often without adequate awareness or comprehension. In this regard, from the young users attitudes we remarked an increasing interest a film production oriented towards offering shorter content distributed in several episodes and seasons more than single products.

Content addiction—driven by persuasive design, instant visual rewards and endless content feeds—is one of the most common consequences, particularly among adolescents. The risk is not only quantitative (time spent), but also qualitative: critical thinking, creativity and interpretative autonomy may be diminished due to the increasing overlap between cinematic and social content, which fragments the viewing experience and reinforces immediate emotional responses, rather than encouraging reflection or understanding.

In short, the risk lies not only in the content itself, but in the modalities through which such content is offered, recommended and framed. The digital environment may encourage passive and conditioned behaviours, unless it is regulated to treat minors not merely as consumers, but as developing individuals with rights.

Addressing these risks requires an integrated approach that combines:

- Greater attention to platform architecture, which cannot be considered neutral or driven solely by engagement mechanisms. It is essential to strengthen transparency and accountability mechanisms, promote ethical design models and implement obligations proportionate and appropriate to user vulnerability—as required under the DSA (Articles. 25, 28, 34–35), the GDPR (Articles. 5, 22, 25) and the AI Act (Article 5.1.b and Recital 28)—in a fairness-by-design perspective focused on protecting vulnerable users;



- Digital literacy programmes aimed at empowering minors to recognize and resist such mechanisms;
- A coalition between schools, public authorities and industry stakeholders, to effectively monitor and regulate the digital environments through which minors access cinematic content.

Analysis of Streaming Platform Policies and Industry Standards

As known, to explore and identify future trends in enhancing the competitiveness of the European Film Industry in areas such as creativity, skills and production, the surveys and focus groups conducted under WP5 aimed to gather primary and secondary information regarding the tastes and preferences of future audiences, as well as the modes of interaction between viewers and content innovation in the creative process. From the analysis, we confirmed data recently highlighted by the European Audiovisual Observatory in 2025 (Ene Iancu, 2025). In fact, we observed that major on-demand streaming platforms—such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Disney+—now play a central role in shaping how minors get access and engage with audiovisual content.

In relation to the Disney+ streaming service, Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, it is first necessary to refer to their non-qualification under the scope of the Digital Services Act and the legal obligations arising therefrom.

Indeed, the DSA applies to all providers of “intermediary services” offered to recipients located in the European Union, regardless of the place of establishment of the provider.

The definition of “intermediary service” includes three categories: mere conduit, caching and hosting.

Streaming platforms offer a video-on-demand (VOD) service that provides professional audiovisual content, acquired or produced (e.g., by The Walt Disney Company) and made available to users through subscription. The service does not allow users to upload or stream their own content, nor does it provide public spaces for interaction. It does not, in short, provide a space for publicly generated content, as YouTube or TikTok do.

Therefore, in light of the characteristics of the service, a streaming platform offering a VoD service:

- does not qualify as a hosting service, as it does not host user-generated content;
- cannot qualify as an online platform, within the meaning of Art. 3(i) DSA;
- does not engage in activities attributable to mere conduit or caching.



A streaming platform that offers a VoD service, not being a so-called online platform nor, inevitably, designated as a Very Large Online Platform, is not required to comply with the enhanced obligations provided for such entities.

For example, in Section 3 (User-Generated Content) of Disney's July 10, 2014 terms of use, the "User-Generated Content" section refers to the totality of the products and services offered by Disney and not specifically to Disney+, providing that Disney's services may allow the user to communicate, send, upload, or otherwise make available text, images, audio and video content, contest entries, or other types of content (the "User-Generated Content") that can be accessed and viewed by the public. Access to these features may be subject to age restrictions, but users are prohibited from submitting or uploading user-generated content that is defamatory, harassing, intimidating, intolerant, derogatory, violent, vulgar, obscene, pornographic, or otherwise offensive or that harms or is reasonably expected to harm any person or entity, whether or not such material is protected by law.

Disney reserves the right but dismisses any obligation to monitor, select, post, remove, edit, store and review user-generated content or communications submitted through the Disney Services, including to ensure that user-generated content or communications comply with the Terms of Use. Disney also declines responsibility for opinions, views, advice, or recommendations posted or submitted by users.

The analysis of the measures adopted by three of the leading on-demand streaming platforms- Disney+, Netflix and Amazon Prime Video-in the area of child protection should focus, in particular, on parental control features, content classification, dedicated interfaces and other preventive tools.

Although, as mentioned above, the DSA does not apply to streaming platforms offering video on demand, the principles of the same regulation, analyzed in the introduction, should also apply to platforms such as Netflix, Prime Video and Disney+. Indeed, there appears to be a clear regulatory gap in EU law on this point.

Extending these principles to the context under consideration would provide greater protection for minors in the specific context of cinema consumed in the digital ecosystem.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the DSA applies in full in two specific cases:

1. When platforms are required to moderate content shared by users, even if this content consists of video extracts distributed or produced by streaming platforms;



2. When minors are not merely passive consumers of content offered by platforms, but are themselves creators of video content published on social networks (such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, etc.). In fact, the interviews conducted reveal that minors often develop an interest in creating video content that can be traced back to the art form of cinema.

To shape a child-friendly film industry it is therefore useful to compare and comment the existing safeguards that the VoD are already embedding in order to comply with the illustrated regulatory framework.

In the table below we illustrate the measures and their descriptions as included in the Terms and Conditions.

Child's protection measures	Disney+	Prime Video	Netflix
Tailored profiles	"Junior" or "Kids" profiles, which show only content suitable for all ages and provides simplified interface for children. Junior Profile Output Protection. In fact, the "Kid-Proof Exit" option can be enabled to prevent accidental or voluntary exit from the junior profile (on this issue, see Disney+ site – Kid-Proof Exit, feature description). The Kid-Proof Exit feature is designed so that younger viewers have to pass a test in order to exit Junior Mode. Disney+ makes it possible to activate the "Protected Exit" feature by following the procedure on the mobile app or a supported web browser.	"Kids" profiles, specifically designed for a child audience. These profiles display only films and television series deemed appropriate according to age-based classification systems, up to the threshold of 12 years. The platform automatically filters search results, excludes inappropriate suggestions and disables purchase functionalities within Kids profiles. However, it remains critically relevant that content downloaded through other profiles – including adult ones – remains accessible from within Kids profiles, thus constituting a potential	A particularly important tool available to parents is the family filter, which can be activated by creating a "Netflix Kids" profile, specifically designed for child users. This profile is: • marked by a distinctive logo; • equipped with a simplified interface with no access to account settings; • automatically restricted to age-appropriate content for children; • disabled from accessing games available on the platform.



		vulnerability in the platform's protective architecture.	This interface design aims to create a user-friendly and safe browsing environment, tailored to the developmental needs of young users.
Access and restrictions	PIN and access restrictions. In particular, a 4-digit PIN can be set to block access to adult profiles. Additionally, setting or changing the PIN requires knowledge of the account password	<i>Global PIN</i> can be set to restrict the viewing or purchasing of content that exceeds a predetermined age classification threshold. This feature is particularly effective in preventing minors from accessing adult profiles or altering their settings. In addition, Amazon allows for <i>individual profile PINs</i>, enabling, for example, adult users to secure their profiles against unauthorized access. Finally, PIN prompts can be applied across all devices linked to the account or selectively configured, via the web interface or mobile app, thereby ensuring a flexible and tailored level of parental control	Further protective tools include the possibility of activating a four-digit PIN (<i>Profile Lock PIN</i>) to prevent unauthorized access to specific profiles. This feature can also be extended to restrict the creation of new profiles, thereby strengthening parental control over the account structure and limiting the risk of circumvention
Content rating by age	It features content rating by age. Indeed, profiles can be configured to access only content with specific ratings. Indeed, the classifications, types, genres, categories and/or descriptions of the	Content classification on Prime Video follows age-based criteria, with variations according to the country of access. Amazon generally	Netflix applies an age classification system to both audiovisual content and games. These ratings are either determined internally or



	contents are provided as suggestions to facilitate navigation and for informational purposes.	adopts the following age categories.	developed in consultation with competent local authorities. The categories reflect the presence and intensity of sensitive content—such as violence, explicit language, nudity, sexual content, or references to drug use—and are clearly displayed both on the title’s information page and in the upper corner of the screen at the start of playback (in the case of television series, ratings may vary across seasons).
Classification of content	0+, 6+, 9+, 12+, 14+, 16+, 18+	<i>Kids</i>: suitable for all audiences <i>Older Kids</i>: recommended for ages 7 and up <i>Teens</i>: for viewers aged 13 and older <i>Young Adults</i>: for viewers aged 16 and up <i>Adults</i>: restricted to viewers aged 18 and over	<i>All</i>: 7+, 10+ <i>Teenagers</i>: 13+, <i>Adults</i>: 16+, 18+
Visual descriptors for content	It provides visual descriptors to indicate themes or scenes in the content, including: Mild Violence; Violence; Mild	Alongside the age classification, Prime Video includes content advisories, such as warnings for flashing	In addition to the age rating itself, descriptive labels are provided to specify the nature of the



	Fear; Fearfulness; Vulgar language; Scenes or themes of a sexual nature; Scenes with discriminatory behaviour or discrimination themes; Depictions of drugs, alcohol or smoking	lights, frightening scenes, or strong language—to inform viewers about specific elements that may require caution.	content that led to the assigned classification (e.g., “explicit language,” “violence,” “nudity”), thereby enhancing transparency and promoting more informed viewing decisions within families.
Limit to purchases		Automatically disabled purchase functions within Kids profiles. To extend this restriction to general profiles, users may activate the <i>Purchase Restrictions</i> option. Once enabled, all purchases or rentals require the entry of a PIN, which can be configured at the account level or per individual device, thereby reinforcing barriers against improper use by underage users.	In “Netflix Kids” profiles, game access is disabled by default.

Table 4: Child’s safeguards for each VoD.

The comparative analysis of child protection tools offered by the three major streaming platforms — Disney+, Netflix and Prime Video — reveals a generally high but uneven level of attention to digital safety. All three platforms provide dedicated profiles for minors, age-based content classification, tools for parental control, content warnings and access PINs, reflecting a shared baseline of protective functionalities. However, relevant differences emerge in terms of interface design and exit security. Disney+ stands out as the only platform offering both a simplified interface and a kid-proof exit, indicating a stronger design orientation towards child-specific usability and containment. Netflix, while offering a simplified interface and a PIN for creating new profiles (a valuable tool to prevent circumvention), does not include a kid-proof exit. Prime Video, on the other hand, lacks both



simplified navigation and kid-proof exit, but compensates partially with a purchase block option that the other two platforms do not provide.

These divergences suggest that while a core set of protective tools is now standard, the depth, usability and preventive design of these tools vary significantly and may reflect different corporate priorities and regulatory pressures.

	Disney +	Prime Video	Netflix
Simplified interface	Yes	No	Yes
Kid proof exit	Yes	No	No
Pin for creating new profiles	No	No	Yes
Purchase block	No	Yes	No

Table 5: *Summary of technical safeguards.*

All the three VoD have a structured set of technical and regulatory measures to safeguard minors in their access to digital content, including the creation of dedicated child profiles, the implementation of age-based content classifications, the activation of parental controls and PIN-based restrictions and compliance with legal standards on the protection of children's personal data however, we observe in terms of efficacy as follows.

- Disney+ has adopted a solid set of parental controls aimed at ensuring a safe and age-appropriate environment for children. Features like the “Junior” or “Kids” profiles limit access to suitable content and offer a simplified interface. The “Kid-Proof Exit” adds extra security by requiring a test to exit the child profile, preventing unsupervised access to adult content. Additionally, PIN protection and password requirements ensure only authorized users can change settings. Age-based content ratings (from 0+ to 18+) and visual descriptors for sensitive themes help parents make informed viewing choices. Indeed, visual content descriptors are provided to inform users about potentially sensitive themes such as violence, fear, sexual content, discrimination and substance use. These indicators serve as useful tools for caregivers in making informed decisions about what their children watch. Overall, Disney+ demonstrates a thoughtful and well-structured approach to child safety, combining



technical controls with clear content guidance. While no system is entirely foolproof, the combination of profile restrictions, exit protections, PIN access and detailed content labeling positions Disney+ as a platform that takes the protection of young viewers seriously.

- The child protection model adopted by Prime Video is grounded in a combination of preventive and reactive measures: on the one hand, dedicated profiles and age-based classifications help reduce children's exposure to inappropriate content; on the other hand, advanced technical tools—such as personalized PINs and purchase restrictions—enable adult users to exercise effective control over children's digital experiences. Nevertheless, the efficacy of these mechanisms remains contingent upon their conscious and active use by parents and caregivers, who continue to play an irreplaceable role in mediating and supervising minors' access to digital content.
- Netflix adopts a multi-layered system of child protection based on three pillars: contractual clauses assigning responsibility to adults; technical tools for configurable parental control; and a simplified, secure interface for young children. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these measures ultimately depends on their conscious activation by adult users, highlighting the central role of parental engagement in mediating children's interaction with digital content.

6. YOUNG EUROPEANS' PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES AS CONSUMERS AND CREATORS IN THE EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRY

The previous chapters of this report have mapped the conceptualisations of “child-friendliness” and of children as citizens, consumers and users, as well as current policies related to youth and the European film industry.

Along with policy and regulation, a child friendly film industry needs to be shaped taking under consideration children's and young people's lived experiences both as consumers – a field of research that lacks systematic investigation into young audiences across regions, particularly concerning the psychological, interpersonal and technological factors influencing film viewership among youth (Sarikakis et al., forthcoming) – and creators. To address this gap as well as to take into account the necessary voices of young people in the development towards a child-friendly film industry, the following chapter presents the findings of focus group interviews of 510 young people living in Europe, exploring young Europeans' film preferences, engagement with film and audiovisual content creation.



6.1. Methodology

Data collection

For this purpose, we draw from 108 focus groups, conducted in the nine countries represented in the REBOOT consortium, eight members of the European Union and one EU candidate country: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain and Türkiye.

Before data collection, ethical clearance from participating universities' review bodies, as well as appropriate approval to conduct research at schools and universities was obtained from the relevant institutions, e.g. local school boards. All participants received an information sheet, provided written and informed consent and were reminded that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences.

The study participants comprised adolescents and young adults aged 12 to 24 years. The sampling strategy specifically targeted students enrolled in secondary (age 12-18) and tertiary education (age 18-24), effectively middle-/high school and university students, with the objective of achieving an approximately equal distribution of respondents from each educational/age tier.

For the secondary education cohort, the sampling design sought to maintain a balanced representation between lower and upper secondary school students, aiming for roughly equivalent proportions from each levels, as well as equal distribution of socio-economic background of participants, which was facilitated by establishing contact through educational institutions in a diverse set of neighbourhoods rather than by engaging with children and young adults on an individual basis. While this equitable representation in the sample was a priority in the research process, it proved to be fully realised as the research teams were heavily reliant on responses and cooperation by schools and educational authorities.

The sampling design prioritised the recruitment of complete classes or study groups of young people in designated urban centres to maximise response rates and representativeness. Secondary school selection followed an intentional sampling strategy designed to capture the demographic diversity characteristic of each city's population. Data collection was mostly conducted at the urban centres



accommodating participating partners' headquarters. However, in certain instances (detailed in Table 6), responses were obtained from additional cities or suburban areas, bypassing recruitment limitations.

University recruitment strategies targeted multiple faculties to enhance respondent diversity and ensure broader demographic representation. While for minors, the recruitment was carried out through the schools, for universities, a calls for expressions of interest were shared, inviting voluntary participation in a research study on young people's film preferences. This document provided an overview of the research objectives and the focus group process. It was distributed to students and colleagues from various universities to help disseminate the call among students, utilising digital dissemination and physical advertising, e.g. posters. Some partners used incentives such as cinema tickets, streaming vouchers or candy to make participation more attractive.

In the case of Türkiye, the Ministry of National Education did not grant the KHAS team permission to recruit for and conduct the focus groups at schools, citing two principal concerns: first, that the research involved the collection of industry-related data; and second, that the survey instrument contained items pertaining to digital platforms, which were classified as commercial brands. On these grounds, the fundamental nature of the study was deemed inappropriate for the participation of minors. Therefore, direct access to secondary schools for research purposes was not permitted for the Turkish partner. Following the university's ethical approval, an alternative recruitment protocol was adopted whereby students were contacted through parents and external to the school setting. Study information was disseminated through parental WhatsApp communication networks to facilitate volunteer identification. Secondary school participants in focus groups were consequently recruited from Istanbul and İzmir exclusively. All focus group sessions were conducted at locations external to school premises, with dual consent obtained from both parental guardians and minor participants.

The recruitment strategy established an initial target of 60 participants per country with equal representation of university students and secondary school students, totaling 540 participants across all nine countries. While the country specific goal was not fully achieved across all participating partners, the final number of participants exceeded the target, yielding a total sample of 607 participants. The distribution between educational levels surpassed the intended targets of



270 participants per cohort, ultimately comprising 299 secondary school students and 308 university students.

Countries	Urban centers and regional data collection locations
Austria	Vienna , 2,028,290 inhabitants (Bauer, Fendt & Trautinger, 2025)
Belgium	Ghent , 272,657 inhabitants; Eeklo , 22,733 inhabitants (Statbel – Belgium in Figures, 2025)
Finland	Jyväskylä , 149,194 inhabitants (Statistics Finland, 2024)
France	Nice , 353,701 inhabitants (INSEE, 2024); Cannes , 74,040 inhabitants (INSEE, 2024b); Vinon-sur-Verdon , 4,387 inhabitants (INSEE, 2024c); Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume , 17,691 inhabitants (INSEE, 2024d)
Greece	Athens , 643,452 inhabitants; Volos , 139,670 inhabitants (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2023)
Italy	Pisa , 89,450 inhabitants (Istat, 2024)
Poland	Warsaw , 1,864,035 inhabitants (Statistical Office in Warszawa, 2025)
Spain	Madrid , 3,422,416 inhabitants (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2024)
Türkiye	Istanbul , 15,701,602 inhabitants; Izmir , 4,493,242 inhabitants (Tuikinfo, 2025)

Table 6: Urban centers included in the data collection.

Country	Number of focus groups			Number of participants		
	Secondary school (S)	University (U)	Total	Secondary school	University	Total
Austria	8	11	19	42	60	102
Belgium	5	8	13	32	30	62
Finland	6	6	12	37	28	65
France	8	7	15	40	42	82
Greece	6	6	12	26	29	55
Italy	10		10	34	32	66



Poland	4	4	8	28	31	59
Spain	4	4	8	32	24	56
Türkiye	6	5	11	28	32	60
Total			108			607

Table 7: Number of conducted focus groups and participants (per country and age group).

Country	Male participants			Female participants			Other participants		
	S	U	Total	S	U	Total	S	U	Total
Austria	23	18	41	19	42	61	0	0	0
Belgium	16	6	22	16	24	40	0	0	0
Finland	16	11	27	21	17	38	0	0	0
France	19	13	32	21	29	50	0	0	0
Greece	7	9	16	19	20	39	0	0	0
Italy	14	12	26	20	20	40	0	0	0
Poland	4	14	18	24	17	41	0	0	0
Spain	0	8	8	32	16	48	0	0	0
Türkiye	11	15	26	17	16	33	0	1	1
Total			216			390			1

Table 8: Gender distribution of participants (per country and age group).

We did not explicitly collect demographic data apart from age, gender, educational tier and country of residence (such as citizenship status, ethnic or linguistic backgrounds), yet the topic did come up in the focus groups, especially in how cultural backgrounds of the participants shape their viewing habits and views on film.

The study's focus group design employed a semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions guiding the discussions, enabling both consistency across the 108 groups in nine countries while allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on emerging themes, reflect and discuss and for researchers to ask follow-up questions, change the order of the questions or leave questions, as for ethical reasons we aimed to keep all group interviews below 60 minutes. Secondary school sessions were designed to last 30–40 minutes, with possible extension up to one



hour dependent on participant engagement and agreement. Each session was co-facilitated by two researchers to ensure appropriate oversight, documentation and dynamic moderation.

Data collection protocols included transcripts of all sessions (audio recordings were not shared with partners or the data analysis team, as per the informed consent form) subject to informed consent with metadata documentation usually including location, date, time, pseudonymised participants with age and gender composition. The interview transcripts were supplemented by detailed observation forms capturing non-verbal communication, affective responses such as periods of silence and group interaction patterns. Transcripts requiring translation were processed using machine translation software (e.g. DeepL) with subsequent human verification to ensure accuracy of meaning. The anonymised transcripts were then subjected to thematic analysis using an inductive coding approach.

Data analysis

Each participating partner conducted the interviews, recorded the sessions, transcribed the data and anonymized the materials within their respective countries and ultimately shared the anonymised transcripts with the deliverable leading partner (UNIVIE), which solely undertook all data analysis independently.

Before analysis, the anonymised data of participants was systematically pseudonymised for easier and consistent data handling. All pseudonyms contain information about the country in which the interviewee participated in a focus group (Austria = A, Belgium = B, Finland = F, France = FR, Greece = G, Italy = I, Poland = P, Spain = S, Türkiye = T), consecutive numbering per country, gender and age.

Example: A61.14M is the 61st participant in Austria, male and 14 years old.

In some cases, information about the specific age of the participants was not shared for the analysis (e.g. because participants did not agree to collect this data). In this case, instead of the age the letters S (school) and U (university) indicate the educational tier/age group (S = 12-17; U = 18-24) of the participant.

The focus group responses were then analysed using an inductive thematic analysis approach. Inductive thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of meaning emerging directly from the collected material, allowing themes to be generated in a bottom-up manner rather than being dictated by predefined coding frames (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis focused on the



informational content of responses, with less emphasis on narrative form or linguistic style, so the participants' perspective on the research topic could be analytically reconstructed in a conceptually dense way. The semi-structured questionnaire provided an initial thematic frame that informed the construction of the evaluation scheme, within which responses were coded into key topics and corresponding categories.

Within each thematic area, answers were paraphrased and documented selected, exemplary verbatim quotations, preserving participants' voices while simultaneously condensing the rich material. In line with Flick's (2002) conceptualisation of thematic coding, cross-case comparison was carried out by developing a thematic structure from the initially analysed cases, while keeping themes open for new inputs in the interviews subsequently analysed. This procedure ensured that the resulting themes remained closely grounded in the original data while supporting a systematic, comparative interpretation of participants' responses

6.2. Focus group results

Trends in Youth Film Consumption

Young people expressed their preferences in characters and stories that are authentic and young people can relate with them: "I tend to gravitate towards kind of like a normal kind of movies, like Greta Gerwig's *Lady Bird*. That was also a great movie. I think I can kind of relate to the main characters" (Participant A6.UF). Similarly, other participants expressed their preference to films which reflect themselves: "I usually codify my favourite films in my head as the ones that reflect me the best. The thing about this film is that it can reflect maybe my darker sides a little bit" (Participant T16.M21). Young people emphasised on film narratives that are realistic: "I thought it was a really realistic movie. I thought the movie showed a very just real story and it wasn't too glamorous or it wasn't too unrealistic. I just thought it was about two very real people experiencing real things" (Participant A21.24F). Likewise, another participant expressed his preference in slow paced films with symbolisms: "I generally like slow-paced, realistic films. The kind that don't shove things in your face. Films that use symbolism without making it too obvious" (Participant T18.M21). At the same time other participants mentioned edgy and fast-paced films: "I quite like speed, anything that gets the adrenaline pumping, stunts, racing, competition, team spirit, etc... anything that's a bit explosive. I like the effect, it's not so much the story, but the sensations that I can't find anywhere else, the (catchy) rhythm, the music, the chases, etc." (Participant FR1.M21)



Another common opinion among young people is the originality of the film narrative: “Kurosawa structures the film like that—an anthology of his own dreams, spanning from childhood to the final stage of his life, almost like an autobiographical narrative” (Participant T53.M18), while others, emphasised on complexity: “The characters’ traits should not be simple, but there should be a personal story that allows for empathy. The plot must keep you glued to the screen” (Participant I35.F17).

According to the participants, it appears that young people used to divide the genres they prefer watching according to their feelings and needs:

“I always divide what I watch into many sections. First of all, it’s entertainment stuff, which I can eat and watch and do something to watch. So, it’s like a background thing. And the other part is like films or movie series, which are engaging totally, where I engage totally. And here, I would say from films, it’s *La Chimera*, the Italian film” (Participant A1.UF).

The participants described the difference between ‘comfort films’ aiming for entertainment without requiring full attention and ‘engaging films’ when young people are actively watching a film. Similarly, movie selection differentiates when young people watch films alone or with friends:

“I think it depends on my mood and if I’m alone or with friends. Because if I’m with friends or like I want to watch a movie that just makes me happy, then I like watching comedies or something. But if I’m by myself, I like to watch things that make me feel something emotional or like to think critically about things” (Participant A27.20F).

Participants explained that when they watch films with company they prefer comedies, while when they are alone they choose films which evoke strong emotions and provoke critical dialogue.

Young people emphasised on storytelling techniques as an important parameter of what shapes their film preferences: “The main reason I love *The Truman Show* is the way the screenplay is structured. It’s one of the exemplary films in terms of storytelling” (Participant T19.M21). Some participants expressed their interest for slow paced films: “I quite like films that are a bit like historical, but also kind of mundane. I like movies that are just a bit boring” (Participant A6.UF) and another participant connected slow pace movies to European films:

“But what I like about it is that it is a very slow movie. By slow I mean, it’s not like this action Hollywood thing. It’s European. And it’s slower. And the dynamic allows you to be with the characters. It’s like you have a dialogue with them. It’s not like you are an outsider and you’re



watching the movie. It's like being in the movie. Because of this slower dynamic. Also, the dialogues are very beautiful and meaningful to me" (Participant A8.25F).

Additional storytelling techniques were mentioned such as plot twist and nonlinear narratives with flashbacks or parallel timelines: "I really love the back-and-forth regarding time; it's a very clever trick that, while you don't quite grasp it during the film, you try to understand what's happening and in the end, it all makes a lot of sense and essentially ties everything together" (Participant G8.F21).

Another commonality among the participants is the aspect of reflectivity. Young people express their preference to films which evoke questions and raise topics for reflection and dialogue: "I'm thinking about what does actually favourite film movie mean? So I would say that this is a movie that I will never stop watching. Like, I will never be tired of watching it. And with every rewatch I will gain something new" (Participant A8.25F). The participants highlighted the importance of films, which have many layers of understanding: "And yeah, it's a romantic story, but it goes way beyond to a more, you know, philosophical, psychological." (Participant A8.25F)

Along with conceptual variety, young people also value movies with emotional impact:

"The few films that have come to touch me or simply attract my attention are because they have aroused something in me. With the passage of time I have come to outline films, a little more film noir, sensations or feelings that one does not normally have, because they are either macabre or stranger things" (Participant S5.M22).

Many young people explained that their favourite film evokes in them unique feelings: "This romantic comedy and its ending, which you don't find in other movies, create feelings and thoughts that no other movie could evoke in me" (Participant G32.F16). Emotions appear to be a core factor regarding the selection of films: "every one of my favourite films has this in common: they appeal to my feelings and to the emotional bond I have with the film" (Participant F60.F18). For other participants emotions evoke through films' soundtrack and music: "But if we're just talking about my favourite music movie because of emotional impact, I think in myself it's just a movie that I've loved ever since I was a child. So for me it's probably *"How to Train Your Dragon."*" (Participant A10.23F). Other participants mentioned the role of technology to create better effects that aim "to arouse greater impulse, sensations or impulses in the viewer" (Participant S5.M22).

Additionally, many participants expressed their interest in cinematography in films: "If a film visually captivates me, I enjoy watching it more. I can focus better on visually striking or cinematographically appealing films" (Participant T54.F18) and another participant further mentioned that her favourite



film is *Conclave* because “there were super nice shots in it, which made me think: now I just want to grab a picture to put on my background” (Participant B20.F20)

Young people’s film preferences are shaped by their favourite actors or directors: “He’s my director. And yes, that’s because that’s why this is my favourite movie. Because of the director” (Participant A19.M24). The role of celebrities is also a factor: “in my case (my favourite film) it’s the *Labyrinth* by Jim Henson because David Bowie plays in it” (Participant A79.16F).

Moreover, young people value films, which address specific topics of their interests: “I enjoy the movies which are so close to my interests. For instance, I watched *Cruella*” (Participant A23.20F). Another participant referred to the topic of space: “For me, it’s very interesting the space, Interstellar travels, stars, black holes, all of that” (Participant A18.M22).

An important factor in relation to young people’s film preferences appears to be nostalgia. Young people refer to movies they grew up watching with their family, or they were their favourite films during their childhood: “My favourite kind of movies that I enjoy are probably the movies that I grew up watching with family” (Participant A21.24F) and in this category are included also classic films, such as Christmas movies: “The Grinch, because I’ve seen it so many times. And I just think it’s such a good way to start the Christmas season. And I always enjoy watching it” (Participant A82.16F).

Another topic of reference are movies which address historical and sociopolitical issues. Young people specifically mentioned political films, such as “my favourite film is *the Platform*. The thing I like about this film are the symbols that are used and the images of the government and the politics and the way that our society is. It shows it in film so perfectly and that’s why I love this film” (A29.21F). Other participants focused on films about social matters: “I really enjoyed *A Day Without Women*. Yeah, it’s an Icelandic movie, I guess. It’s also a documentary. And it’s about the women’s strike in Iceland. Yeah, they refused to work for one day and the whole system collapsed. And I was sitting in the cinema and I was crying. It was so empowering” (Participant A51.F22). Another example of participants pointing out films with social causes is the film *Poor things*: “I liked how it addressed the issue of female liberation and how society essentially contributes to a woman’s body and expression, as well as the standards a woman has about our society, the way it was put forward” (Participant G7.F21). Additionally, many participants referred to historical movies such as: “*Inglourious Bastards*. I liked that it wasn’t directly about the Holocaust, but about the structure of how it happened. And that it involved different countries besides Germany” (Participant A66.14F). Participants’ comments about historical films point out that “I think it’s really great how film art is able to bring history to the



fore and in a way continue the knowledge of the things that happened back then and which, however, affect our modern life and how we have things here” (Participant F61.F18). Participants highlighted the films’ role against injustice: “Cinema can shed light on injustices, on forgotten voices. I like when the message is subtle, not forced — it makes you think rather than preach” (Participant FR6.F21).

The final category, mentioned especially by school students, pointed out that they select movies that make them not feel bored, but instead they keep students’ interest: “It has to be exciting so that you don’t get bored. And it simply has to be interesting. I think the story is also very important if you have a really interesting plot” (Participant A61.14M) and another student stated: “So without suspense it’s not a film... or without something like that it’s not really a film” (Participant A62.15F).

Youth Engagement with Contemporary Films

Young people shared their experiences related to film engagement, beyond watching them. The first category, which derives from the focus groups, is the social aspect of visiting the cinema and watching films. Participants stated that “going to the cinema is a very social activity. So I go to the cinema with people and I’m also really enjoying discussing the films afterwards” (Participant A45.F23). Young people also stated that the viewing setting determines the type of discussion on films: “If you’re watching it (a film) with your class, you can discuss what you thought of it. If you’re watching it alone, you can recommend it or maybe talk to others if they’ve also seen it” (Participant A93.12M); Watching a film with friends and family about films allows one to get to know them in a different way: “actually not only discussing whether that movie is great or not so great, but to see the different points of view of other people. Their emotional responses. It’s also more about learning about the other person, like a personality. So it’s a great way of meeting” (Participant A10.23F). A participant shared a relevant experience: “I remember watching a movie and there’s this gay party scene and my mum at the end was like have you seen things like that? I was like, yeah, that’s my weekly reality and that opened up a space for us to share experiences that she might not have had” (Participant A13.25F). Participants emphasised on the importance of communities, either in organised forms of film discussion in film clubs: “I am the president of the cinema club, so every Friday we sit and watch a movie and afterwards we talk about it with our friends over a drink” (Participant T9.F19); or in online community among friends:

“I think I started intentionally watching movies with my friends in quarantine, always online, always together, so even though we still can’t watch them together as a group of friends, we still find time. There are features to watch Netflix or things like that at the same time. Or by calling from anywhere on the side. We usually start it at the same time through online



platforms. Most likely, we are already in direct conversation on Discord. Otherwise, the vast majority of the time it was over Discord” (Participant T12.F20).

Along with discussing with friends, a participant shared that she enjoys writing her movie review in a notebook: “So I always try to think about it a lot. One thing I do is to make a brief review in a notebook of each film” (Participant S3.F20). Other young people enjoy engaging on film-related social media either in a more passive way by reading film reviews “I’m in a reddit group where they discuss all kinds of things about the latest upcoming films [...] I just read. You get other perspectives; how things are looked at in the film” (Participant B34.M17), while other participants follow friends’ posts about films: “I often see friends posting stories about films they’ve seen” (Participant I3.F23). There are also young people, who participate more actively in social media such as Letterboxd, Filmweb and TVTime:

“I usually go on like Letterboxd, a very popular app, a great app, love that app, to like to see other people’s reviews but also like to log in my video. But also like I would say now it’s very easy to get into like phone discourse and social media like Twitter, Etsy, whatever. And recently I saw Challengers. It’s very popular on Twitter right now. Like all the discourse and all the fun edits of the movies and such. And I think it’s a great way to engage with the movie” (Participant A6.UF).

Likewise, other participants expressed their interest in engaging with Letterboxd: “I really like this a lot. I use it all the time. It’s become an addiction” (Participant G32.F.16). Participants explained that in Letterboxd they have the option to follow their friends and their film rates:

“We all follow each other on Letterboxd and talk about the films we watch. Sometimes, we even argue about them. I might say, “How could you give this film four stars? It’s only a two-star film!” Or I might rate an excellent film with only two stars and I’ll argue, “How can you give it just two stars when it has such a deep story?” (Participant T54.F18).

Along with Letterboxd, young Europeans mentioned discussing and sharing their opinions about films also in other social media, such as TikTok: “Yes, I share. Tiktok. I even had a tiktok about a movie” (Participant T38.F14). Additionally, young people mentioned searching film details and background information on social media: “I enjoy watching plot summaries or film theories on YouTube, I used to be quite a Star Wars fan and there are the comics [...] and watched some of them on YouTube because I found it interesting” (Participant A83.16M). Another participant stated



that “whenever I watch a movie, I then go to a Czech film database and read the best reviews and see if I can relate and get a better opinion about the movie” (Participant A2.UF).

Finally, young people referred to active engagement with fan communities, such as creating fan content: “sometimes I do something on Pinterest, like collages and I read a lot of fan fiction and I want to start writing” and further explains that “it’s easier to watch something on TikTok and if you’re in this bubble and then it’s easier to say ‘I really like that’, if it’s just a small community” (Participant A48.SF).

Audience Creativity: Adaptations of Film Storylines and Characters

Young people express creativity by modifying characters and storylines of films they watch: “when I watched some Spiderman movies, I would take my toys, some Lego I had and recreate it, changing almost everything” (Participant G35.M13). The level of engagement varies, depending on individuals’ interests, as some participants reimagining in their head alternative storylines: “Obviously, if I’m not happy with the end, I’m like, what else could there be? And then I reimagined it. I feel like I always do that” (Participant A3.UF) and similar experiences shared by school students: “In elementary school, we had to imagine the continuation of a story. Sometimes, when I watch a movie or a series, I think about what I would like to happen instead of what actually happened.” (Participant G40.F14). Likewise, another participant explained that she enjoys imaging different endings of the films she watched: “It’s a reflex, especially when the characters have made an impression on me” (Participant FR3.F21). At the same time, other participants discuss possible changes with their friends: “I feel like sometimes you read a book and it’s really good and then you see a movie afterwards and there’s just something missing. So I complained to my friends, for example, that it should have been done differently” (Participant A48.24F).

Additionally, some young people write fan fiction: “Many times I was writing my own fan book, based on the characters which already existed and I was just rewriting the book” (Participant A2.UF) and others read fan fiction: “If I don’t like the ending of a film, I mean, I can always read fan fictions. There are people who have already written, like, I love it for the ending” (Participant A48.24F). Participants further stated they write blog posts presenting their personal film review: “I wrote a blog post about why the film shouldn’t be done this way, like what’s wrong with it and I remember I was quite disturbed” (Participant A53.M24).

Moreover, young people mentioned filming parodies based on films they watched: “(...) the main scary person was like a doll or a child. And so we remade it. It wasn’t supposed to be a parody at



the time. But looking back, it's actually crazy. And my little sister was the evil person" (Participant A7.UF), while other participants rewrote and filmed a movie for university courses: "For me for my bachelors one of the last classes was to rewrite a movie and make it for a modern audience if it was old. So we actually had to write the full script of how we would do it" (Participant A55.F24). Some participants even referred to reinventing scripts and characters of a film they watched: "There's this movie called *Reservoir Dogs*. I recreated the movie as a screenplay, with character designs. But instead of human characters [like in the original film], they're dogs, real dogs. They're like gangsters, so I also created character designs and changed their lines to reflect how they would behave if they were dogs" (A74.18M).

Among others, some participants stated that films may inspire them to paint, write music or a text:

"*Cheap Cigarettes* for instance, influenced me to create a similar story again, perhaps different. With the painting I do, I can take something from a movie, something from music, something from anything and paint it, but not on video. If I see a film and it inspires me to do something" (Participant G6.F20).

Cultural Pluralism in Films

Young people expressed their perspectives, regarding the topic of cultural representation in films. Participants emphasised that more diversity is expected nowadays in films compared to the past: "I think that definitely today - I mean, in the past, I believe it was rarer to have representation - but today, I think it is necessary and we expect it in a film" (Participant G7.F21), highlighting the political aspect of inclusion and representation: "it's a political issue, I mean, there needs to be an inclusion generally in terms of identities, cultures, civilisations and stories of nations" (G8.F21). Nevertheless, young people explained that a film does not have to represent all cultures, but all cultures need to be represented through films in total: "A film doesn't have to represent ten different cultures. It can focus very well on one culture, like the little girl from Uganda for example: She definitely wanted to do more African culture or when it came to Black Panther she had created a whole culture around it" (Participant G10.M19).

Additionally, young Europeans pointed out that on the one hand, cultural pluralism increases the possibility for audiences to be able to relate to the film: "I think it's extremely important. Because it enables a variety of people to relate. Otherwise, it's just like a few dominant perspectives" (Participant A48.24F) and on the other hand, cultural representation enables people to get introduced to other people's culture: "so that people can see a different perspective. Because,



obviously, there is not just love and adolescence. It is very important to have variety in nationality, places and stories” (Participant G31.F16). Participant T13.F23 added on the discussion the importance of films which explore cultures without stereotypes:

“It turns into this whole us vs. them mentality and that ruins everything, in my opinion. But when a film genuinely explores what it means to be human and what being human in this particular geography looks like, that’s when those differences and nuances actually gain meaning. That’s when it turns into something valuable” (Participant T13.F23).

Another participant pointed out that for her it is not that important to feel represented in films, although “95% of the films still feature white people” but she mentioned that she finds it interesting “to learn about other cultures or views” (Participant B14.F20). At this level, participants pointed out that cultural representation can either be positive or distort a culture: “There are exaggerated cultural elements in the film. I think this is a big question—it can be distorted, like you said and used as a shield. Or it can be used to introduce a lesser-known culture. Or it can misrepresent a culture” (Participant T15.M21); therefore they put emphasis on authentic representation: “If they’re going to showcase culture, it should be done with rawness and authenticity. It’s better to present it with reality, even if it’s uncomfortable, rather than sugar-coating it” (Participant T19.M21).

Participants mentioned the importance of people and especially children having the experience of being represented in the films they watch:

“I think it might be especially important for children as well. To see a character, represent them. And maybe their social realities. There was this one viral video once. I think where children of colour watched the Ariel movie. And they were totally happy about seeing that she’s a person of colour as well. And I think it’s very important for them to have that kind of representation for them” (Participant A52.24F).

Another point of discussion was about the opportunities of self development through cultural pluralism. When people choose to watch different narratives, that enables “people to discover new interests and realise that they also like other kinds of stories. Through this, they can not only broaden their horizons but also evolve internally” (Participant G33.F16).

However, a common opinion among participants is that representation should not be forced, but rather be organic in films: “the main goal here is to represent each culture equally. But when they push people of colour or LGBTQ plus community people to everywhere, it doesn’t represent equality [...] because they push these minorities and they show off that these are minorities” (Participant



A1.UF). Young people pointed out that diversity should fit the story: “So for example, for the film *How to train your dragon* they’re thinking of doing a black character for Astrid, which I think is not really fitting the storyline because it’s a Nordic storyline” (Participant A8.25F). Finally, participants stated that while diversity should be addressed in films, they also expressed their aversion to doing so with such frequency: “this need for every film to address diversity and highlight some kind of ethical background is a bit too much for me” (Participant A83.16M), while emphasis was given on representation that may be stereotypical and limiting: “in some cases they overdo certain things and I think that sometimes they present stereotypes” (Participant G7.F21).

Digital Content Creation Among Youth

Young people are creatively engaged in digital content creation, ranging from videomaking to capture and store memories to professional film production. Video and filmmaking appears to address many needs of young people, referring to creativity, sharing experiences, storing memories, connection and communication, entertainment, learning tools during studies and in some cases even source of income. Both school and university students appear to have experience with video- or filmmaking:

“Since I was little, I had a camera in my hands. Since my parents are directors. I had a YouTube channel. In the 7th and 8th grades of middle school, I did all the editing myself. Of course, I eventually gave it up. However, the editing part has stayed with me; for example, we shot a timelapse video and I was able to edit it” (Participant G32.F16).

In their leisure time, young people mentioned producing audiovisual content to store memories either with their friends: “But me and a lot of my friends, if we do something together, we then make a recap or something on Instagram, just for us. So we cut it on the phone and then we have our own Instagram page where we post it with our friends” (Participant A48.24F)) or on their own: “I do film sometimes when I’m on a trip and I really enjoy a moment and try to capture it and take a video of a beautiful place that I’ve been to” (Participant A46.24F). Additionally, young people enjoy sharing experiences on social media such as YouTube and TikTok: “I have a friend who started TikTok recently, but she’s not really making movies, but rather edits of her life as a student in Vienna” (Participant A50.F21). Similarly, a school student mentioned that “A good friend of mine has a hobby: he goes into abandoned houses and documents them. He also has about 10,000 followers. He started on YouTube about four or five years ago and now he’s also sharing on TikTok” (Participant A84.17M). Another participant mentioned that he made videos with his friends from school and shared them on social media: “I film my friends at school all the time. I have a Youtube



account. For example, I shot my friends' ways of sitting etc. I shoot and share it with my friends. I share it on Youtube and TikTok" (Participant T16.M21).

Young people make videos for their entertainment: "a few times with friends, we filmed some parodies of certain YouTubers. We didn't make them public; we just did them for ourselves because we enjoyed it" (Participant A75.17M), while other students referred to COVID-19, explaining: "Back in lower secondary school, I used to make stop-motion films so often, especially during the Corona pandemic" (Participant A81.17M). Along with social media content and stop-motion films, participants mentioned producing trailer videos as well: "With an app and you could make a short trailer, I thought that was the max. You could put your own images and your own text in there. Every family party we had made a trailer like that" (Participant B31.M15). A school student shared her experience with video and filmmaking at her childhood:

"In grades 1-3 we recorded something, but it was more like a performance. Once or twice I recorded a film for religion, where I only had to dub a voice for luck and I edited it. But the worst thing was that in grades 7 and 8 my friends and I decided to remake Harry Potter. I even wrote down all of them and I have all the names, for example instead of "The Philosopher's Stone" it was "Harry Potter and the Kidney Stone" (Participant P51.F15).

Moreover, young people mentioned they produced a film as an act of social activism: "So, with a friend, we started a project together on the topic of *16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence* and it was actually (broadcast) on ORF [Austrian Broadcasting Corporation]. We filmed it because we were doing graffiti" (Participant A71.16F) or their interests: "it is more about producing content to promote Italian basketball rather than films for sponsors and various sports realities" (Participant I34.M17)

Along with their personal interests, young people shared experiences of filmmaking from their educational environment, either school or university:

"When I was in school, I went to a high school specified in art. And my teacher was involved in the local film industry. So I was doing storyboards, I was directing a lot behind the camera. And we had a yearly project, where we made a full length movie" (Participant A9.24F).

Educational institutions and educators with filmmaking skills have positively influenced young people's experiences with film production: "We did a project where some tackled poetry and literature, others did it with painting and we did it with film. It was related to Zakynthos. So we did a



five-minute comedy based on Greek society” (Participant G9.M21). Similar experiences shared also university students:

“When it comes to content, I did my bachelor’s degree in journalism. We had the opportunity in two semesters to make a little movie about something. And it kind of fitted well when I went to Paris. I went on vacation and I wanted to know how street artists perceived Montmartre, the district where the old traditional and music scene and artists in Paris even started. So how were all the old influences kind of in Montmartre affecting now numerous street performers and so I filmed the movie. It’s like a short movie with interviews and with me kind of explaining Montmartre in Paris. So that was very nice” (Participant A8.25F).

Another participant explained that she produced videos as homework for school: “My videos are within the scope of homework or classes and these links are public. I upload them to Youtube, but I upload them as a hidden link. I send the link to my friends who want to watch them or who I think will be interested in them” (Participant T9.F19).

In the professional field, some young people produce videos in a corporate context: “I make diversity videos, for example, interviewing different kinds of people and then cutting it together to a whole two to three minute video and upload it on Instagram as well, for the corp-page” (Participant A47.22F), while other participants shared their working experiences in video editing: “I also edited two commercials for the university where I work, with drone footage and lecturers speaking out. And I also worked for an internet TV station, where I edited videos of politicians and recorded political debates” (Participant P4.M22).

Additionally, other participants presented their experiences in script writing “I’ve already written several screenplays and I was once involved in the production of a film” (A74.18M). Among them, there were participants who had experience as film actors: “I personally recorded and participated in the production of three films. Only one has been released” (Participant P47.M15).



7 CONCLUSIONS

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the challenges that the film industry faces with respect to a specific category of young users. Considering the evidence from the empirical study developed in WP5, T5.5, this report defined the legal framework addressing the principles driving children's best interests and fundamental rights within the sectorial EU laws, compared the relevant contractual clauses applied by key-players of that economic sector and provided policies to shape a child-friendly film industry. Combining the three conceptual figures of the child as citizen, consumer and user delineate a multidimensional understanding of children's engagement with culture, media and digital environments. They reveal how children navigate overlapping spheres of participation, consumption and creation, each shaped by institutional, economic and technological forces. Across these domains, the principle of child-friendliness operates as a transversal framework, challenging adult-centric assumptions and reorienting cultural governance towards inclusion, agency and accountability. This perspective aligns with broader frameworks such as UNESCO's 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which underscores participation and access as central dimensions of cultural rights.

Recognising young people's current agency, the report underlines the significant role of children and young people in actively shaping audiovisual industries. Therefore, youth are not perceived as passive viewers of cultural products, but instead they appear as global cultural stakeholders, who shape filmic progress both as audiences and as creators.

According to young people's perspectives, film plays an important role in young people's lives, emphasising in authentic narratives with strong emotional impact. Young people also express their preference to films, which evoke questions and raise topics for reflection and dialogue. Additionally, young Europeans are interested in films with which they can relate to and they even select specific genres to their feelings and needs. Among other things, they place emphasis on films that address and expose historical and sociopolitical issues. Storytelling techniques are a further factor that affects their preferences, along with elements of nostalgia and cinematography.

Another topic of interest among youth is cultural representation. They pointed out that a film does not have to represent all cultures, but all cultures need to be represented through films, explaining that from one hand, cultural pluralism increases the possibility for audiences to be able to relate to the film and on the other hand, cultural representation enables people to get introduced to other people's cultures. However, young people underlined that cultural representation needs not to be forced, but rather organic, fitting the story and without stereotypes.



Young people's engagement with films is not restrained to film viewing, but youth actively participate and navigate a dynamic environment of social media and participatory networks. Young people emphasised on the social aspect of visiting the cinema and discussing the films with their friends. They pointed out that discussing films allows people to interact and get to know different aspects of their friends and family. The topic of communities, either formal such as film clubs or informal such as group of friends appears to be a main factor of young people's filmic experiences which further extends to engagement on film-related social media such as Letterboxd and TVTime. These platforms provide space for film reviews and appear to be highly popular among youth. Some young people even participate in following online fan communities, reading film-related fan content, such as fan fiction.

Young people do not only report reading fan community content, but they further express creativity on films they watch, by experimenting with modifications of film storylines and characters. They mentioned writing fan fiction content and blog posts presenting their film reviews, while others even produce parody films. Additionally, young Europeans mentioned rewriting and refilming films they watched to make them more relatable to contemporary audiences, but also reinventing scripts and characters of films they watched. Young people express their personal voice through painting, synthesising music and writing texts inspired by films.

Young people are actively expressing their creativity through digital content creation, from making videos for social media to producing films as professionals in the industry. Video and filmmaking appears to be means of personal expression, sharing experiences, communication and connection. Young people enjoy sharing experiences on social media such as YouTube and TikTok for entertainment, but also as an act of social activism. Many young people shared experiences of filmmaking from their educational environment, either school or university, which underlines the important role of media literacy and film education. Finally, young people are also aspiring emerging professionals, working in the industry in different positions such as producers, scriptwriters and directors.

Children today are no longer passive media recipients but active cultural participants. They take on multiple roles: citizens with rights to participation and representation, consumers who navigate through global and local film cultures and creators who produce digital content. The report argues that European policies must move beyond narrow protectionist frameworks. Instead, they should adopt an integrated approach that recognises children's agency, inclusion and rights.



The findings indicate that while the citizen figures foregrounds participation and civic agency, the consumer exposes the entanglement of childhood with market logics and cultural production and the user highlights the complexities of digital participation and data governance. Together, they point to an emergent paradigm in which childhood is understood as an active, relational and mediated social condition, which we argue to be a key component to enhance competitiveness of the European film industry. This reconceptualisation provides the theoretical foundation for understanding how European audiovisual policies translate these normative principles into practice, shaping the future of child-friendly cinema and digital culture: first, understanding young audiences as consumers enables producers to design films that better reflect children's tastes and identities, increasing market appeal across Europe's heterogeneous youth demographics. Second, acknowledging children's creative abilities and practices positions young people as promoters and co-creators, not only generating organic visibility, but also strengthening audience loyalty around European content. Finally, by treating children as cultural citizens with rights to representation and participation, the industry is encouraged to foster and prepare young people to develop their media and filmmaking skills, ensuring the industry's continuation and future.



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