



Hellenic Republic  
**National Commission  
for Bioethics & Technoethics**

## **S T A T E M E N T**

**On protecting children from the adverse impact of social media algorithms**

**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR BIOETHICS & TECHNOETHICS**

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The Hellenic National Commission for Bioethics & Technoethics (NCBT) observes with concern an increasing wave of social media's adverse consequences on children's well-being and safety.

The main message of this statement is that the best interests of a child must be paramount in an increasingly AI-dominated world.

Algorithmically enabled social media content must not compromise children's well-being and safety. Their right to be free from manipulation and misinformation should be safeguarded. It is evidenced that these technologies, leveraging basic findings of neuroscience and behavioural science, are deliberately designed to optimise user attention and engagement as raw materials to be monetised and generate revenue. Platform design decisions trigger excessive human-machine interaction, which in turn leads to problematic and addictive behaviours, and incentivise or amplify harmful experiences for children.

The mitigation of the aforementioned risks has to be carried out in alignment to the fundamental ethical principles, with special emphasis on the *no-harm principle*, as well as on the *legal principle of proportionality*, where appropriate. The latter involves the balancing between commercial freedom and the right to safe content and accurate information.

However, when the protection of vulnerable groups, including children, is at stake, the interests and rights of the latter always prevail. The requirement of a child's protection from addictive, misleading, malicious, abusive, or harmful content always takes precedence and cannot be compromised.

Addressing this problem with practical measures is a moral duty of contemporary digital society and must be given absolute priority.

In light of the above, the Commission considers that children's wellbeing should be fostered by:

- Raising family and community awareness through digital media and information literacy

programmes, promoting critical thinking and healthier social interactions and social media diet, as well as through multi-stakeholdered initiatives to build a repository of real-life scenarios of social media's risks for children along with good practices and recommendations.

- Promoting access to confidential, non-judgmental and affordable mental health services, which can address issues arising from children's problematic digital technology use.

- Introducing *smart regulation* on social media platforms, incorporating "Safety by Design" and "Child Rights by Design" approaches.

- The principles of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* must be embedded into the design and application of the tech industry's business models, so that every child enjoys the opportunity to flourish in the online environment.

- Endorsing the *Child Online Protection (COP)* initiative and the UNICEF's *Kindly* initiative, and other relevant campaigns aiming to protect children online, without demonising the internet and social media.

- Conducting interdisciplinary research on the risks of social media use on children's mental health, while ensuring that technology companies share data relevant to the health impact of their platforms with independent researchers and the public.

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