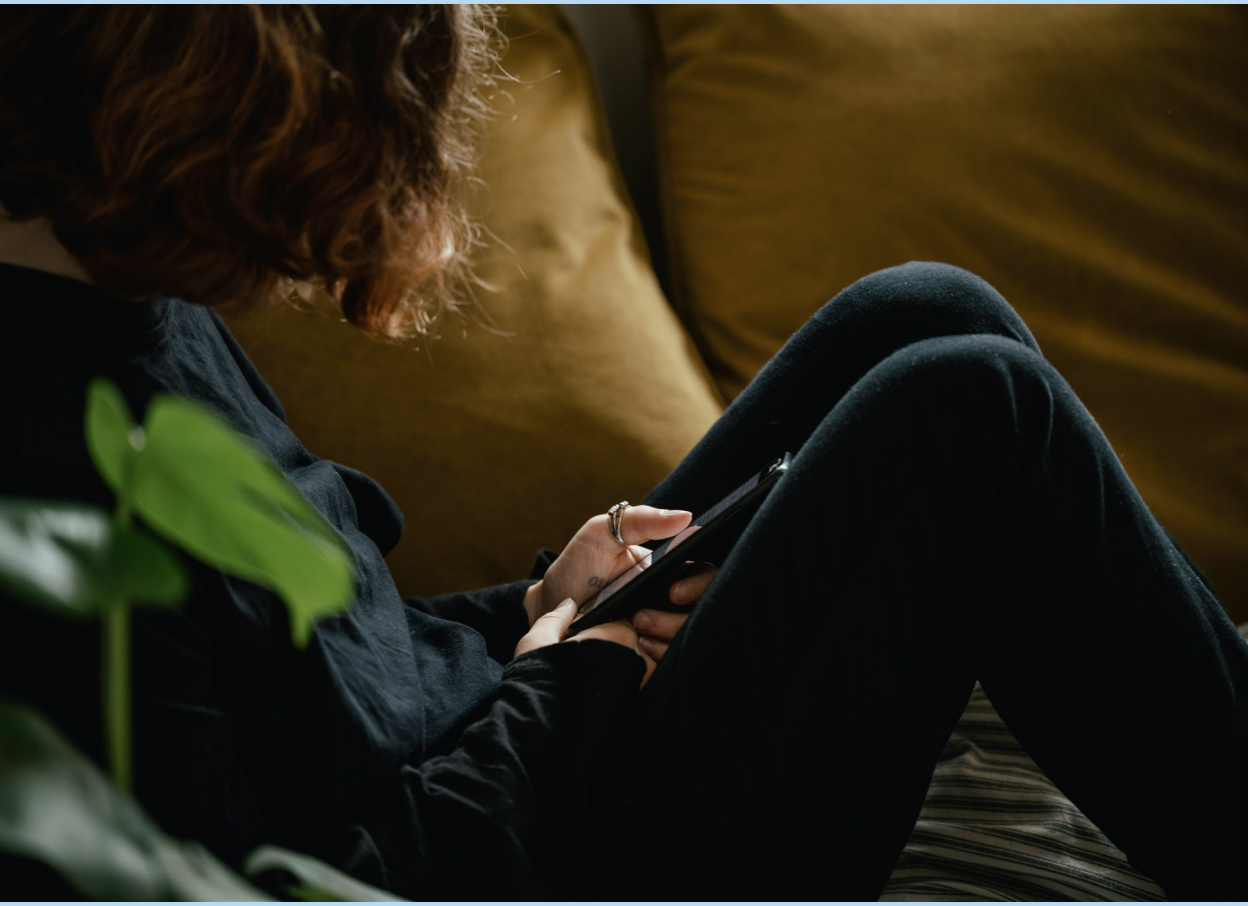

Internet of Children 2026

An Abridged Report on the Monitoring of the Presence of Children and Adolescents on the Internet

June 2026

Organisers:

Instytut Cyfrowego Obywatelstwa

GEMIUS

PKDP

Polskie Badania Internetu

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→ About the Internet of Children project

The permanent monitoring initiative known as Internet of Children was established in 2024 by four organisations: the Institute for Digital Citizenship Foundation (ICO), Polskie Badania Internetu (PBI), Gemius, and the State Commission for Counteracting Sexual Abuse of Minors Below 15 Years of Age (PKDP). The project aims to provide reliable data on the online presence of Polish children and adolescents, and to encourage discussion on the shared social responsibility for the digital environment in which the youngest generation is growing up.

The key data presented in the *Internet of Children 2026* report comes from two sources. The first is Mediapanel, which is the standard method of measuring internet audiences in Poland. It is conducted by Gemius on behalf of Polskie Badania Internetu. It measures internet usage by Polish users across computers and mobile devices. The second source is the Gemius Hardware Panel, which enables the analysis of smartphone internet usage with very high temporal precision.

This means that the presented findings are not self-reported by children or parents, but are instead a record of actual digital behaviour captured directly from users' devices. Consequently, monitoring enables observation of not only the scale of internet use, but also children's daily rhythms, screen time patterns, the applications they use and their everyday online practices.

This year's report expands both the scope of the analyses and the way data is presented in the first section, which uses Gemius analytical tools. Alongside social media platforms, instant messaging services, streaming services, and online games, the report now also covers AI-powered products, which have quickly become part of the everyday digital lives of children and adolescents. The structure of the analyses has also been revised. Data on children aged 7—14 is now presented in the broader context of the overall internet user population and is then explored in greater depth through additional segmentations corresponding to different stages of development, as well as different social and regulatory issues.

The year 2025 and the start of 2026 brought a marked shift in the way governments, public institutions, researchers and the general public began to speak about the impact of social media and digital platforms — not only on children and adolescents, but on adults as well. Legal proceedings against the largest digital platforms, regulatory action and new legislation in various countries changed the focus from individual to systemic responsibility.

The publication of the first *Internet of Children* report in March 2025, also brought an end to the era when it was considered acceptable to claim that children were not present on social media. The weight of the debate thus shifted from 'Are children there?' to 'What is the state doing to protect children online?'

This year's edition of the report broadens its perspective beyond the analysis of individual applications and screen time to encompass the wider architecture of the digital environment. It encompasses social media platforms, instant messaging services, games and AI tools, as well as the attention economy and the mechanisms behind the design of engaging digital products and their impact on child development, public health and the functioning of society. The Internet of Children project is unique in Poland in that it enables these processes to be observed on the basis of actual behavioural data rather than user self-reporting.

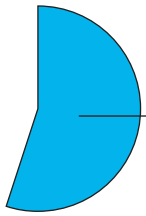
→ Summary of the report's key findings

Before they have even left for school, between six and eight in the morning, more than half of Polish children aged 7—14 reach for their smartphones. And not just to turn off the alarm. In fact, a third of them open TikTok at that time. In the evening, after 10pm, one in four children spends at least fifteen minutes on their smartphone, scrolling through social media, watching videos or messaging friends.

The *Internet of Children* report reveals what the everyday digital lives of Poland's youngest internet users i.e. children aged 7—14, actually look like. The study that produced these findings measured real activity on smartphones, computers, and tablets, recording it to the second. These are not based on parental reports or school questionnaires. The data comes from the Mediapanel study and the Gemius smartphone panel (the Hardware Panel).

This is the second edition of the report. The first, published a year earlier, revealed the scale of the under-thirteens' presence on social media platforms that they are not formally permitted to access, making it the first study of its kind in Poland. A year on, we examine what has changed.

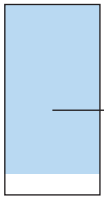
Key figures



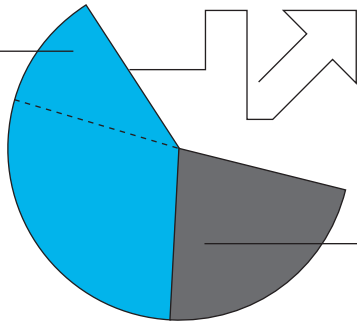
55%
children aged 7—12
regularly use the largest social media platforms or instant messaging services, despite these not being intended for their age group

1 m
children aged 7—12
are active users of the largest social media platforms: TikTok, Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat

2.6 m
children aged 7—14
are Internet users



88%
of online time
is spent by children aged 7—14 on mobile devices, primarily on smartphones



40%
of online time
is spent by children aged 7—14 on social media platforms

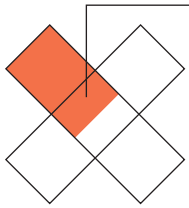
↘ **29% of their total time online** is spent on TikTok

22%
of their total time online
is spent on YouTube

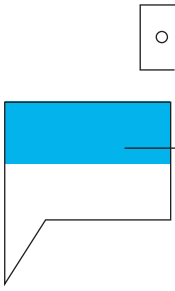
1.2 m

children aged 7—14
came across beer ads in
the top social media apps

32%

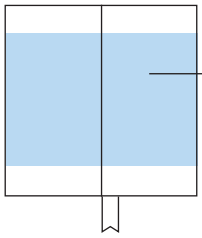


children aged 7—14
came into contact with
websites and apps featuring
erotic content



43%

children aged 7—14
used ChatGPT (via the app or online)



69%

children aged 7—14 visit educational platforms, but spend there on average

→ 6 mins daily

The share of educational content in total time spent online is 1%.

Time and activity

In Poland, 2.6 million children aged 7—14 use the internet. This represents 81% of this age group Nearly one in five children remains offline, which sets this group apart from older age brackets, where internet penetration stands at 95—99%.

4 h 25 min
per day is spent online by children aged 7—14

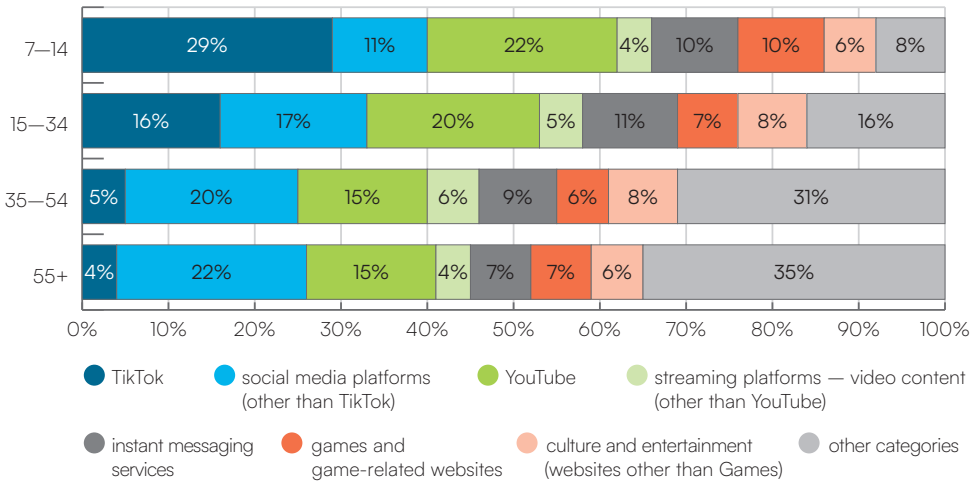
However, children who are online use the internet more intensively than anyone else. The average daily time online in this group is 4 hours and 25 minutes — the highest figure across all standard age categories, including adults. Children account for 8.7% of internet users, yet generate 11% of total time spent online.

Almost all of this time is spent on smartphones. Mobile devices account for 88% of their online time, computers for 12%. While the majority of children do use computers, they do so for an average of just 37 minutes a day. Smartphones, by contrast, are used for 3 hours and 59 minutes.

What do they spend their time on? Half is absorbed by just two platforms: TikTok (29% of total online time) and YouTube (22%). A further 10% of time is attributed to instant messaging, and another 10% to games. Social media platforms collectively account for 40% of children's online time, with an average daily usage of 2 hours and 33 minutes.

ducational sites are visited by 69% of children, but spend an average of just 6 minutes a day on them. Educational content accounts for 1% of total online time.

Figure 1. Share of categories in total time spent online



Source: The *Internet of Children 2026* report

Smartphone use during the day

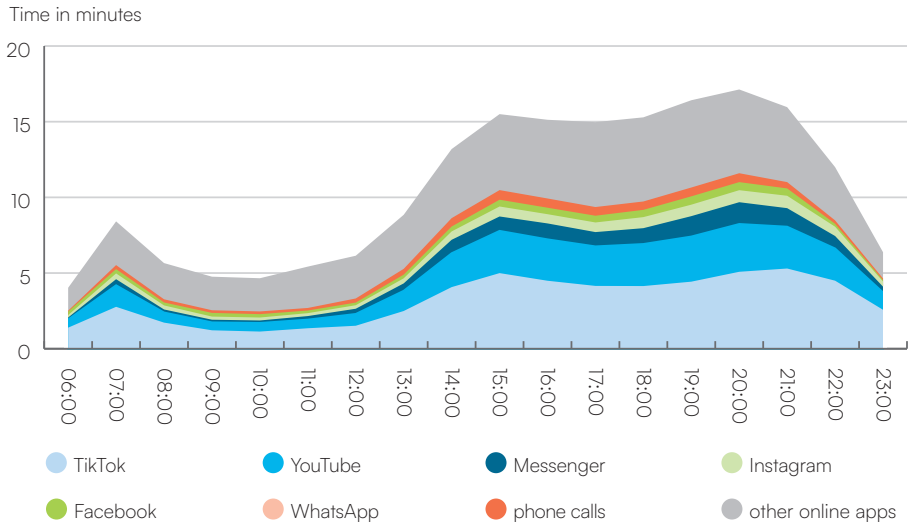
56%
children aged 7—14
use their smartphones in the morning

Smartphones accompany children throughout the day. In the morning, before school, more than half of children (56%) turn on their phones between 6 and 8 a.m. A third open TikTok, and a similar proportion open the Messenger app. During school hours, online activity drops but does not disappear: more than a million children reach for their smartphones every hour. TikTok and YouTube remain at the top of the app rankings, followed by other social media platforms and instant messaging services, while mobile games and ChatGPT are growing in popularity.

The real surge comes after 2 p.m., when school ends. From that point until 9 p.m., nearly 60% of children are actively using their phones, spending 25—30 minutes per hour with the screen on. Two peaks are clearly visible: around 3—4 p.m. (after returning from school, before parents get home) and around 8—9 p.m. (evening wind-down). The most intensive smartphone use therefore coincides with moments when adults are occupied with their own affairs and not actively spending time with their children.

Between 9 and 10 p.m., more than half of children pick up their phones at least briefly. Between 10 and 11 p.m., that figure exceeds 40%. One

Figure 2. Average time spent on the most popular apps by hour of the day across the entire 7—14 age group, expressed in minutes

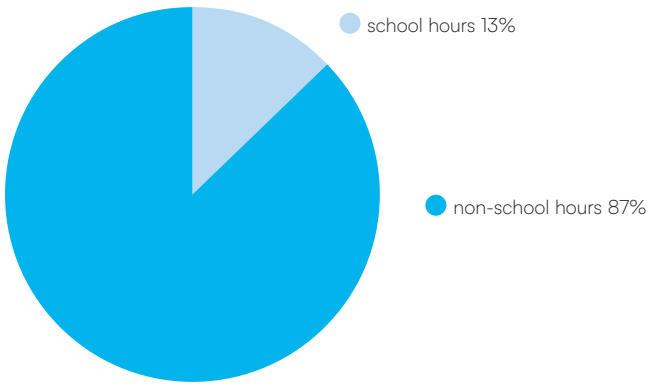


Source: The *Internet of Children 2026* report

in four children spends more than 15 minutes on their phone at that hour. At weekends, smartphone time increases by a fifth and late-night use intensifies. Even over the Christmas holidays, the drop in daily usage is modest — around 20 minutes — and is concentrated around Christmas Eve dinner.

School hours account for around 13% of children's total monthly phone use. A ban on phones in school, unaccompanied by educational measures and a genuine alternative to screens, would reduce online activity by only around ten to fifteen per cent — which does not address the underlying problems.

Figure 3. Estimated share of smartphone use during school hours in total smartphone use by children aged 7—14



Source: The *Internet of Children 2026* report

Children on social media platforms

Social media platforms are not intended for children under the age of 13. In practice, age verification ends with the submission of a false date of birth.

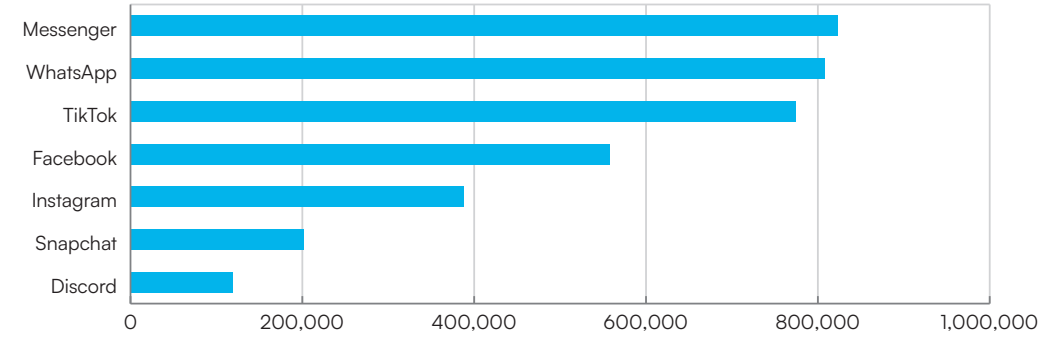
The previous report showed that 58% of children aged 7—12 actively used the largest social media platforms and instant messaging services. In this year's edition, preceded by months of public debate and press coverage, that figure remains at a similar level. In November 2025, there were 1.3 million active users in this age group i.e., more than half (55%) of all children aged 7—12. The slight drop in user numbers falls within the margin of statistical error.

If we exclude instant messaging services from this group and focus solely on TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, it emerges that 44% of children aged 7—12 — nearly one million — actively use at least one of these platforms.

approx. 400,000
children aged 7—12
spend over 2 h per day on TikTok

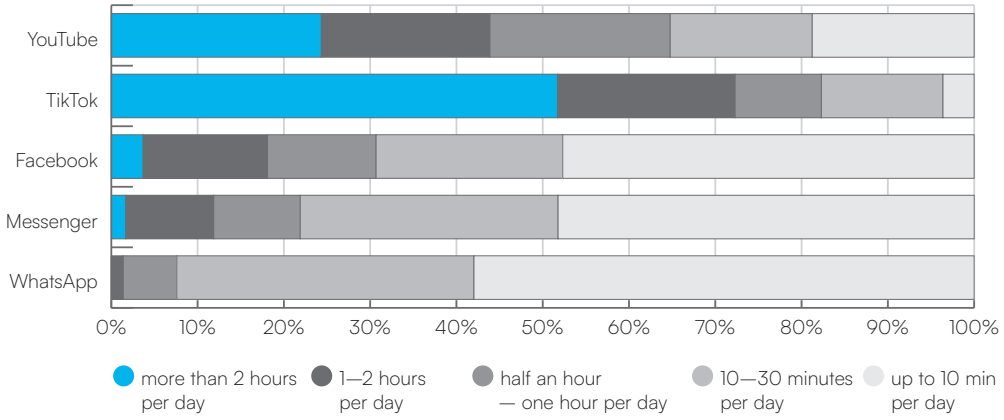
TikTok is the undisputed leader in terms of engagement. Half of its active users in the 7—12 age group — around 400,000 children — spend an average of more than two hours a day on the app. Nearly two thirds of active users, that is half a million children, return to TikTok at least a dozen or so times a day.

Figure 4. Monthly number of active users aged 7—12 using individual social media apps and instant messaging services (after excluding those who launch the apps only incidentally)



Source: The *Internet of Children 2026* report

Figure 5. Time spent online: % shares of children spending a given amount of time on the most popular apps, among active users of each app



Source: The *Internet of Children 2026* report

Across the entire 7—14 age group (potentially covered by the proposed minimum age requirement that would defer access to social media until the age of 15), 1.9 million children actively use at least one of the four platforms — 60% of this age group. Nearly one million of them (31%) spend a combined total of more than two hours a day on these platforms.

TikTok accounts for 75% of all time spent on social media within this group, and for 29% of children's total online time.

Adult content

A pornographic website ranks among the most visited websites by children aged 7—14 on mobile devices.

In this age group, 32% of children, corresponding to approx. 1 million users, have been exposed to erotic content. This level is comparable to the reach recorded across the general internet user population (33%)

1 m
children aged 7—14
came across erotic content online

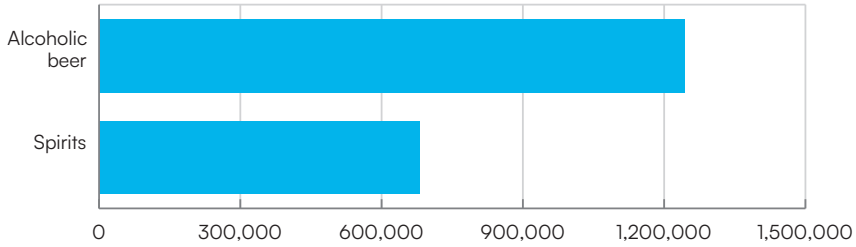
Exposure to erotic content can have a variety of sources: advertising, redirects, links shared by friends, a lack of safeguards, but also the natural curiosity of children at this age. Regardless of the cause, the scale of the phenomenon calls for a response in the form of both educational measures and the tightening of access control mechanisms.

Alcohol ads

The law does not permit alcohol advertising to be directed at minors. The data shows that online, these provisions are dead letters. In November 2025, across TikTok, Facebook and Instagram combined, 1.2 million children aged 7—14 were exposed to beer advertising, and nearly 700,000 to advertising for spirits. This represents 39% and 22% of the age group respectively.

This is largely a consequence of the absence of age verification: children provide a higher age at registration, and after a few years the system treats them as adults.

Figure 6. Monthly number of children aged 7—14 exposed to alcohol advertising while using top social media apps (TikTok, Facebook, Instagram) on their phones



Source: The *Internet of Children 2026* report

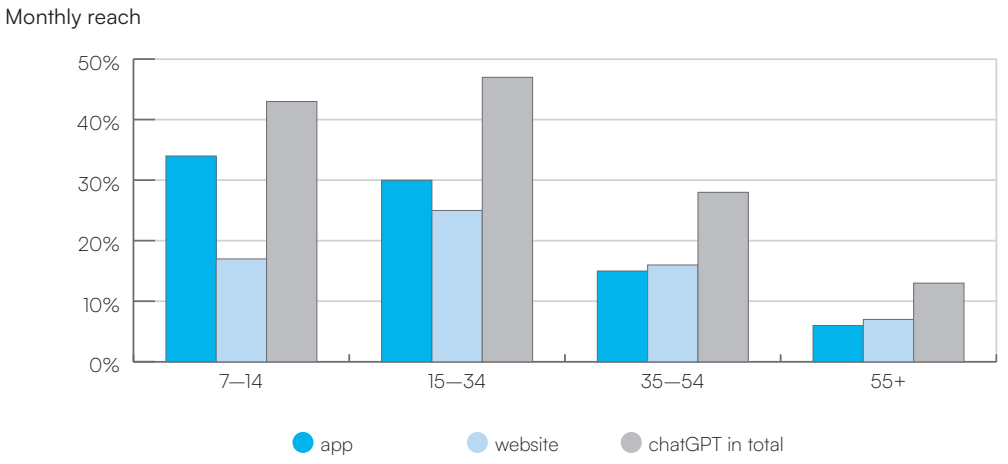
AI Tools

ChatGPT reaches 43% of children aged 7—14 (across the app and website combined), while 18% of this group use it actively and regularly. Among children and adolescents, use via the mobile app predominates. ChatGPT also appears in 10th place in the ranking of most frequently used apps.

The scale of contact with artificial intelligence is, however, considerably broader than ChatGPT alone. **Children are consumers of AI-generated content (so-called AI slop) on social media platforms and YouTube — the same platforms on which they spend nearly two thirds of their time online.** They use AI tools for video editing (CapCut reaches 23%), encounter AI Overviews in Google Search, and AI chatbots are built into WhatsApp and Messenger, which are regularly used by 2 million children.

"AI companion" apps — chatbots designed for conversation and relationship-building — currently reach fewer than 4% of children. However, the ease with which children can encounter AI within messaging apps, alongside conversations with friends and family, blurs the boundary between algorithm and human.

Figure 7. Monthly and daily reach of ChatGPT — with no minimum time or number of days per month threshold applied



Source: The *Internet of Children 2026* Report

→ Methodology

The report draws on the following data collected by Gemius.

Mediapanel is the standard for measuring internet audiences in Poland, conducted by Gemius on behalf of Polskie Badania Internetu (PBI). It combines user-centric measurement (data from user panels) with site-centric measurement (tracking scripts on websites). The data covers activity across all devices — computers, smartphones and tablets — and is weighted demographically using data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS) and the NetTrack survey.

The Gemius Smartphone Panel (Hardware Panel) is one of the sources feeding into Mediapanel, and at the same time an independent data source that enables in-depth analysis of app usage with second-by-second precision. Panel participants receive smartphones equipped with special software that records every app launch and every page view, along with the exact time. Recruitment takes place predominantly through in-home interviews with respondents, supported by CAWI and CATI methods. In the case of children, the agreement is signed by their parents. In November 2025, the panel comprised more than 2,700 panellists, including 259 children aged 7—14.

The data in the report relates primarily to November 2025. Analyses of smartphone use in December — covering the holiday and school break period — are based on December 2025 data.

It is worth bearing in mind that the 7—14 age group spans several groups that differ considerably from one another, from seven-year-olds starting school to fourteen-year-olds completing their final year of primary education. The figures given are averages for the group as a whole; younger children within this range spend less time online, older children more.

The definition of active social media use, applied in the analyses covering children under the age of 13, requires that a given app be launched on at least 4 different days in a month for a combined daily total of at least 2 minutes. This criterion eliminates incidental launches.

→ Recommendations

In the first edition of the report, we set out recommendations across four areas: systemic regulation, industry self-regulation, law enforcement, and education and awareness-building. A year has passed. None of those recommendations has been implemented to a degree that would have translated into any meaningful change in the scale of the problem described. The recommendations below update and build on the earlier proposals, while also addressing new challenges, including the development of AI tools and the evolving regulatory landscape.

European risk-based classification of digital products and services

A European risk-based classification system for digital products and services is needed, with particular regard to children. It should require manufacturers to undergo audits, and subject their declarations to spot-check institutional oversight tailored to the specific nature of digital services.

Regulating the digital economy as a public health matter

The impact of algorithmic media extends beyond the health of individual users. Platforms shape the information environment, social relationships and levels of trust, and for this reason the regulation of the digital economy should form part of public health policy and the protection of children's rights.

Introducing a minimum age for access to social media platforms and transferring responsibility for effective age verification to digital service providers

The state should introduce a minimum age for access to social media platforms, and transfer responsibility for enforcing age restrictions to digital service providers.

- **Restricting "addictive design" mechanisms that increase the risk of excessive use of digital services by children and adolescents**

  Digital services for children should restrict mechanisms that drive excessive use, such as infinite scroll, autoplay, notification systems and algorithmic recommendations.

- **Protecting children and adolescents in the face of the development of artificial intelligence tools**

  The development of AI tools requires the introduction of protective mechanisms for children and adolescents, addressing the risks of manipulation, the relational nature of chatbots, and exposure to automatically generated content.

- **Restricting the profiling and behavioural advertising of children and adolescents**

  Children should be afforded special protection against profiling and behavioural advertising, including the use of their data and online activity for commercial purposes.

- **Strengthening the effectiveness of enforcement of regulations protecting children in the digital environment**

  The problem lies not only in the absence of regulation, but also in the inadequate effectiveness of its implementation and oversight.

- **Establishing an independent body responsible for children's safety in the digital environment**

  A specialised institution is needed, responsible for monitoring risks, conducting research and overseeing children's safety online.

All recommendations, together with their justifications, can be found in the final chapter of the full report.

Table of contents of the full report

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Internet of Children 2026. A Report on the Monitoring of the Presence of Children and Adolescents on the Internet summarises the findings of the second year of monitoring the online activity of the youngest users in the digital space, based on data provided by the research company Gemius, and sets them against in-depth expert analyses. The monitoring initiative is organised by the Institute for Digital Citizenship Foundation, the State Committee for Counteracting Sexual Abuse of Minors Below 15 Years of Age (PKDP), and Polskie Badania Internetu and Gemius. The research section of the publication examines how the smartphone has become part of children's daily lives, shaping the structure of their day, their use of key applications, and the role of social media. The contextual section broadens this year's perspective with four key threads: the current state of research knowledge on the impact of digital media on children and adolescents; the scale and mechanisms of violence against children in the digital environment; the ways in which social media algorithms shape the world of the youngest internet users; and the mechanisms, scale and consequences of children being used as the hidden advertising capital of VLOPs. The report closes with recommendations for necessary action.

The report is available online at:
internetdzieci.pl
gemius.com/pl/internetdzieci
pbi.org.pl/raporty/internet-dzieci-2026

Download the full *Internet of Children 2026* report (in Polish)

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