**CPH Tech Policy
Youth Committee**

Inputs to promote digital education for young people

Denmark

1) What are the main challenges that young people in your country face in accessing digital education?

Denmark is one of the most digitalized countries in the world. (1) Children in Danish public schools have for the last 10 years been provided laptops or iPads depending on their age and the municipality they are attached to. The purchase and use of computers in education systems has increased significantly in Denmark since 2002. (2) However, the increase in the use of technology outside of school has also taken place.

In 2021, 51% of Danish children from 6-12 had a profile on one or more social media platforms,(3) in the age group 12-18, this was around 95%. (4) The challenges in Denmark related to youth and digital education are thus not related to the lack of access to digital technologies but rather questions surrounding how these technologies are best put to use in the education system, as well as used by youth in their free time.

Until now, there has been no required school curriculum for educating children on the potential risks and proper behavior online.

There is currently a debate in Denmark about whether technology should be a less present actor in the education system. Multiple factors have triggered this debate, notably tech and digitalization had become highly politicized over the last couple of years and in December 2022 the Ministry of Digitalization was established. (5)

In 2021, the use of Chromebooks in Danish public schools was halted, as the education platform Google Workspace had not complied with the GDPR surrounding children. (6) This put a spotlight on the protection of children's data. Furthermore, the normative assumption that more digital technologies in education create better and optimized learning spaces also seems to be challenged, as the international PISA test from 2022 showcased that Danish school pupils have scored historically low in mathematics, reading, and writing. (7) These factors are all related to technology and can be understood separately from each other, but put together they create a mosaic that is making parents, scholars, teachers, and politicians question what is going wrong in the current system.
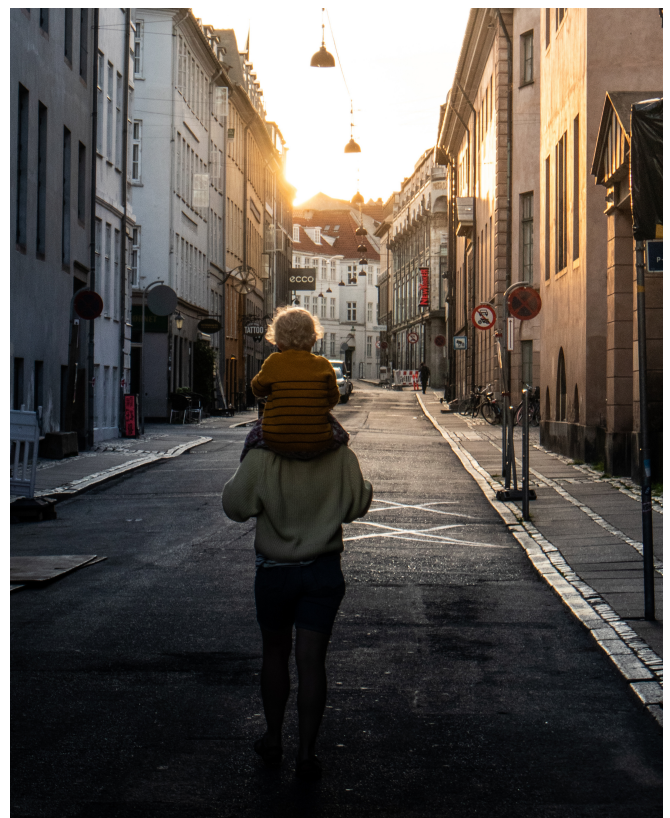
Mental health among Danish Youth

Generally speaking, mental health among youth in Denmark has worsened since scholars began monitoring it in 2009. (8) Many factors have contributed to this development, and one of the things they have observed is a dramatic change in the way social relationships among youth are being sustained. There is an increase, especially among boys, to interact with each other in online spaces. Young people who are unhappy or lonely are more likely to spend more time online. If a child is bullied online, it is likely that their lives offline will be negatively impacted.

Studies show that there is a significant correlation between bullying, being bullied, and committing crime. (9) Thus these signs of dissatisfaction among youth, can greatly affect their future development and life trajectory.

Marginalized Youth in Denmark

Danish children and young people have a high level of daily screen time compared to the countries Denmark compares itself to in northern Europe. (10) Furthermore, the study from VIVE indicates that children from poor socioeconomic backgrounds seem to have a higher media consumption compared to children from more resourceful homes. (11) These children are likely to spend more time online than the average, unsupervised, and are much more susceptive to the risk of being exposed to explicit content, mis/disinformation, online bullying, trolling, sextortion, and radicalization as they are less likely to grow up in families that teach them how to navigate online. A distortion accrues where vulnerable young people become victims in yet another area - this time in life online.

Credit: Viggo Lundberg

2) What steps is the Government taking to ensure that digital education is accessible and promoted among young people?

In the Education System

As part of the Danish Digitalization Strategy that was launched in 2023, the subject "Technology Understanding" is supposed to become part of the children's curriculum in Danish public schools from the ages of 13 to 18. (12) The government's proposal states that the new curriculum must adequately prepare students to both use and critically assess the technologies they encounter in their daily lives, but also introduce students to technical skills such as coding and robot technologies. This is an effort to educate pupils, but also to attract more people, especially women, to education and careers within IT.

After a two-year assessment, the government deemed that there was no legal basis for Google Chrome to use students' data to improve their platform, and thus the learning platform had to be abandoned. However, this also meant, that for two years, there were uncertainties among teachers, parents, and students concerning which platforms to employ, disrupting what is supposed to be a stable learning environment. (14) The Danish government has installed mechanisms in its efforts to ensure the protection of citizens and their data, but this is a challenging process that does not always run smoothly.

In 2022, 60 % of Danish companies experienced difficulties in recruiting IT specialists. Only 23% of IT specialists in Denmark were women, however, this still ranks Denmark as the 6th country with most women represented within the EU. (13)

The Danish Data Protection Agency

The Danish Data Protection Agency is the central independent authority that oversees compliance with data protection regulations. The agency carries out many important tasks, and has among other things, been the organ in charge of investigating the Chromebook case in the Danish municipalities, mentioned above.

Digital Start to your Digital Citizenship

The Danish government has developed the website Digital Start, where you "learn to become a digital citizen". (15) It is designed as a game that is supposed to introduce 15-18-year-olds to the three main public platforms; MitID, Borger.dk, and Digital Post. Here the youth can test their knowledge and win points by answering questions surrounding the platforms correctly. The platform is developed as a teaching tool and can be used in Danish classes or social sciences.

3) What steps is the Government taking to ensure that young people can realize their human rights online in a safe, empowering, and inclusive way?

Danish Context

To give an indication of the sociocultural context in which Denmark is positioned, it is important to highlight that within a Scandinavian context, there is a tradition for prioritizing the empowerment of children to become independent critical thinkers. Within this normative framework, legislators must balance this aspiration to protect the youth from harm as well as nurturing their autonomy. This is reflected in Danish regulations such as the Child Law, implemented January 1st, 2024, advancing children's right to be heard and involved in their own social care. (16) From a Danish normative standpoint, we argue for an increase in the involvement of the youth and children in developing solutions, initiatives, and action plans regarding the safe presence of youth online.

Collaborating with Civil Society

The Ministry of Children and Education has released funds for different actors in civil society to jointly develop tools and material to guide, inform, and educate children on challenges and opportunities online. (17) The project demands a high degree of child participation and cross-sectorial cooperation, with the following four focuses:

- **The Digital Traffic Club for Children and Young People** aims to equip children and young people to behave safely and securely on the Internet.
- **Development of teaching materials** for educators can be used as inspiration for teaching topics related to digital literacy.
- **School patrols for digital road safety** to support a healthy digital culture at schools and educational institutions where children and young people take care of each other and themselves on the internet.
- **Communication efforts** on abusive behavior on the internet will support children and young people to handle abusive behavior on the internet, including informing them on what to do if they are exposed to abusive behavior.

EU

More broadly, Denmark follows EU guidelines and regulations. (18) Here the European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+) and the GDPR to protect but also to empower the youth are worth mentioning.

Infants

Based on recommendations from the Danish NGO, Børns Vilkår, the government has recommended that children younger than 2 years old, should not be exposed to screens. (19) This is due to the fact that children under 2 years old need to learn to understand the world through physical contact with both objects and people - screens do not offer these qualities and are therefore deemed irrelevant to the development of the infant. This harmonizes with Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in the best interests of the child. (20)

4) What are the main gaps and challenges to young people's protection from online threats in law, policy, and practice in your country and the impacts on young people's human rights?

Knowledge Gaps

The existing knowledge about online risks for Danish children and young people is characterized by significant knowledge gaps. (21) In a Danish context, most knowledge is available about the risks associated with children and young people's behavior among peers. However, little is known about online communities for self-harm or radicalization. Furthermore, there is little knowledge concerning the effects digital technologies have on disabled youth.

Age Verification

The Danish government and the EU have both been working on the development and political legislation of digital proof of age, which is yet to take form. This means that there is currently no mechanisms protecting unsupervised children from illegal, explicit, or misguiding content.

Digital Citizenship

Digital citizenship is acquired in Denmark when a person turns 15 years old. Various public online platforms must be attended to by Danish citizens in order to get their mail, their health results, report their taxes, receive their paychecks, etc. Studies from the Danish IT University show that it is not only the elder generations who are struggling to navigate these different platforms, which you are required by law to use, but in fact, there is also a big underrepresentation of the age group 15-18. (22) This challenges the discourse about the youth being digital natives, and thus the issue is often overlooked.

The study indicates that the youth is unprepared to navigate these opaque and bureaucratic websites, and thus are not made aware of their rights. This is especially challenging for the youth who are not offered the support and guidance to navigate these platforms by adults. The governmental sites become even more complex and opaque when you are non-Danish citizens living in Denmark, contributing to the marginalization and digital exclusion of specific societal groups. These challenges have also become apparent in cases where these systems have to be employed by disabled youth. (23)

Empowering Parents

As the gap between different generations becomes more prominent online through distinctions made between Millennials, GenZ, and now Gen Alpha, Danish parents express that they struggle to guide and supervise their children's activites on online platforms. This is related to the fact that the youth's behavioral patterns and presence online differs from the older generation, and thus the youth use platforms their parents do not always understand. There is a need to qualify parents' knowledge, so they feel competent in guiding their children's activities and behavior online. This is to create the best terms for children, so they can wander the online world safely and openly share good and bad experiences online at home. This can be done by drawing parallels to the guidance parents provide their children offline and empowering them to show interest and discuss online behaviors and risks at home.

5) What steps is the Government taking to ensure that young people are protected from online threats?

The protection against sexual crimes and threats online in Denmark

One legislation protecting citizens online is § 264 d in The Danish Criminal Code. (24) § 264 d prosecutes the unauthorized distribution of private images, such as nudity, which has an enhanced penalty if the person is under 18 - meaning that you will be sentenced more harshly due to the circumstances of the case.

§ 264 d was most famously evoked in the Umbrella case. (25) The case concerns an incident that took place in 2015, where videos of sexual assaults on a 15-year-old girl, by a 15-year-old boy were recorded by the boy's friends. From spring 2015 to fall 2017, the videos reached more than 5,000 people online. Around 1,000 people have been charged in the case, and those majority of the sentenced with enhancements were minors themselves. This is one of the factors that makes the case so controversial, as it would seem unreasonable to give the minors a harcher sentence because the aggrieved was underage, considering most of the people sending and sharing the video were minors themselves.

The Danish Criminal Code was updated in 2022. § 264 e was added, and it deals with identity theft. The crime is punishable by a fine or imprison-ment. There is an enhanced sentence if the victim is under-age, and if the perpetrator has been prosecuted with the same crime before.

§ 264 e, subsection 1 convicts misusing another person's identity by using information about that person to **improperly impersonate** them.

§ 264 e, subsection 2 convicts misusing another person's identity by unauthorized disclosure of material where the victim's personal information is used to **improperly manipulate** that person's appearance.

§ 264 e, subsection 1 is therefore criminalizing making fake profiles online. § 264 e, subsection 2 is interesting, as it shows how Denmark has illegalized certain acts, such as deepfakes, even before they were understood as a threat.

In some respects, § 264 e illustrates that Danish legislation has been ahead of the game regarding online crime, as deepfakes can actually be sentenced. However, most cases never end in prosecution as the perpetrators are located outside the EU, making it difficult to track their IP address and pursue them legally.

Denmark has been taking various steps to ensure that young people are safe online. However one nation state can not control the world wide web, and this makes it hard to prosecute the offenders, as most perpetrators are not in Denmark, nor Danish citizens, or are simply too difficult to track. Therefore, legal online matters call for a global and streamlined regulation ensuring protection against online threats.

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An interdisciplinary student initiative representing the voices of the youth in the Tech Policy debate.

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