

# RESEARCH REPORT



COMITTEE:

**WORLD HEALTH  
ORGANIZATION**

SUBJECT:

*THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND  
DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES ON MENTAL  
HEALTH*

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Organization Comittee

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# INTRODUCTION

« *ENSURING ACCESS TO SAFE, EFFECTIVE AND QUALITY-ASSURED HEALTH PRODUCTS* »

Founded in 1948, the **World Health Organization** is a specialized agency and a member of the **United Nations network**. Its purpose is to promote diplomacy and international cooperation in hopes of **preserving global health**. The World Health Organization is a committee that involves precise medical data, expertise, and interlaced factors (geographical, political, and social). It carries strong values of **equity** that lead global efforts so that everyone in the world can have good health.

The **World Health Assembly** (headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland) directs and coordinates all of the WHO worldwide campaigns and policies. All member states of the United Nations attend; 34 technically qualified members are elected every three years.

The World Health Organization addresses important health issues facing contemporary societies and responds to sanitary and humanitarian crises. As health is a broad and complex subject, the World Health Organization works closely with other UN bodies such as the World Food Programme, as showcased for the *Initiate 2* project, a five-year initiative launched in 2021 which brings together emergency response actors in order to design the future of pandemic emergency response. The World Health Organization is also composed of numerous networks, committees, task forces, and experts (up to 189), such as the WHO Digital Health Technical Advisory Group.

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Digital technologies are rapidly growing tools for society. They are becoming an important **asset** to individuals as well as institutions, even supporting achievement of the 17 **sustainable development goals** that are key to the United Nations. Yet, their use presents **serious risks** and a powerful impact on our society. They are changing the way we communicate information, how we envision our society, and even how we plan for crises and conflicts.

The United Nations stated, *“we – governments, businesses, and individuals – have a choice to make in how we harness and manage new technologies.”*

In the context of the World Health Organization Committee, delegates will reflect upon the **impact** of digital technologies on **worldwide mental health**, at an individual scale and a global scale. The core issue of this subject is to not only the impact of digital technologies, but how to regulate these tools while preserving fundamental individual freedoms.

The motion that must be assessed is the following:

**“HOW CAN THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES ON MENTAL HEALTH BE REGULATED WITHOUT INFRINGING ON INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS ?”**

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# DEFINING THE SUBJECT

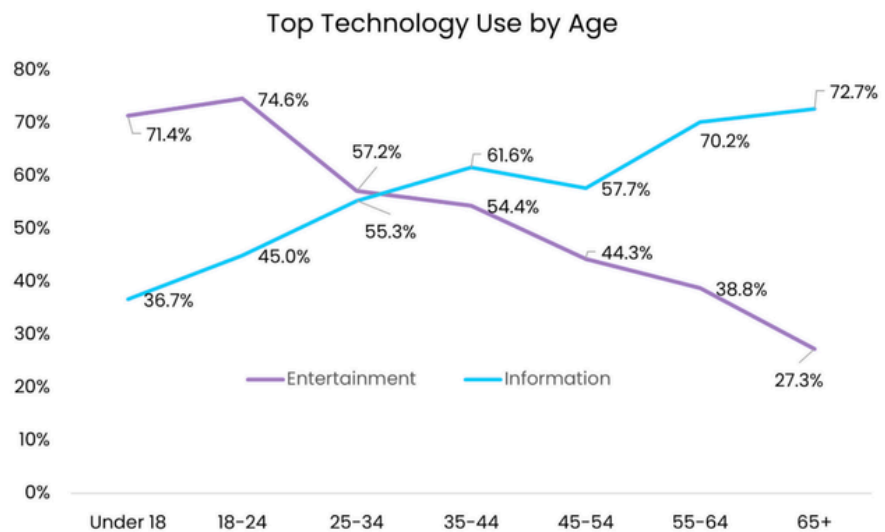
**Mental health** is gravely impacted by the **growing use** of digital technologies. Those impacts are wide and range from **psychological struggles** to **global decline in psychiatric health**. Individuals face struggles such as psychological distress, addiction, attention span and hyperactivity problems, anxiety, depression, insecurity. These impacts can also be positive, with the advancement of access to healthcare through digital tools (telehealth) or strong connection to community through social media.

These impacts are even stronger as individuals and companies are more and more **dependent** on digital technologies.

According to the survey of the Mental Health America Association (2025), over 75% of people surveyed said they feel heavily reliant on technology. Unfortunately, individuals are not always capable of self-regulating to limit the negative impacts of technologies on their mental health.

Moreover, **young adults and pre-teenagers** are more vulnerable to these negative impacts, and especially concerned by the negative effects of social media and gaming. 2024 data from the WHO Regional Office (Europe) reveals a rise in problematic social media use among adolescents, with rates increasing from 7% in 2018 to 11% in 2022. According to the World Health Organization, this

*“raises urgent concerns about the impact of digital technology on the mental health and well-being of young people.”*



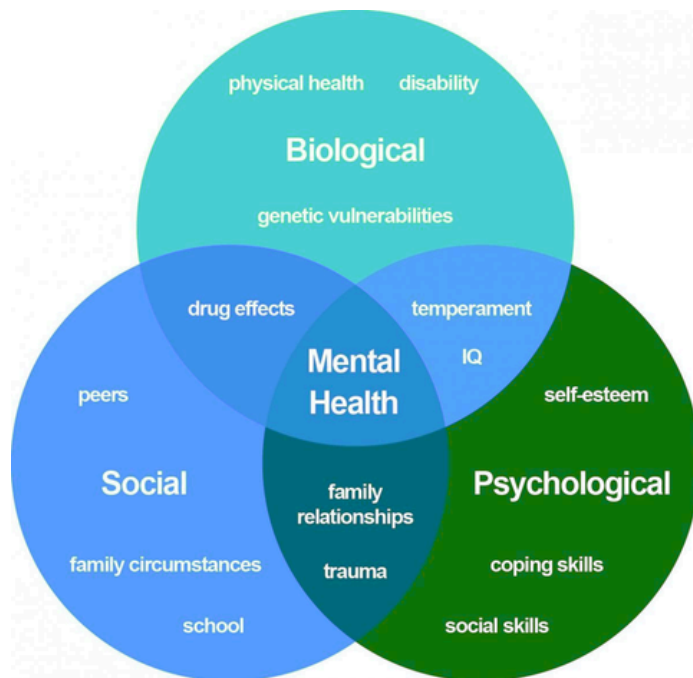
Therefore, delegates are required to suggest **actions and motions** responding to the impact of digital technologies, especially social media, **onto UN member populations in different age groups.**

## KEY DEFINITIONS

- **Mental health** is the emotional, psychological, biological and social well-being, affecting how individuals think, feel and behave. It can be evaluated both in terms of psychology and psychiatry. Mental health, just like health, is a standard for all and shouldn't be only addressed when it becomes problematic.

George Engel's biopsychosocial model explains mental health as the result of three interacting factors: biological, psychological, and social.

See the diagram below :



- **Digital technologies** include social media platforms, artificial intelligence tools, and digital communication systems.
- **Regulations** refers to policies or legal frameworks implemented by governments or international organizations to control or guide the use of these technologies.

## KEY GUIDELINES

Delegates must explore the subject while asserting their countries' positions. First, they must assess how social media and digital technologies are **affecting** individuals and society in terms of health.

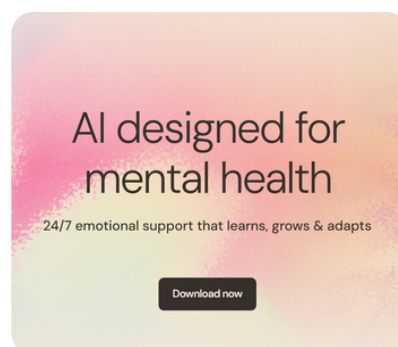
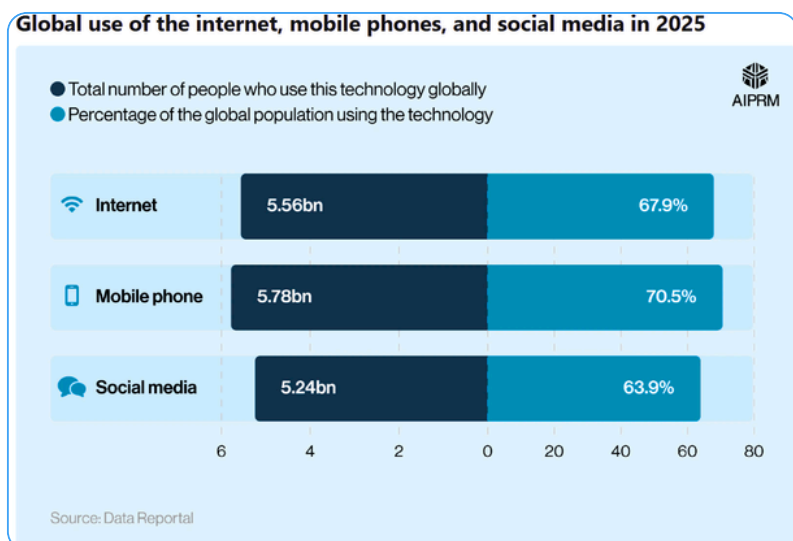
They must also **define digital technologies** and identify in which contexts they influence mental health, in order to **examine their impact**.

Finally, delegates will reflect upon **individual freedoms** and their **limits** when it comes to global health, as well as to what extent they can be **regulated** by the United Nations.

# GENERAL APPROACH

From dial-up forums in the 1990s to today's AI-driven therapy tools, technology has been intertwined with mental health for more than three decades. Research on the topic shows consistent duality: on one hand it can be incredibly beneficial, on the other its grave impact on mental health is undeniable. The rapid evolution of digital technologies has made the regulation process harder. Can global regulation keep pace with technological innovation, or will digital platforms continue to shape societies without sufficient oversight?

The stakes of this regulation process are high. Almost everyone has been or will be concerned by it, and the regulations must adapt to all individuals. The challenge is to **protect individuals while embracing progress**. For some countries, this is an opportunity to promote mental health and support the third sustainable development goal: "good health and well-being for all." However, other countries will try to protect their interests, especially economic ones.



Example of AI-driven therapy tool "Ash"

In this context, the issue goes beyond the impact of technology itself: it is about whether states can develop effective regulatory frameworks adapted to digital environments. Their ability to act collectively will determine whether mental health can be protected without undermining fundamental freedoms.

## GLOBAL POSITIONS AND POWER OF ACTION

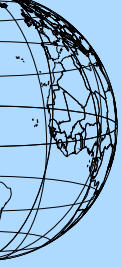
The approach to this issue **varies** significantly from one country to another, which makes international agreement more difficult.

Europe, for instance, has adopted a highly **regulatory approach**, with measures aimed at protecting personal data, restricting social media platforms, and especially safeguarding teenagers. For example, the European Union is working toward a harmonized approach to age verification and legally enforced age limits.

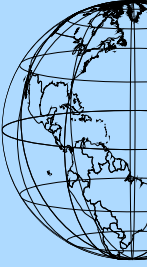
The United States, on the other hand, tends to **favor individual freedoms**, such as freedom of choice and speech, while also supporting the digital technology market. However, it is important to note that U.S. policy is not always applied consistently. China, a leader in the digital technology market, also takes a **business-focused approach**, although it maintains very strict control over these technologies within its own territory.

The United Nations can help **unify** these different approaches by establishing **regulations**, often non-binding, encouraging international cooperation, and **promoting ethical standards**. In reality, the UN does not have legislative power. It can only suggest recommendations, regulations, and campaigns. This means that countries make decisions for themselves. Delegates must take this into account when writing their clauses

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# HOW DO DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AFFECT POPULATIONS AROUND THE WORLD?



## 1. DISCRIMINATION AND SELF COMPARAISON ISSUES

On social media, teenagers face **discriminations** and self comparison issues. Evidence suggests that certain youth populations might be more **vulnerable** than others to potential harms of social media use, such as female and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning adolescents, who are more likely to experience **electronic victimization** than male or heterosexual peers. These discriminations usually are under the form of **insults** and **hate speeches**.

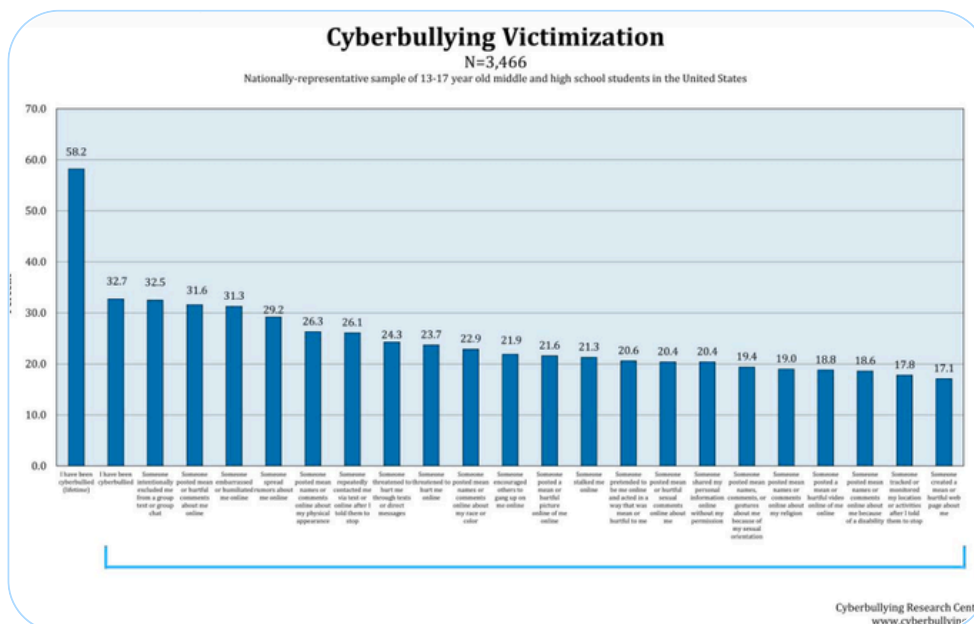
Teenagers are also known to be engaged in **social comparison**, and social media platforms provide abundant social informations, increasing issues around **self image**.

Despite the potential to trigger immediate emotional responses, research has examined the day-to-day naturalistic occurrence of these comparisons and coinciding effects.

Across fourteen days, 94 adolescents (51% female, Mage = 16.47) reported how their life compared to others' lives on social media three times per day.

## 2. CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is the repeated use of digital technologies to intimidate, **harass**, or **harm** someone, often leaving a digital footprint that can have serious emotional and social consequences. Sending threatening or aggressive messages via text, email, or social media. Common forms of cyberbullying are usually posting humiliating videos of the victim online, creating fake profiles to mock or defame individuals and spreading rumors digitally. A report from the WHO reports that 1 in 6 school-aged children face cyberbullying.



Studies among young people have found cyberbullying, sexual harassment victimization, and racial discrimination to be associated with **negative health outcomes** such as depressive symptoms and anxiety.

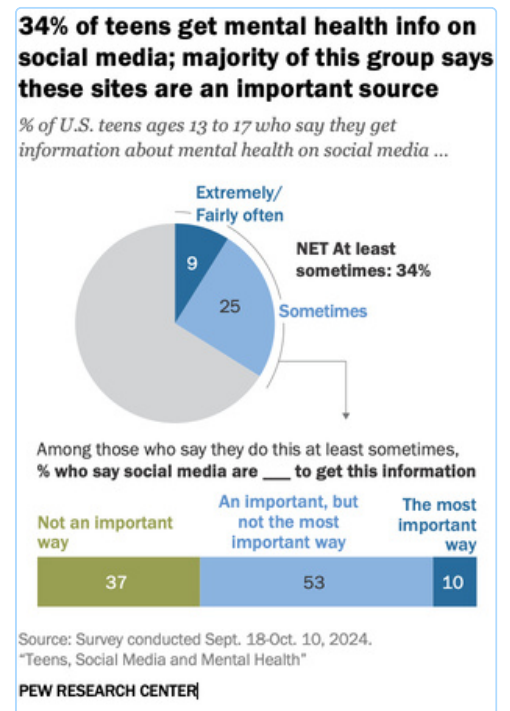
## 3. ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, OR OTHER MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

As previously said discrimination, cyberbullying, and comparison can deteriorate teenagers mental health. Research centers says that roughly 1 in 5 say social media sites hurt their mental health. Several studies, such as the Youth Risk Behaviour Survey of the United States in 2023, shows that extremely frequent use of social media platforms correlate with constant feeling of sadness, **depression, anxiety**, and suicide risks.

## 4. POSITIVE AFFECT : Social media becomes a resource to communicate and inform teenagers on mental health

Some teenagers are turning social media platforms into an actual **resource** used as a way to communicate and inform others about mental health. This can be extremely useful for

audiences to **educate** themselves on these important topics, and can positively influence victims to find help around them. The survey of Pew Research Center shows that in fact, 34% of adolescents have got **informations** about mental health of social media platforms. Platforms such as TikTok have become spaces for influencers and therapists to **share experiences** and advice about mental health.



## 5. MISINFORMATION

Though it is important to remember that social media does also **misinform** their audiences by spreading fake health informations. A recent study published in the Journal of Social Media Research analyzed the amount of misinformation circulating around social media by reviewing 27 different studies containing more than 5,000 social media posts. Although the study found misinformation was present across a variety of mental health content, content on **neurodevelopmental** conditions, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism, were more likely to contain misinformation.

The rate of **inaccurate information** was highest on TikTok, where as many as 52% of ADHD-related videos studied contained misinformation, along with 41% of videos about autism



# BLOC POSITIONS



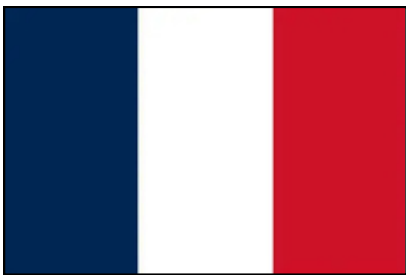
**Brazil** is said to be the fifth-largest social media market with over 80 % of its population accessing to social media.

Brazil has started implementing new measures on the 17th of march 2026 to restrict minors access to social media and prevent them from viewing violent and illegal content. In Brazil, teenagers up to 16 years old must have their accounts linked to a legal guardian. The government seeks to protect children and teenagers from the hyper-addictive purpose of algorithms on social media.



**China** plays a major role in digital technologies combining rapid innovation, a self contained digital ecosystem and a strong regulatory and supervisory role. Global social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook or TikTok are restricted inside China. Instead they have local alternatives such as WeChat or Douyin.

China is also a global tech competitor that heavily invests in AI. Some social media platforms created by chinese industries, such as TikTok, have expanded worldwide. The algorithms used by these platforms are known to be heavily addictive and influential towards individuals.



**France's** position towards the unhealthy affects social media is to regulate within age groups. President Emmanuel Macron has decided that from the beginning of the 2026 school term (September 2026), phones will be banned from highschool. This decision has already been taken in middle schools since 2018 and the installation of the regulations has been seen as positive for teachers during classes. Regulations on social media have also been taking place. In fact, french lawmakers have passed a bill to ban children under 15 years old, as a way to protect them from excessive screen time that can deteriorate their mental health. They have also introduced a social media "curfew", restricting access to social media platforms during specific hours of the day, such as late at night.



**Germany** is known to have an active presence on social media with 86,5% of it's population engaging in some form of social media. Like most countries of the EU, Germany considers a social media restriction for children under 14 years old, and a modified version of platforms for older teenagers, though it has not been implemented yet.

Germany has progressed in recent years on issues related to public digital skills, for example through the DigitalPakt Schule initiative. This service has implemented funds in education to increase digital technologies through infrastructures and equipments.



**South Korea** social media use among Korean teenagers is already widespread. A 2025 survey by the Korea Press Foundation found that 70.1 percent of teens use social media, about half of them daily. The Korean Government is described to “move cautiously” on regulations for teenagers in social media, it being a bill talked about at National Assembly, watching closely regulations being made overseas. This caution may be linked to the bill passed in 2011 creating a mandatory nighttime shutdown on video games for those under 16 years old, retracted a decade later as the rule infringed on rights and heavily impacted the gaming industry in South Korea.



**Sweden** health authorities issued guidelines in 2024 stating that children under the age of two should not be exposed to any screens, and teenagers should have no more than three hours of screen time per day. The Swedish government has issued studies to demonstrate the impact that social media has on teenagers, the results are clearly negative, as they recognize that they are a risk for mental health issues and can influence eating disorders and a harmful self-image. The government announced an inquiry into social media use and age restrictions.



**United Kingdom** has passed in late 2023, the Online Safety Act, this is the first major UK legislation to regulate social media, search engine, messaging, gaming, dating pornography and file-sharing platforms. The Act places a range of duties to protect users from illegal or harmful content. Debates in parliament introduced the idea of strengthening this Act to protect children and teenagers more. The government has also been consulting on whether or not to introduce a formal minimum age for using social media of at least 16, although most apps already require a minimum user age of 13.



**United States of America**, as research from the Reuters Institute suggests social media and video network has become the main source of news in the US overtaking the traditional TV channels and news websites. Social media has had a highly influential role in the country for politics and activism. In fact, according to the BBC, after the take over of Elon Musk on X (Twitter) the proportion on the platform that self-identified as being on the right tripled. At the same time, TikTok was banned for 14 hours at the beginning of Trump's amendment in 2025, today the president delays an entire ban as an agreement is made between the Chinese company and US government.

# PAST UNITED NATIONS WORKS

→ WITHIN REPORTS AND REGULATIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES



While the WHO has not yet implemented regulations or laws on the use of digital technologies, they have made workshops and reports on these subjects. In fact, it can be useful for delegates to read these studies as they can be a roadmap for the creation of your clauses.

## 1- WHO report (september 2024) : Teens, screens and mental health

The WHO Europe region released a very important report on teenagers and the affect that social media and gaming has on them. While it is based on the **HBCS study** (health behaviour on school-aged children), a survey from 2021-2022, that explores statistics on social media and gaming usage.

The report observes the **rise of problematic use of social media that has increased from 8% in 2018 to 11% in 2022**, it also reveals the different gender-based problematics and finally the risks and addictions that teenagers face while using digital technologies.

→ WHO report : <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/25-09-2024-teens--screens-and-mental-health>

→ HBCS full study : ( résumé + pdf ) <https://iris.who.int/items/b7538d5f-d9ba-455f-ae11-80b28a43c76a>

## 2- The WHO Report “ Roadmap to action”

Inside the previous report, the WHO includes what they call a “ roadmap for action” these are important ideas, that can become future regulations on the issue of technological devices, inside a clause debated at the UN.

These ideas can **inspire** delegates for the creation of their clauses. They include promotion of mental health services, in schools of responsible social media use, but also ensuring a safe access of young populations to technological devices and creating age-restrictions or regulations.

These are only a few of the solutions the WHO experts have called onto, for

more information read the the column Roadmap for Action.

→ Teens, screens and mental health by WHO:

<https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/25-09-2024-teens--screens-and-mental-health>

### 3- WHO and TikTok collaboration

While that may seem surprising, WHO and TikTok have been collaborating so that the social media platform aim to provide people with science-based information. This year-long based collaboration from September 2024 to 2025, **increased the promotion of health literacy and healthy behaviours in an increasingly digitized world.**

The collaboration expanded efforts around a number of relevant health topics, translating science-based information into relatable and digestible video content, with more support for influencers provided through TikTok's creator training programs.

→WHO news on their collaboration with TikTok :

<https://www.who.int/news/item/26-09-2024-who-and-tiktok-to-collaborate-on-more-science-based-information-on-health-and-well-being>

### 4- Opportunities and risks of AI (reports from both UNESCO and WHO)

Generation AI is a UNESCO conference by **Stefania Giannini** (UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education) in July 2024. This article introduces the key opportunities and risks that AI has on education. It introduces the changes that education has to face with AI being used by students and teachers. Mrs Giannini proposes solutions given the clear negative impacts that digital technologies create on mental health, well being, creativity and lack of concentration of students. In fact, the UN assistant highlights the creation of restrictions such as setting an age limit for the use of AI, that could be restricted from students under 13 years of age. She also reminds her audience that a notification on a phone can result in children taking 20 minutes to reconcentrate on their class, **affecting their retention and memory.** By reminding this she highlights the importance that banning phones from schools could have on education.

→ UNESCO article : <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/generation-ai-navigating-opportunities-and-risks-artificial-intelligence-education>

### 5- AI and Youth: Insights from the UNESCO Campus of the year

Article that resumes the UNESCO Campus focused on Artificial Intelligence,

where three perspectives meet : students from across the world, a CEO and a UNESCO expert on AI.

The first discussion is with **Elena Sinel**, founder and CEO of Teens in AI. She introduces the risks of AI and recommends using AI tools after the age of 13. She introduces ethical questions that they create, and believes that education needs to be reinvented so that students use wisely AI without being dependant of it.

The second expert, UNESCO's **Lihui Xu**, specialist in the Ethics of AI Unit, gives another perspective. He reminds the need of four human rights when using AI : transparency, privacy, oversight and right to fairness. He also highlights that AI is a tool, but that you should always check the sources that they use. He concludes by reminding the students that AI should never replace social connections as that can destroy mental health.

→ UNESCO article : <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/ai-and-youth-insights-first-unesco-campus-year>

## **6- WHO experts workshop towards responsible AI for mental health and well-being**

This recent workshop, invited on the 29th of January 2026, over 30 experts in different sectors, such as artificial intelligence researchers, ethics lawyers, mental health researchers and clinicians, and public policy makers. The goal of this workshop was to find solutions against the dangers that AI can create in mental health.

In this article, the WHO introduces three key recommendations so that AI can have an increasingly better effect on well-being and mental health. The first is that generative AI should be recognized as a public mental health concern by governments of the United Nations, but also by different health systems and industries.

The second is that AI should be tested and monitored to understand better the effects and outcomes they have on populations, such as emotional dependence.

Finally, the workshop highlights, that AI tools used for mental health support, should be co-designed with mental health experts and people with lived experience, with mental health issues.

These recommendations are more detailed in the report which delegates can read, as they can be a source of inspiration for clauses based on generative AI.

→ WHO news "Towards responsible AI" : <https://www.who.int/news/item/20-03-2026-towards-responsible-ai-for-mental-health-and-well-being--experts-chart-a-way-forward>

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## SOURCES TO GO FURTHER

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