

## Perceived Impacts of Global Online Content on 16 To 18-Year-Old Students' Wellbeing: Insights from Educators in Malta, Italy, Portugal, And Cyprus

Josephine Ebejer Grech

*IDEA College, Malta*

### Abstract

This qualitative study examines how national policy frameworks in Malta, Italy, Cyprus, and Portugal address the wellbeing risks associated with global digital media exposure among students aged 16–18, and how 12 educators in these four countries perceive these challenges within their classrooms. Drawing on Marginson's glonacal perspective and Banks's digital citizenship framework, the study triangulates policy analysis with interviews. Interview data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Findings reveal a persistent gap between policy rhetoric and classroom practice. Although national strategies acknowledge online risks and position digital wellbeing as a cross-curricular responsibility, three key tensions emerged: online harm often occurs beyond school hours and is perceived as outside educators' direct control; teachers face limited time and expertise while delivering extensive high-stakes curricula and responding to complex digital and social challenges; and students are frequently more familiar with rapidly evolving online content than some staff. The study argues that predominantly reactive and regulatory measures, such as restricting mobile phone use during lessons, are insufficient. It concludes that digital wellbeing requires sustained professional development addressing the psychosocial dimensions of technology, implemented in ways that remain sensitive to educators' workload. These findings contribute to debates on fostering student resilience within an increasingly borderless digital environment.

**Keywords:** Online Safety, Problematic Internet Use, Digital Citizenship, Misinformation, Educator Empowerment