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Restricting the use of mobile phones in schools is a justified decision

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There is a wealth of research showing that excessive mobile phone use is addictive, negatively affects students' learning performance, and has a negative impact on young people's social life and health. As in many European countries, a uniform regulation will therefore restrict the use of smart devices during school hours in Hungary from 1 September, a decision that the majority of Hungarians agree with, according to a KINCS survey.

Regulation of mobile phone use has been justified by the experience of recent years, which has shown that excessive use of smartphones has a significant negative impact on children's academic performance and their physical and mental well-being. According to the UNESCO and UN 2023 report, excessive use of smartphones has been shown to be associated with poor educational performance, reduced concentration and even negative effects on children's emotional stability, and therefore a restriction on the use of smartphones is recommended in all schools worldwide.

France, Sweden, the Netherlands, Italy, Slovakia, Romania, the Netherlands and the UK have already taken decisive steps to ban mobile phones from schools. In France, mobile phones have been banned in class since 2010 and since 2018, not even during breaks and mealtimes. Sweden has opted for mobile phone-free schools in response to worsening PISA results.

In Hungary, the restriction of mobile phone use in schools became mandatory in September this year. According to a KINCS survey, the majority of Hungarians agree with this decision, with the majority believing that smartphone use by students should be restricted during school hours. According to a national representative survey conducted by KINCS in March, 94% of respondents in lower primary schools, 89% in upper primary schools and 73% in secondary schools consider it necessary to restrict the use of smart devices.

Nine out of ten Hungarians think that smartphone use can be addictive and that it also has a negative impact on young people's social life and health. 77% of respondents think that smartphone use has a negative impact on young people's physical health and 72% think that it has a negative impact on young people's neurodevelopment and mental health (71%). An overwhelming majority of respondents (81%) believe that excessive smartphone use means young people spend less time in offline communities, and 72% think it means more young people are lonely than they used to be. Parents of children under 18 are even more decisive: 96% say smartphone use is addictive.

According to the latest KINCS survey, digital devices are introduced into children's lives from a very young age, with six out of ten parents reporting that their child started using them before the age of six. Meanwhile, only a quarter of respondents think that children should be introduced to digital tools before the age of six. While 80% of parents consider online content to be dangerous for their child, only one in two families use some kind of parental control. According to research on media use habits and online presence in Hungary, parents see the main risk of smartphone use as a decrease in physical activity, but also fear that their children could be bullied and that they could develop an internet addiction. All national and international research is consistent in seeing more risks than benefits in children's constant use of mobile phones at school, which is why the restriction of mobile phones in all schools in Hungary from this school year is a step forward and an important step. Of course, in certain cases, such as when necessary for learning, the phone can be used.