CI 2522 L Green

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National Classification Review
Submission by
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Thank you for including me in the initial round of consultations leading to the National Classification Scheme Review (Discussion Paper) (ALRC 2011, p. 234). I have enjoyed engaging with this important work and have pleasure in responding to the four questions raised in the Discussion Paper in the following terms.

Question 7.1
Should the Classification of Media Content Act provide that all media content likely to be X18+ may be classified by either the Classification Board or an authorised industry classifier? In Chapter 6, the ALRC proposes that all content likely to be X18+ must be classified.

I would argue that media content likely to be classified X18+ should be able to be classified by an authorised industry classifier. The existence of an authorised industry classifier would go some way to lessen the burden of classification upon the Regulator and, at the same time, removes the uncertainty of timelines and scheduling for the producer. It can be assumed that the existence of authorised industry classifiers will promote an ongoing dialogue between media producers and their authorised industry classifier around classification issues.

Question 7.2
Should classification training be provided only by the Regulator or should it become a part of the Australian Qualifications Framework? If the latter, what may be the best roles for the Board, higher education institutions, and private providers, and who may be best placed to accredit and audit such courses?

Classification training should become a part of the Australian Qualifications Framework, able to be provided by both higher education institutions and private providers. While theses institutions are subject to their own

regulatory and audit mechanisms, both internal and external, the Regulator should accredit and audit these courses.

Question 8.1
Should Australian content providers—particularly broadcast television—continue to be subject to time-zone restrictions that prohibit screening certain media content at particular times of the day? For example, should free-to-air television continue to be prohibited from broadcasting MA15+ content before 9pm?

Given that the important issue here is Guiding Principle (3), that children should be protected from material likely to harm or disturb them, time-zone restrictions should be lifted as soon as it can be confidently assumed that parental locks and technological restrictions can replace these to keep children safe. It should be noted here that the exemption rightly afforded to news and current affairs means that children may be regularly exposed to unsettling material; while issues around children's access to adult content on the internet, DVDs, magazines, etc entails active engagement by parents across a range of media in keeping their child safe.

Extensive research in Australia and overseas (EU Kids Online and AU Kids Online, both attached) have indicated that many of the experiences and much of the content that unsettles and disturbs children is user-generated, often by the child's peers. Thus Australian children ranked as the group of children most likely to be bothered by their online experiences when comparing Australian children's responses with the responses of children from 25 other countries. However, this overall ranking reflects the relatively high positioning of response by Australian children in a number of specific categories. The areas in which Australian children were most likely to say they were bothered were: misuse of personal data (second in 26 countries); exposure to online bullying (3/26); seeing sexual images (4/26); and engaging with potentially harmful user-generated content such as suicide promotion material, anorexia and bulimia support sites, hate sites etc (6/26). Of these, seeing sexual images and potentially harmful user-generated content are most likely to be addressed by Classification standards.
The AU Kids Online report has received extensive media coverage since its release at the beginning of November, and some of this is outlined in the file attached (AUkidsMedia11). Also based on the AU Kids Online report, and concentrating upon responding to children's needs, I made a belated submission to the Convergence Review. This may have been too late to be accepted but it is attached here.

Question 12.1
How should the complaints-handling function of the Regulator be framed in the new Classification of Media Content Act? For example, should complaints be able to be made directly to the Regulator where an industry complaints-handling scheme exists? What discretion should the Regulator have to decline to investigate complaints?

Where content must be classified by the Classification Board, complaints handling should be by the Regulator. Where classification is not required to be classified by the Classification Board, complaints handling should be by the industry complaints-handling scheme in the first instance and should only progress to the Regulator after those avenues have been exhausted or if the complaint has not been resolved within a specified time frame.

In terms of the opportunity presented by this review to address the issue of the Refused Classification category and the possibility of a mandatory filter at the level of the Internet Service Provider, I support the restriction of Refused Classification to materials that are actually illegal and attach my co-authored submission to the Refused Classification Review, Untangling the Net.

Attachments:
AU Kids Online media coverage (AUkidsMedia11) AU Kids Online (AUkidsOnlineFinal) Classification Review Submission (ClassificationReview11) Convergence Review, Lelia Green's submission (possibly unpublished) (ConvergenceReview11) EU Kids Online Final Report (Final report) Untangling the Net: the scope of content caught by mandatory internet filtering, submission to the Refused Classification Review by Professors Catharine Lumby, Lelia Green and John Hartley (LumbyGreenHartleyFeb10)

References:
ALRC (2011). National Classification Scheme Review (Discussion Paper), Australian Law Reform Commission, September, available from: http://www.alrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/pdfs/publications/dp_77_whole_pdf_.pdf (accessed November 12 2011)

Untangling the Net: The Scope of Content Caught By Mandatory Internet Filtering

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Executive Summary

Background

The following report considers a number of key challenges the Australian Federal Government faces in designing the regulatory framework and the reach of its planned mandatory internet filter. Previous reports on the mandatory filtering scheme have concentrated on the filtering technologies, their efficacy, their cost and their likely impact on the broadband environment. This report focuses on the scope and the nature of content that is likely to be caught by the proposed filter and on identifying associated public policy implications.

We recognise that the Federal Government faces real challenges in balancing the risks posed by the online media environment with the opportunities that environment presents. In preparing this report, the authors acknowledge that the Federal Government is still considering the detail of how mandatory filtering will be implemented and how classification will work under the scheme. Our research is not intended to pre-empt those decisions but to offer constructive input, to highlight key public policy challenges and to inform public dialogue.

This report was prepared by three senior academics in the media studies field, Professor Catharine Lumby, Professor Lelia Green and Professor John Hartley. We have all published extensively on the issues of online media, media content regulation, young people and media consumption, and public policy. As members of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, we are currently collaborating on a large research project that considers the risks and opportunities for children in the online and mobile media era. The research on which this report is based was supported by the Internet Industry Association and we acknowledge their assistance. We would also like acknowledge the input of Professor Stuart Cunningham, Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation at QUT, and the research assistance of Paul Taylor.

The Federal Government faces unprecedented challenges in media content regulation. The online environment is one in which media consumers are increasingly becoming media producers, with enormously varying levels of skill and distribution. The means of distribution and consumption range across content developed and distributed by established media organizations, through emerging online sites, to amateur and peer-to-peer content.

A neglected aspect of public policy that needs to be considered in the internet filtering debate is the question of how we sensibly balance the risks posed by online material, particularly to children, and the opportunities provided to the broader community to participate in sometimes controversial debates, to access and debate material pertaining to political and social issues, and to allow reasonable adults to make decisions about what they consume or produce online.

Australia's current system for regulating media content has evolved erratically, reactively and inconsistently. The Federal Government has inherited not only the challenges of the new media era but equally the deficiencies of the regulatory regime developed for past media eras. It is clear that Australia needs to avoid simply applying an inadequate and inconsistent media content regulation regime to a very different and emergent media landscape. There is a clear need to rethink media content regulation in the online era –a need supported by the research detailed in the body of this report.

The challenge of regulating media content in the online era is also an opportunity to examine the rationale of media content regulation from first principles and to engage the public and all stakeholders in a dialogue about the purpose and scope of classification.

Key Findings

On the basis of our survey of international research, we argue that Australia should not apply a system of media content classification that already treats different media inconsistently to the online environment without any consideration of the existing flaws in regulation and the complex particularities of the online world. *The internet is not a medium*: it is a whole new media environment which requires us to rethink how we regulate content, protect vulnerable groups and define the relationship between media consumers and media producers.

One of the clear risks of focusing disproportionate public policy attention and public resources on content regulation is that many parents and teachers may gain a false sense of security when it comes to the material their children encounter online. This risk is particularly high in a regulatory system that relies on a blacklist which, by its very nature, will only capture and represent a small sample of the online material of concern.

1. Scope of Content

One of the often stated aims of the Federal Government's internet filter is to prevent access to child pornography[12]. No serious commentator could question the importance of shutting down the production and distribution of child abuse materials or of blocking access to other categories of the content the great majority of Australians find abhorrent, including bestiality and active incitement to violence. Yet if the mandatory internet filtering proceeds on the basis of the current approach to opt-in voluntary filtering of material hosted overseas- via a blacklist maintained by the Australian Communication and Media Authority – a far broader variety of material than that represented at the extreme end of the spectrum may be caught.

In December 2009, Minister Conroy announced that the RC category would be used as a basis for mandatory filtering of the internet at ISP level in Australia. This submission addresses some public law and policy concerns about the efficacy of using that category as a basis for filtering.
The current proposal indicates that the list of mandatorily filtered sites will be based on the RC category. The key issue that arises here is that the RC category – developed primarily as a classification code for film and video – is a broad category which invites broad legal and quasi-legal interpretation.

In Australia, much material which falls outside the R 18+ category moves into the RC category because the X 18+ category excludes any material that depicts violence. The broad range of material that is produced for and distributed on the internet, including news, current affairs and other material of public interest, may well be caught on the basis that a classification regime intended for film and video is applied to an online environment where multiple producers and consumers intersect.

The interpretation of the RC category on its own also opens an array of potential issues given the breadth of the purpose and audience for online material. The Classification Act does not offer detailed criteria for determining whether content is RC. Rather, it states that material be classified in accordance with the principles in the National Classification Code. These guidelines are extremely broad.

The cases referred to in this report strongly suggest that interpretations of what is deemed part of the RC category is one the courts are inclined to leave to the discretion of the Classification Board and Review Board. This is of real concern for an online environment in which the range, scope and purpose of material is far wider than that encountered in films produced for entertainment purposes. Adding weight to this concern is that one of the factors that the Classification Act states must be taken into account when classifying material is "the persons or class of persons to or amongst whom it is published or intended or likely to be published". This provision reflects a set of assumptions about the way material is generated and consumed which map onto the traditional media environment but which become almost meaningless in an era where material migrates rapidly across many contexts and where an enormous amount of content is generated by consumers themselves.

In the report we consider some hypothetical examples of material that could well be deemed RC and mandatorily filtered out of the Australian internet. Potential material that could feasibly be deemed RC on the basis of the current Classification Code includes:

- A site devoted to debating the merits of euthanasia in which some participants exchanged information about actual euthanasia practices.
- A site set up by a community organisation to promote harm minimisation in recreational drug use.
- A site designed to give a safe space for young gay and lesbians to meet and discuss their sexuality in which some members of the community narrated explicit sexual experiences.
- A site that included dialogue and excerpts from literary classic such as Nabokov's *Lolita* or sociological studies into sexual experiences, such as Dr Alfred Kinsey's famous *Adult Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*.
- A site devoted to discussing the geo-political causes of terrorism that published material outlining the views of terrorist organisations as reference material.

2. Transparency

Another critical question raised by the prospect of a mandatory filtering system is whether the public will have the right to know what is on the blacklist, the right to appeal decisions to place material on the blacklist and a consequent right to judicial review. There are clear public policy reasons for denying access to some categories of material on this kind of list – for example, information that might facilitate access to child pornography or compromise national security. However, if the range and nature of material potentially blacklisted extends well beyond these categories then there are some clear public law principles that require attention. We need to consider what material on the blacklist will not be released and for what reason. We also need a clear policy and regulatory framework that spells out who is able to access the list and who will have legal standing to appeal content caught by the list.

A related concern here is that if parents and other who care for or educate children are unaware of the size and content of the blacklist they may have a false sense of security and fail to properly supervise young people's online activities. It is critical, in this regard, that the public is informed about how extensive the blacklist is and what kind of material it catches.

3. International Context

The proposed public model of mandatory internet filtering would separate Australia from the great bulk of western liberal democracies who have opted for industry self or co regulatory approaches. It is clear that liberal democracies tend to adopt voluntary regulatory approaches that focus on narrowly defined segments of undesirable content – usually child pornography. In the European Union, for example, the filtering regime requires interaction between governments, police, advocacy groups and the general public who identify instances of undesirable content, and the ISPs who voluntarily filter such content on the understanding that any failure to do so is likely to result in greater regulation of the sector. There is general consensus on the material that is considered illegal or harmful and this includes: child pornography, human trafficking, racist material, material promoting terrorism and all forms of internet fraud.

While it is clearly important that Australians make our own decisions about managing the risks and opportunities posed by the online media environment, we submit that it is equally important that we take into account how those decisions place us in relation to comparable democracies and to explore the evidenced-based options that have informed policy-making in other jurisdictions.

4. Balancing Rights and Managing Risk

If the government were to implement a mandatory filter, the extent to which this would conflict with the right to freedom of speech and access to information is uncertain although it is clear that the scope of the content caught would certainly increase the level of the conflict. Our governments have a clear obligation to protect national security, the public order and to uphold public morals. They also have an obligation to consider how to balance and protect freedom of speech and association. In the online and mobile media era balancing these obligations becomes increasingly difficult: both in terms of policy orientation and detail. The Federal Government in Australia faces an unprecedented scenario in which media consumers have become media producers and distributors online and in which the means of hosting and producing material proliferate hourly.

The clear issue at this juncture is whether mandatory internet filtering, via a blacklist, is the most appropriate method to go forward in terms of balancing rights and blocking the worst category of content. There is evidence to suggest that all systems can be evaded by some internet users and that no technical means of filtering can be implemented that prevents such evasion. The question as to whether overfiltering or underfiltering is preferable remains a matter that individual states must decide. While it seems that many states have delegated responsibility to individual ISPs, this question raises two important public policy questions:

- **In the case of overfiltering**: is the potential of unwittingly restricting the lawful expression of a citizen and their access to information so offensive to fundamental human rights that it conceivably constitutes a breach of Australia's international obligations?

- **In the case of underfiltering**: is the inexact implementation of internet filtering satisfactory given that much content which may be deemed grossly offensive to public morals will not be successfully blocked and may also leave parents and teachers with a false sense of security when it comes to children accessing the internet?

The growth of peer-to-peer online networks generate some additional regulatory challenges for the Federal Government. A mandatory filter will not catch illegal material disseminated through these channels. Indeed, one of the key challenges in identifying those who disseminate and consume child pornography is that much of it is not openly displayed on websites but is exchanged in a covert and encrypted manner via bulletin boards. More recently, evidence is emerging that child pornography is also increasingly being covertly housed on third party websites through the use of malware bots. The international evidence clearly suggests that the majority of child abuse prevention resources need to be targeted towards coordinated policing of those who manufacture and share child abuse materials, often in contexts where they are involving their own family members or children known to them.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

This report investigates the scope and nature of content likely to be included in the Australian Federal Government's planned introduction of a mandatory internet filter, how this compares to international practice and what public policy issues may flow from this change.

1.2 Research Questions

Our report considers the following key issues:

- What is the Federal Government's current policy on internet filtering, particularly in relation to the scope of material to be caught by proposed filtering?
- What public policy considerations should the Government take into account in seeking to implement its current policy?
- What are the matters of public interest in regard to the potential impact of such filtering on democratic debate, access to information, cultural vitality and freedom of speech?
- Where should the line be drawn in terms of striking a balance between a need to protect Australians from harmful material and the rights of adult citizens to freedom of expression and the right to information and to access material which is not itself illegal?
- What are the different categories/types of content that could be blocked under this filtering proposal?
- What are the options open to the Federal Government when it comes to deciding what categories and types of content should be blocked?
- In relation to these categories (including child abuse material, 'Refused Classification' material, and harmful/inappropriate content) what are the challenges implicit in filtering such material including:
    - How (clearly) are they defined in Australian law;
    - How are they currently handled in terms of regulation and law enforcement;
    - How would the filtering of that scope of material compare with international practice;
    - What issues of freedom of expression, access to information, public acceptance of the usefulness/legitimacy of filtering, and government control (or even censorship) of content would arise?
    - Other similar factors thought to be relevant by the research team will also be considered here.
- What challenges and concerns arise in relation to applying existing regulatory frameworks for traditional media (e.g. the RC category) in an online context?
- What is international practice around the scope of material filtered in other jurisdictions?

1.3 Methodology

This report is based on an international literature review on approaches to internet filtering, the scope of content filtered and the public policy issues that arise from different approaches. It also includes a comprehensive review of published Australian documents on the proposed mandatory internet filter. Primary documents such as policy factsheets, ministerial press releases and departmental reports were reviewed. This activity was complemented by an exhaustive search of relevant media reportage of the issue in addition to current scholarly research. Relevant Hansard, legislation and case law was also consulted to establish the framework in which online censorship currently operates.

1.4 Internet Filtering Terminology

Although a discussion on the specifics of filtering technology is beyond the scope of this report, it is necessary to provide a working knowledge of the circumstances under which filtering technology can be applied. Internet filtering can be implemented at three levels:

- On the centralised backbone of a nation's internet infrastructure,
- At the decentralised Internet Service Provider (ISP) level; or
- At the individual PC level

Filtering can also be mandatory or voluntary. That is, governments can apply a mandatory filter on the nation's internet infrastructure. Otherwise they can regulate that ISPs apply a mandatory filter that filters content. Alternatively, governments have the option to allow ISPs to voluntary implement filtering software on their products or provide individual PCs users with appropriate filtering software that they freely apply to their own PCs.

Filtering technology is a complicated process with a number of different options available. For a brief overview of the options available to governments or ISPs see Appendix One.

1.5 Structure of the Report

This report is structured into the following five sections:

Section 1 introduces the report and provides a brief overview of the evolution of media content regulation in Australia and considers some of the broad public policy principles that need to be balanced in designing a regime for future media content regulation.

Section 2 provides an overview of the current Federal Government's stated policy concerning internet filtering. It also discusses the type of content that is likely to be filtered, how this content is determined in law and the potential legal challenges to this law.

Section 3 discusses the international practices of internet filtering. It considers how other western liberal democracies have approached internet censorship and compares how Australia's proposed filtering policy compares with these, and with countries not currently aligned with western liberal democracies.

Section 4 explore the key public policy issues raised by mandatory internet filtering in relation to the potential scope and nature of the content filtered.

1.6 Media Content Regulation in Australia

In this first section, we introduce and background the key public policy issues identified in this report: the question of whether the Australian federal government should apply a classification regime built on the foundation of a very different media landscape to the current online environment. We see this as a threshold issue for any debate about the scope and form of content that will or should be caught in a mandatory filtering system.

Media Content Regulation: Background

The current Federal Government has inherited a complex and inconsistent system for regulating media content. Over many decades, content regulation in Australia has evolved in an ad hoc manner and on the basis of political expediency, across the political spectrum. Our research into the history of this regulation strongly suggests that Australian media classification systems have not, to date, been built on sufficient empirical evidence about actual public attitudes or on evidence about actual media consumer behaviour. In saying this, we acknowledge the valuable and expert work done by government agencies such as the Australian Media and Communication Authority (ACMA) and the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC). ACMA, in particular, has been exemplary in producing research to inform public policy. However, the historical record gives little room for public confidence in the level of resourcing for the role either agency is potentially being asked to play in the next iteration of public policy and regulation around online media content.

The anomalies in the regulation of media in Australia are perhaps best illustrated by the current treatment of computer games which, while classifiable under the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995 remain unavailable for classification under the R 18+ or X18+ categories. This distinction is based, according to the Classification Guidelines, on the premise that the interactivity of games changes their impact on media audiences. This distinction is, from the point of view of a wide body of media studies research into gaming and other media consumption practices, unsustainably broad and certainly not supported by the empirical evidence in our field. As a research paper examining a major national study of computer gamers clearly demonstrates, the typical gamer is 30 years of age, often a parent and actively engaged in making decisions about what media is appropriate for themselves and their children (Brand et al, 2009). The question necessarily arises: why is such a consumer trusted to have access to R 18+ material in a cinema but be denied access to an R18+ video game they play on their computer?

Much of the regulation of media content in Australia has evolved in a distinctly jerry built manner that has often taken little account of empirical evidence about public attitudes or of expert studies of how consumers actually interact with media. The treatment of X-rated material in Australia is another case in point. This category of sexually explicit and non-violent material was first proposed in 1983 at a meeting of Australian commonwealth and state ministers responsible for censorship. They agreed that a new X-rated classification was warranted to accommodate the new video market which allowed adults to view sexually explicit material in their own homes. The original classification clearly excluded sexually violent material, child pornography and bestiality. Under the new scheme, all excluded material was to be refused classification (RC) and deemed illegal to sell or rent. The agreed plan was for all the state Attorneys- General to pass mirror legislation, also passed in the ACT and NT, that brought this classification into law. The reality was very different. Following political pressure applied by interest groups, no states followed through on the agreement. The result is that this material is available in the ACT and in parts of the Northern Territory but still not legally available for sale or rental in any Australian state. The more insidious result is that there is now a substantial unregulated black market in not only X rated, but also RC material in all states. The ban on this material has been in place since the mid-1980s, despite a wealth of research showing that up to 90 % of Australians, in common with international studies, have no concern about adults accessing non-violent sexually explicit material (McKee, Albury, Lumby, 2009)

The history of public policy and regulation around other media is not incidental to our focus in this report. The examples provided above demonstrate an issue germane to public policy issue: that the current system of classification and media content regulation has not been developed in an evidenced-based manner. It has historically treated various new media in a piecemeal fashion, been shaped by interest groups with scant reference to empirical evidence about what the majority of Australians think and want and by untested (though understandable) public fears about new media and new genres. From the consumer's point of view, the current system of media content regulation

now resembles a bowl of spaghetti. There is a raft of different systems that work simultaneously, and with little coherence, in relation to consumer concerns. These systems range across self-regulation (advertising and much of news and current affairs reporting), variable and inconsistent levels of regulation (popular magazines, videos, computer games) and strict criminal regulation (child pornography, incitement to terrorist activities). How the content of different media is regulated and understood depends largely on what original medium the content arrived in, on what political pressures were extant at the time of regulation and on what political and public debates have subsequently arisen.

In the relatively new but rapidly evolving online environment the disjuncture between these different and often contradictory regulatory systems are fracturing along numerous fault lines. As material from a wide variety of media- produced by professionals and amateurs – is increasingly published online, the issue of which original classification lens it should be seen through becomes increasingly vexed.

A compelling example of this is the public debate that erupted over a photograph of a 12 year old female taken by internationally known artist Bill Henson. Henson has been exhibiting his photographs for three decades and a substantial portion include nude subjects who are in their early adolescence. 65,000 people attended his retrospective exhibition hung in the Art Gallery of NSW in 2006. There was no attendant public outcry when his works were exhibited in a major gallery. In 2008, however, when the Roslyn Oxley gallery put the work in question on an invitation and it went up on the gallery's website a small group of media commentators ignited a public furore. Bill Henson's work was subsequently seized by police from the Oxley gallery and from public institutions, including the National Gallery of Australia. Many public commentators, including key politicians, denounced the work as a form of child pornography. ACMA was asked to classify Henson's images, on the basis that they had been posted online. They then referred them to the OFLC. After two weeks of heated public debate, a panel of five classifiers determined that the images should be given the lowest classification rating: G.

Despite the regulatory outcome, what the Henson affair alerts us to is the potential for the broad language of the current classification code and guidelines to be used to ignite public and political controversy. This is particularly the case under a mandatory rather than a voluntary filtering system. The diversity, intent and audience of online material multiplies this potential exponentially. The Henson affair was a case that clearly demonstrated how weeks of public furore, media attention and regulatory resources can be easily consumed by concerns about a small group of images or a body of text, understood as legal or innocuous elsewhere, if posted online. A much more pointed question that flows from this controversy is how well ACMA and the OFLC are prepared and resourced to deal with the innumerable controversies and challenges to online material that will potentially arise once filtering is mandatory and proceeds on the basis of a blacklist of content that, on the basis of the existing ACMA blacklist, will range across a broad variety of material.

The online environment brings together an unprecedented range of media formats, platforms and technologies. It does so in a way that allows consumers, of all ages, to both produce and consume media. It allows them to access content via their computers and phones. It also confronts them, as citizens, parents and public policy advocates, with an unprecedented array of content to negotiate. Understanding the risks and opportunities of this new media environment, as we argue on the basis of research outlined below, involves understanding how this environment changes the way in which people produce and consume media. Just as video technology fundamentally changed the context and the autonomy with which people consume documentary and entertainment media, so the rise of the internet, and particularly the Web 2.0 environment, have had a radical impact on the agency of media consumers and on how they consume and understand the media content they live with on a daily basis.

Online Media Content Regulation: Future Directions

A neglected aspect of public policy that needs to be considered in the internet filtering debate is the question of how we sensibly balance the risks posed by online material, particularly to children, and the opportunities provided to the broader community to participate in sometimes controversial debates, to access and debate material pertaining to political and social issues, and to allow reasonable adults to make decisions about what they consume or produce online.

The potential risks of an unregulated online environment to the public, and to children in particular, are real. In an Australian context, however, these debates have frequently run parallel to utopian

discussions of the educational and socially transformative potential of digital, online and mobile media without any recognition of how the two might relate. In thinking about how we frame online content regulation and public policy it is critical that we bring these two frames of reference into dialogue. Our understanding of risk must be balanced with an appreciation of the opportunities that this new media environment provides.

There is now a substantial body of work available on the risks and opportunities that the internet poses and provides to young people, particularly that gathered by the extensive and expert EU Kids Online research network. This project examined key European research on cultural, contextual and risk issues in children's safe use of the internet and new media across 21 countries. This work, cited in the influential and recent UK Byron Review [3] clearly suggests that public policy and regulation which is genuinely and empirically grounded in an ethic of care for children and young people will fail if it relies too heavily on a simplistic block and control strategy. It also strongly suggests that getting the balance right between regulation and the education of parents and young people about safe internet use is critical when it comes to the overall effectiveness of a broader protection strategy[4].

Both the EU Kids Online research and the Byron Review found that many parents are simply unaware of the risks to their children and/or feel unable to supervise their internet use. One of the clear risks of focusing disproportionate public policy attention and public resources on content regulation is that many parents will gain a false sense of security when it comes to the material their children encounter online. This risk is particularly high in a regulatory system that relies on a blacklist that, by its very nature, will only capture and represent a small sample of the wealth of online material of concern. As Dr Tanya Byron argued when launching her report: “A useful way for us all to think about this is to look at how we protect children in places of benefit and risk in the real (offline) world: public swimming pools. Here there are safety signs and information; shallow as well as deep ends; swimming aids and lifeguards; doors, locks and alarms. However children will sometimes take risks and jump into waters too deep for them or want to climb walls and get through locked doors – therefore we also teach them how to swim. We must adopt the same combination of approaches in order to enable our children and young people to navigate these exciting digital waters while supporting and empowering them to do so safely**”**[5].

In broader terms, focusing too much public attention and government policy on filtering material detracts from the need to promote and propagate the use of the internet much more widely, for many new purposes, including education, science, journalism, imaginative work, health and community-building. With the progressive roll-out of the National Broadband Network, public education is required on the use of the internet, not only on its dangers. The internet offers new opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship and the growth of knowledge, and it extends these opportunities to the whole population.

Public policy, arguably, needs to promote a clear element of personal responsibility for navigating the online environment, just as people have to take responsibility for walking down the street and driving a car. The priority should be to balance maximum access to information with necessary regulation. The ‘opportunity cost’ incurred by mandatory ISP filtering of content is that this move potentially puts in jeopardy the economic, cultural and social benefits of population-wide internet use (which is a government priority via NBN and the Education Revolution), by focusing public attention on control, prohibition, and danger.

Young people, particularly those under 18, are accustomed to being told that their parents know best. To some extent the journey of adolescence is a conversation between parents and their maturing offspring about learning trust and respect for the other’s perspective, to the point where the children are themselves prepared to take on the responsibilities of adulthood and parenting. ABS research has repeatedly communicated the existence of this family-level negotiation around trust, autonomy and consequences when it comes to online access and activity, with negotiated changes in family rules as children mature. In the 2007 Australian study of 751 households, involving telephone interviews with parents and 1003 children of the households aged between 8-17 completing diaries, researchers found that: “Most parents trust their child’s judgement about the internet and, at least some of the time, leave it up to him/her to choose what is done on the internet (83%). This includes two-thirds who trust their child’s judgement all/most of the time (66%).”[6]

The Rudd government is committed to rolling out a national broadband network with world class speeds and capacity, with the aim of enhancing education, commerce and innovation. Applying a filter to an already slow system, prior to the NBN roll-out, will cripple it further. To apply the filter to the enhanced services available once the NBN is in place will reduce the benefit and increase the costs

of access necessarily excluding some from participation: arguably those who stand to benefit most. Coupled with the other reasons to rethink such a strategy, the NBN is an encouragement to regulators to see their role as an enabling one, and not as one which restricts and limits.

2.0 The Scope of Filtered Content

2.1 Introduction

As part of their pre-election platform, and since their election in 2007, the Rudd government has sought to address public concerns over internet content by signalling an intention to expand the regulatory approach to internet censorship by implementing a mandatory internet filtering program. This program would compel Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to block users from accessing websites deemed prohibited.

The proposed internet filter was promised as part of the government's election pledge regarding their *Plan for Cyber Safety Policy*, which also called for greater education, international cooperation, more research and additional law enforcement[7]. Concerning the planned internet filter, the Labor party's pre-election factsheet specified that, if elected, the government would:

> "Provide a mandatory 'clean feed' internet service for all homes, schools and public computers that are used by Australian children. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) will filter out content that is identified as prohibited by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). The ACMA 'blacklist' will be made more comprehensive to ensure that children are protected from harmful and inappropriate online material.[8]

More specifically, in regards to the type of content that will be filtered, the factsheet states:

> "Labor's ISP policy will prevent Australian children from accessing any content that has been identified as prohibited by ACMA, including sites such as those containing child pornography and X-rated material.[9]"

In May 2008, the Government made good on its election promise and committed $125.8 million over four years to implement their proposed range of cyber safety measures[10]. According to the minister's website, "The policy reflects the view that ISPs should take some responsibility for enabling the blocking of 'prohibited' material on the internet, as they do in a number of western, developed countries.[11]" Similarly, in regards to the type of content that the government intends to blacklist, the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has stated that ACMA will maintain a list of internet web sites, predominantly comprising images of the sexual abuse of children, which are defined as 'prohibited' under Australian legislation.

2.2 Current Government Policy

Understood broadly, the current federal government policy on cyber-safety acknowledges the importance of taking a comprehensive approach to the issue. The Minster responsible for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, has been clear that "ISP filtering is no silver bullet" and stated that the government's $125.8 million cyber-safety policy includes an emphasis on education and information measures along with law enforcement, consultation with industry and community stakeholders and conducting further research. The critical issue, and one that is yet to emerge in the detail of the policy roll out, is where the balance will ultimately lie in terms of resourcing and policy focus.

Australia lags well behind its US, and particularly its European counterparts, when it comes to any detailed and original research into how children, families and adult consumers interact with and experience online material. Despite recent Federal funding of research on these matters, there is, in relative terms, still a paucity of broad and rich research on which our Federal Government can draw in responding to the increasingly pressing issue of what kind of material Australians, including children, produce and share online and how to protect them from genuinely inappropriate and illegal material. As technology and platforms rapidly evolve, the list of questions about how to understand and regulate new kinds of material grows. In such an environment, it is to be expected that government policy on cybersafety needs to be flexible enough to reflect this uncertain and evolving landscape.

In December 2009, Minister Conroy announced that the RC category would be used as a basis for mandatory filtering of the internet at ISP level in Australia. This submission addresses some public law and policy concerns about the efficacy of using that category as a basis for filtering.
The current proposal indicates that the list of mandatorily filtered sites will be based on the RC category. The key issue that arises here is that the RC category – developed primarily as a classification code for film and video – is a broad category which invites broad legal and quasi-legal interpretation.

2.3 The ACMA Blacklist

In 2007, the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (BSA) was amended by the Communications Legislation Amendment (Content Services) Act. These changes, which came into effect in January 2008, significantly changed the face of online media content regulation in Australia. Working together, Schedule 5 of the BSA and a new Schedule 7 established a scheme to regulate internet content which is overseen by the Australian Communication and Media Authority.

Under the current co-regulatory scheme, internet content in Australia is regulated by a complaints based schemed managed by ACMA. Their response to a complaint depends on two factors: how the content is classified and where it is hosted. If it is hosted in Australia and deemed to be "prohibited content" it is subject to a takedown notice issued to the content host or ISP hosting the content. If it is hosted offshore, however, ACMA notifies IIA's Family Friendly filter providers accredited under its co-regulatory industry codes. They must update their filters upon such notification. Under the IIA codes, ISPs do not have to block access to URLs. Instead they must make an accredited filter or filtered services available to users. It is up to the users if they wish to use such filters or adopt other means to supervise their children online.

The mandatory filtering scheme proposed would remove this voluntary aspect of filtering in relation to content hosted offshore (the bulk of online material) and potentially result in a system where an extremely wide range of sites from MA 15+ material to RC material will be blocked.

Schedule 5 of the Broadcasting Services Act establishes the mechanism for ACMA to deal with prohibited content of the internet that is hosted offshore:

> This Schedule sets up a system for regulating certain aspects of the Internet industry.
>
> If the ACMA is satisfied that Internet content hosted outside Australia is prohibited content or potential prohibited content, the ACMA must:
>
> (a) if the ACMA considers that the content is of a sufficiently serious nature to warrant referral to a law enforcement agency--notify the content to an Australian police force;
>
> (b) notify the content to Internet service providers so that the providers can deal with the content in accordance with procedures specified in an industry code or industry standard (for

example, procedures for the filtering, by technical means, of such content).

Bodies and associations that represent the Internet service provider section of the Internet industry may develop industry codes.

The ACMA has a reserve power to make an industry standard if there are no industry codes or if an industry code is deficient.

The ACMA may make online provider determinations regulating Internet service providers.

If they believe that the content would be considered prohibited content if reviewed by the Classifications Board then ACMA would add it to the blacklist which is given to the filtering software providers.

Schedule 7 relates to content hosted in Australia. It provides:

A person may make a complaint to the ACMA about prohibited content, or potential prohibited content, in relation to certain services.

The ACMA may take the following action to deal with prohibited content or potential prohibited content:

(a) in the case of a hosting service--issue a take-down notice;

(b) in the case of a live content service--issue a service-cessation notice;

(c) in the case of a links service--issue a link-deletion notice.

Content (other than an eligible electronic publication) is ***prohibited content*** if:

(a) the content has been classified RC or X 18+ by the Classification Board; or

(b) the content has been classified R 18+ by the Classification Board and access to the content is not subject to a restricted access system; or

(c) the content has been classified MA 15+ by the Classification Board, access to the content is not subject to a restricted access system, the content does not consist of text and/or one or more still visual images, and the content is provided by a commercial service (other than a news service or a current affairs service); or

(d) the content has been classified MA 15+ by the Classification Board, access to the content is not subject to a restricted access system, and the content is provided by a mobile premium service.

Content that consists of an eligible electronic publication is ***prohibited content*** if the content has been classified RC, category 2 restricted or category 1 restricted by the Classification Board.

Generally, content is ***potential prohibited content*** if the content has not been classified by the Classification Board, but if it were to be classified, there is a substantial likelihood that the content would be prohibited content.

Bodies and associations that represent sections of the content industry may develop industry

codes.

The ACMA has a reserve power to make an industry standard if there are no industry codes or if an industry code is deficient.

The ACMA may make determinations regulating certain content service providers and hosting service providers.

Under existing legislation[12], prohibited online content is any content that would be rated "RC" and "X18+" or rated R18+ or MA15+ (for commercial services) and not subject to a restricted access warning system.

Refused Classification ("RC") content is any content which depicts:

- paedophilic activity
- child abuse
- instruction on drug use
- instruction on how to commit a crime
- bestiality
- sexual nudity involved minors
- excessive and frequent violence
- sexual activity involving minors or descriptions of it
- violence during sex
- fetish activity
- incest fantasies
- exceeds lower classification categories
- video games that exceed MA15+

X18+ Content is any content which depicts:

- Actual sexual intercourse between consenting adults
- The following is also strictly not permitted in this category:
    - No violence, sexual violence or coercion
    - Fisting
    - Candle wax
    - Bondage
    - Spanking
    - Golden showers
    - Depiction of people over 18 as minors

R18+ permits simulated sex but not visual material that shows people having actual intercourse, including penetration and oral sex.
In terms of the ACMA reviewers reaching a decision about the likelihood of material being prohibited content, Senator Conroy stated:

> ACMA content assessors have been members of the Classification Board and/or undergo formal training provided by the Classification Board. ACMA employs a number of former National Classification Board members within the Codes, Content and Education Branch who have a combined experience of close to 20 years at the Classification Board. This experience in conjunction with the formal training and regular referrals of content to the Classification Board help ensure consistency of classification decisions[13].

At the 30th of April 2009 there were 977 URLs on the ACMA blacklist[14]. Although the specific sites on the blacklist remain undisclosed, approximately 49% (479 URLs) of these websites were blocked on

the basis of an X18+, R18+ or MA15+ classification. Approximately 51% of the blocked sites were refused classification: 32% being for child depiction with the other 19% for unspecified other reasons.

This figure of 977 URLs has decreased from "around 1,110 URLs" which was the figure quoted on January 31st 2009[15]. Two of the blacklisted URLs contained images of dismembered foetuses. In the period 1 January 2008 to 31 December 2008, ACMA notified 1206 URLs relating to prohibited content and potential prohibited content hosted outside Australia to the makers of filtering software. Over the same period, ACMA removed 1048 items that no longer provided access to prohibited content or potential prohibited content. In the period 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2007, 1812 were notified. The figures stated above include any duplicate notifications resulting from multiple complaints about a specific URL during the period.

According to Senator Stephen Conroy[16], as at 30 November 2008, of the URLs on the blacklist:

(i) 0 relate to Internet content which is or would be classified MA15+;
(ii) 65 relate to Internet content which is or would be classified R18+;
(iii) 441 relate to Internet content which is or would be classified X18+;
(iv) 864 relate to Internet content which is or would be refused classification (RC);
(v) 674 relate to Internet content which is or would be refused classification in accordance with paragraph 1(b) of the Films Table of the National Classification Code because it depicts in a way likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult a person who is (or appears to be) a child under 18.

ACMA assessed and took action in relation to a further 778 items of overseas-hosted content, which were assessed as follows for the year ended 30 June 2008[17]:

Classification and description of online content	Number of items
MA 15+ – Violence	0
MA 15+ – Sex	0
MA 15+ – Themes	0
MA 15+ – Drug Use	0
MA 15+ – Nudity	0
MA 15+ – Language	0
R 18+ – Violence	0
R 18+ – Sex	6
R 18+ – Themes	0
R 18+ – Drug Use	0
R 18+ – Nudity	3
R 18+ – Language	0
X 18+ – Actual sexual activity	249
RC – Crime – promotion/instruction	2
RC – Violence – depiction	1
RC – Paedophilia – promotion/instruction	3
RC – Child – depiction	409
RC – Bestiality – depiction	10
RC – Sexual violence – depiction	13
RC – Sexual fetish – depiction	42
RC – Sexual fantasy – depiction	40
RC – Drug use – promotion/instruction	0
RC – Terrorist related material	0

RC – Publication	0
Cat 1 – Publication	0
Cat 2 – Publication	0

2.4 Online content regulation: the treatment of X and RC material

In order to determine whether content is permissible, ACMA relies on their interpretation of the censorship regulations as contained in the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995 (Cth).* Internet content is regulated through the same classification system used for films (not the more relaxed publications classification system). Section 9 of the Act states that "subject to section 9A, publications, films and computer games are to be classified in accordance with the Code and the classification guidelines." The Code refers to the National Classification Code[18] (see appendix three and four). The legislative scheme also includes Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games 2005. The Guidelines were made under s 12 of the Act which empowers the Minister, (that is, the Attorney-General of the Commonwealth), with the agreement of participating State and Territory Ministers, to determine guidelines to assist the decision-maker in applying the criteria set out in the Code.[19]

The recent broadening of what may be considered prohibited content under the current voluntary filtering system raises more questions than it answers about what kind and scope of material may disappear from our computer screens in the near future and how the Classification Act will work in relation to Schedules 5 and 7. There is certainly a very real risk that reasonable adults will be prohibited from viewing a very wide range of content and that some content, which is legal offline, may become illegal to access online. For example, X18+ material can be legally purchased in the ACT or bought by mail order and viewed on a home DVD player. Under the new prohibited content scheme and mandatory filtering it appears very likely that all Australia adults would be denied the right to watch legally classifiable material on the internet, regardless of whether such sites were restricted to viewers over the age of 18.

The interpretation of the RC category, in particular, opens an array of potential issues given the breadth of the purpose and audience for online material. While the category is designed to refuse classification to material that the vast majority of Australians find abhorrent, including child pornography, bestiality and active incitement to acts of violence, there is also room to include material that sits in a much greyer area. The Classification Act does not detail criteria for determining what criteria should be applied in determining whether content is RC. Rather, it states that material be classified in accordance with the principles in the National Classification Code. These guidelines are extremely broad For example, in relation to publications, films and computer games one sections states that content will be RC if it deals with: sex, drug misuse, addiction, crime, cruelty, violence or revolting or abhorrent phenomena in such a way that they offend against the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults to the extent that they should not be classified". The term 'reasonable adult' could be understood as a means of limiting the range of material caught under the RC provision. A common sense reading would suggest that the views of the majority of Australians should be taken into account when determining whether a 'reasonable adult' would expect material to be refused classification. In practice, however, this has not been the case.

In Adultshop.Com Ltd v Members of the Classification Review Board [2007] FCA 1871 the court considered the test of "likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult" provision in the Code. The case was brought by Adultshop.com Pty Ltd. who applied to have the court review the Classification Review Board's decision to classify the sexually explicit film, *Viva Erotica*, as X18+. Although R18+ and X18+ are both restricted to persons above the age of 18, the effect of an X18+ rating means that the film cannot be legally sold or rented in Australia, other than in the Australian Capital Territory or the Northern Territory. In their original appeal to the Classification Review Board, Adultshop.Com had provided extensive expert witness material demonstrating that the great majority of Australians were not opposed to people over the age of 18 accessing non-violent sexually explicit films.

In bringing their suit against the Classification Review Board, the applicants contended that (1) the Guidelines are beyond the power of the Minister under s 12 of the Act because they dictate an X18+ classification without regard to "the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults" or the provisions of the Code; (2) if the Guidelines are valid, the Review Board applied them without regard to the merits of the case; (3) that the Review Board failed to give effect to a proper construction of the phrase "likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult"; (4) the Review Board's approach to the task led it to wrongly reject or discount certain survey and expert evidence called by Adultshop in support of its claim for an R18+ classification; and (5) Adultshop pointed to a finding made by the Review Board that there was extensive community consultation in the process of updating the Guidelines in 2005. Adultshop contended that the 2005 review of the Guidelines did not consider the X18+ classification and there was no community consultation on that issue.

In rendering their verdict, the court ruled that a reasonable adult was not a mechanistic test, nor was it to be applied in a majoritarian sense but rather as a collective interpretation of what society considered inappropriate or likely to cause offense. Because relevant legislation specifies that the Classification Board and the Classification Review Board are to be composed of a cross section of Australian society, the court ruled that the board's judgement as to the likelihood of certain content to cause offense is sufficient. In short, evidence about the views of what a large majority of adults think other adults should be allowed to see, read or watch is not taken directly into account in the current classification system. The OFLC, unlike its UK counterpart, has not conducted broad empirical research into community attitudes and the interpretation of the guidelines is de facto left to a small group of people who are said to represent and understand who the 'reasonable man'.

Another area, which deserves scrutiny in relation to material that is potentially caught under RC guidelines online, is the clause in the Code referring to materials that "promote, incite or instruct in matters of crime and violence". The classification guidelines were challenged in this regard in the NSW Council for Civil Liberties Inc v Classification Review Board (No. 2) [2007] FCA 896[20]. In this case, two publications, *Join the Caravan* and *Defence of the Muslim Lands* were assessed as 'RC' (Refused Classification) by the Classification Review Board. The grounds upon which the applicant claimed relief depended upon what it contended was the Review Board's erroneous application of the provisions of the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995 (Cth)*. In particular, the applicant took issue with the Review Board's decision to classify the publications 'RC' on the basis of its finding that both publications 'promoted, incited or instructed in matters of crime or violence'.

The NSW Council for Civil Liberties Inc challenged the Classification Review Board's decision on four key points: (1) the meaning of the clause "promote, incite or instruct in matters of crime or violence" (2) that violence only refers to violence in Australia (3) that the review board failed to consider the elements of Section 101 of the Criminal Code and (4) the failure of the review board to consider the educational merits of the books.

The court found that in order to be refused classification under the Act, it is not necessary for a publication to solely stimulate or increase the likelihood for the recipient to commit violence, but that it should also be considered against the other provisions of the section of the Act which include "in such a way that the contents of the publication offend against the standards of morality, decency" and "... in a way that it is likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult." The judge also reasoned that "the publications 'may appeal to some disenfranchised segments of the community' and that 'the book was designed to encourage such people to take up arms and commit specific crimes against non-believers'" and that this was in fact "addressed to the audience, in Australia, to which the instructions and exhortations in the publications might appeal."

The Rabelais case[21] (Michael Brown & Ors v Members of the Classification Review Board of the Office of Film and Literature [1998] FCA 319) tested the "instruct in matters of crime" of the National Classification Code made under the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act*

1995 (Cth). The facts of the case pertained to the July 1995 edition of "Rabelais", the student newspaper of the La Trobe University Student Representative Council. The edition contained an article called "The Art of Shoplifting". Following complaints from retailers the article was found by the Commonwealth Office of Film and Literature to "*instruct in matters of crime*" and was subsequently refused classification thus prohibiting its distribution. In rendering its decision, the review Board considered what it described as "*the content, theme and tone of the publication*". It found the tone of the article to be instructional and hortatory. While it was claimed that the writing was not without humour, it lacked indicators that it was intended to be satirical. Its tone was considered to border on malicious. A majority of the Board concluded that the publication instructed in matters of crime and should be refused classification. A minority of the Board was of the opinion that “while the article was instructional in shoplifting the context of the publication with the nature of the crime was *such that the publication should not be refused classification*".

In their ruling, the three presiding justices concurred with the review board’s decision arguing that the assessment of whether a publication instructs in matters of crime must be read as whole and in context including the authors, the publication itself and the intended target readership. Only when the writing is of satirical or ironic character such that it negates the instruction by conveying the message that this is not to be taken seriously can it be found to be not in breach of the law. In this instance the court found that the language of the article did not convey such negation and that the review board had diligently followed the provisions of the Act in rendering its decision to refuse classification.

The cases referred to above strongly suggest that interpretations of what is deemed part of the extraordinarily catch-all RC category is one the courts are inclined to leave to the discretion of the Classification Board and Review Board. This is of real concern for an online environment in which the range, scope and purpose of material is far wider than even that encountered in films produced for entertainment purposes. Adding weight to this concern is that one of the factors that the Classification Act states must be taken into account when classifying material is “the persons or class of persons to or amongst whom it is published or intended or likely to be published”. This provision reflects a set of assumptions about material is generated and consumed which map onto the traditional media environment but which become almost meaningless in an era where material migrates rapidly across many contexts and where an enormous amount of content is generated by consumers themselves.

It is useful, at this point, to consider some hypothetical examples of material that could well be deemed RC and mandatorily filtered out of the Australian internet. Potential material that could feasibly be deemed RC on the basis of the current Classification Code includes:

- A site devoted to debating the merits of euthanasia in which some participants exchanged information about actual euthanasia practices.
- A site set up by a community organisation to promote harm minimisation in recreational drug use.
- A site designed to give a safe space for young gay and lesbians to meet and discuss their sexuality in which some members of the community narrated explicit sexual experiences.
- An art gallery website which includes photographs of naked children or adolescents taken by an established artist.
- A site discussing the causes of terrorism that published material exemplifying the beliefs of a terrorist organisation in order to ground the discussion of the causes of terrorism.
- A website in which survivors of child sexual abuse shared their experiences in a therapeutic context
- The online publication of a university newspaper which include an article about smoking marijuana

It is important not to be alarmist about the scope of material that will be caught under the RC or X18+ categories should mandatory filtering go ahead. It should certainly be noted that the Classification

Code clearly states classification decisions should give effect to the principle that “adults should be able to read, hear and see what they want”. How this injunction will be interpreted in relation to online material under a mandatory system, however, is open to broad interpretation.

2.5 Transparency and the right of appeal and judicial review

While it is clear that the government’s stated intention is the adoption of a mandatory internet filter to prevent access to prohibited content, it is unclear exactly how the mechanisms for this will be implemented. While preventing access to child pornography is clearly one of the primary reasons for implementing this filter, the current ACMA blacklist suggests that majority of websites (61%) on the blacklist fall outside this category of material.

A further critical concern is that, under the present system, the ACMA blacklist is not released for public comment and, while those hosting content which is put on the list have a right of appeal, content creators or other people who could be deemed to have standing in the matter, have no right of appeal. Without a right of appeal under public administrative law, there is also no avenue of judicial review. While there are well established precedents for exemption from administrative appeal – for instance if matters pertaining to national security or the broad protection of public morality – the offence to established democratic practice arguably increases exponentially in relation to the scope of content being filtered. Given the breadth of material that exists online and is potentially caught by the prohibited content provisions it seems to us, imperative, that at the very least the Federal Government commits to a clear system of appeal and judicial review of decisions and that there is transparency about what is put onto such a blacklist with rare exceptions.

3.0 The International Practice of Internet Filtering

3.1 Europe

The practice of internet filtering does occur in Europe; however, the vast majority of European filtering is voluntary. Internet service providers (ISPs), search engines and content providers engage in voluntary filtering on the understanding that by cooperating with the state, they can prevent further regulation in the future. Overall, ISPs are under no obligation to monitor the acceptability of internet content, but must filter unacceptable content once it is brought to their attention by the government, police, advocacy groups or the general public. In this way, the overwhelming majority of EU nations achieve the aim of blocking access to child pornography sites without resorting to legislation that their parliaments and peoples find coercive and objectionable. For most jurisdictions, it is illegal to possess or circulate child pornography (although the definition of 'child' varies, as does the age of consent).

Over the past few years, however, there has been a discernable move towards greater regulation among EU countries, with a particular focus upon child pornography websites. As discussed below, in June 2009 Germany legislated to filter such websites in the face of considerable opposition and controversy and having given firm guarantees that the filtering regime only applies to child pornography. In the subsequent general election, the ruling Christian Democrat Party lost power and the laws have not yet been implemented. This leaves Italy as the only EU country using mandatory filtering. Here, the Italian government filtered some online gambling websites whose operations are illegal, before subsequently mandating the filtering of online child pornography, and an on/off prohibition of *The Pirate Bay* peer-to-peer BitTorrent site. Overall, however, there is no wholesale mandatory filtering of internet content in any EU country as is proposed for Australia, and EU countries have adopted voluntary filtering regimes prior to any consideration of mandated filtering.

In terms of broader EU regulations, there is a general sentiment that voluntary ISP, search engine and content filtering should be preferred on the implicit understanding that it is through such voluntary cooperation with state authorities that further legislation will be unnecessary. The type of content filtered voluntarily relates to child pornography, racism, terrorism and sometimes gambling, as well as defamation. There is no obligation which requires ISPs to monitor internet traffic and they are largely protected from prosecution.

The regional policy is specified in the Electronic Commerce Directive 2000/31/EC[22]. In Article 12, the "mere conduct" exception prevents ISPs from being prosecuted for information 'merely' transmitted over their networks with the proviso that they (1) did not initiate the message (2) they did not select or modify the information and or (3) they did not select the intended recipient. Article 14 addresses liability of ISPs for hosting content – "ISPs will not be liable for hosting information, provided they do not have actual knowledge that the activity is illegal and, upon obtaining such knowledge, act quickly to remove it." Article 15 precludes ISPs from any general obligation to monitor content or data transmission on their servers[23].

In 1996, the European Council requested that the European Commission produce a "summary of the problems posed by the rapid development of the internet." The commission produced a report entitled "Illegal and Harmful Content on the Internet.[24]" This was followed by the drafting of a common framework for self regulation resulting in an Action Plan on Promoting Safe Use of the Internet[25]. The plan endorsed five major strategies to combat illegal and harmful content on the Internet:

- Promoting voluntary industry self-regulation and content monitoring schemes, including the use of hotlines for the public to report illegal or harmful content.

- Providing filtering tools and rating systems that enable parents or teachers to regulate the access of Internet content by children in their care, while allowing adults to access legal content.
- Raising awareness among consumers about services offered by industry to allow users to leverage the internet more fully.
- Exploring the legal implications of promoting the safer use of the internet
- Encouraging international cooperation in the area of regulation.

Overall, in the EU, the filtering regime requires interaction between governments, police, advocacy groups and the general public who identify instances of undesirable content, and the ISPs who voluntarily filter such content on the understanding that any failure to do so is likely to result in greater regulation of the sector. The definition of undesirable content tends to vary between countries but is broadly classified as content which is either illegal or harmful. There is general consensus on what is considered illegal or harmful and this includes: child pornography, human trafficking, racist material, material promoting terrorism and all forms of internet fraud. Harmful material is material that might offend the values and sentiments of others and could pertain to politics, religion or racial matters. In the countries that have moved to legislate some mandatory filtering, Germany and Italy, assurances were given that the mandated filtering is narrowly defined (see below).

3.1.1 Great Britain

Large scale voluntary internet filtering was spearheaded by the United Kingdom whose Cleanfeed program was launched in June 2004 through a commitment by BT, Britain's largest ISP. The program revolves around the filtering of content deemed inappropriate by its inclusion on a list of websites compiled by the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF). The IWF is a not-for-profit organisation that runs in collaboration with government, industry, the police and the public. The program is largely orientated towards the filtering of images of child abuse as established in the UK's *Protection of Children Act 1978*. ISPs, mobile network operators, content providers and search engines such as Google and Yahoo are provided with a copy of the list and are encouraged to remove access to websites listed on it. Those who attempt to access illegal content hosted overseas encounter an error message. For content hosted in the UK, the offending material is required to be taken down. Additional internet surveillance is conducted by the UK's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre. The law also enables police to forward the personal details of people who have accessed illegal content to banks, who will cancel their credit cards as a breach of service.

3.1.2 Germany

In June 2009, ignoring widespread opposition, the German parliament passed legislation to require ISPs to filter websites that contain child pornography. The secret filtering list was to be compiled by the German Federal Police and transmitted to ISPs daily, with a committee to monitor and check the list of banned sites[26]. In response to concerns that the filtering infrastructure could be used to block content such as online gambling, copyright violations and so on, Martina Krogmann, a government spokesperson and supporter of the legislation stated that "she is clearly opposed to a broadening of the scope, adding that the new law had been defined narrowly[27]". In September 2009, before the legislation could be implemented, the Christian Democrats lost power in a General Election and were required to enter into coalition with the Free Liberals to remain in government. As part of the negotiations it was agreed not to implement the legislation but instead to embark upon a year's trial of deleting websites hosting child abuse material, rather than blocking them[28].

3.1.3 Italy

During 2006 Italian ISPs were forced to block access to Web sites that offer online gambling by virtue of Financial Law (Law 266/2005). This gave the Amministrazione Autonoma dei Monopoli di Stato (AAMS or Autonomous Administration of State Monopolies, a part of the Ministry of Economy and Finances) the power to bring to the attention of ISPs instances in which gambling sites are operating without authorization from the AAMS itself. When brought to their attention by the AAMS, ISPs have the legal obligation to inhibit access to these sites by adopting appropriate technical measures to this end. The AAMS has compiled a list of websites that should not be accessed from Italian networks. This was list was implemented by ISPs through "hijacking" DNS communication and redirecting it to the DNS server of the AAMS. Users trying to access blocked websites were provided with a notice saying "pursuant to the decree of the AAMS of 7 February 2006 the requested website is not accessible because it does not have the necessary authorizations for collecting bets in Italy". The system, however, is easily circumvented by using a proxy server. Nevertheless, although technically avoidable, the blacklist is apparently still applied by Italian ISPs[29]. In January 2007 the Italian government passed a decree requiring ISPs to block access to child pornography websites after being notified of such websites by the National Centre against Child Pornography[30]. In 2008, using commercial law, an Italian court ordered ISPs to block access to Swedish BitTorrent site *The Pirate Bay* which facilitates the illegal exchange of copyright material. Successfully overturned on appeal, the original ruling was upheld by the Italian Supreme Court and the situation is still in flux.

3.1.4 Sweden and Norway

The Norwegian government has considered blocking access to “foreign gambling, websites that desecrate the flag or coat of arms of a foreign nation, that promote hatred towards public authorities, contain hate speech or promote racism, offensive pornography sites, and peer-to-peer sites that offer illegal downloads of music, movies or television shows.[31]” However, this proposal was not adopted by the government.

A filtering system was announced in 2004 as collaboration between Telenor, the leading Scandinavian telecom company and KRIPOS, the Norwegian National Criminal Investigation Service. This system was designed to prevent access to child pornography at ISP level. The blacklisted URLs were based on a list compiled by KRIPOS. In May 2005, Telenor and the Swedish National Criminal Investigation Department announced that a similar filtering system had been introduced for all Telenor’s customers in Sweden[32].

Overall, however, in both Sweden and Norway, filtering occurs on a voluntary basis with no sanction for noncompliance. Each ISP determines the scope of blocking access[33].

3.1.5 Ireland

Irish ISPs generally self-regulate in regards to child protection. When illegal content is identified, ISPs must take reasonable measures to remove that content from public access. ISPs are only required to respond to illegal content by removing illegal content hosted on their systems[34].

3.1.6 Denmark and Finland

Since 2005, Finland has maintained a voluntary program to restrict access to child pornography websites. The Finnish police maintain a list of sites; however, there is no obligation for ISPs to block these sites. The same voluntary ISP-end filtering program is implemented by Denmark[35].

3.2 United States and Canada[36]

The application of internet filtering regulations differs in both Canada and the United States. Neither Canada nor the United States adopts a mandatory internet filtering system; nevertheless, regulation exists in both countries that revolves around four key issues: child-protection and morality, national security and computer security.

In the US, the government has tried several times to legislate child protection; however, government mandated attempts have been struck down by the courts on the grounds of the First Amendment, regarding freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The first piece of legislation was the United States Communication Decency Act (CDA). The provisions of this Act were to "criminalise the transmission of indecent material to persons under eighteen and the display to minors of patently offensive content and communications." Civil libertarians challenged this law with the court finding that the bill's uses of "indecent" and "patently offensive" were so vague that enforcement would have violated the First Amendment. This was later affirmed by the Supreme Court. Following this defeat, a second piece of legislation was introduced - which became known as the Child Online Protection Act (COPA). This legislation was directed at material considered "harmful to minors." Again, however, the courts enjoined this legislation on first amendment grounds for the reason that to accurate identify "indecent" material and pre-emptively block it, would have required ISPs to filter arbitrarily and extensively in order to avoid criminal liability. In 2000, The Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) was passed requiring public schools and libraries to implement Internet filtering technology in order to receive federal E-Rate funding. The law required that in order for a school or library to receive federal funds for internet access they must demonstrate to the FCC that it has installed or will install filtering technology. The technology must filter content that is deemed to be obscene, child pornography, or material harmful to minors. The choice as to which content fulfils this criteria is at the discretion of filtering technology developers who make such choices during the development phases of the technology. The law has been upheld by the Supreme Court following challenges on first amendment grounds.

Overall, internet filtering in the United States is largely left to private manufacturers that compete for market share in internet filtering technologies. Those required to block content, such as schools and libraries, can select from a range of different filters each with different approaches. Some include whitelists of pre-approved sites whereas the majority use blacklists which are generated through automated screenings of the web. The decision as to what to filter rests in the purview of the filter manufacturers in the first instance, and then the individual PC users who implement that filtering software.

Canadian practice in relation to internet filtering is orientated towards government facilitated industry self-regulation. Private parties are required to self-regulate with the encouragement of the government under the threat of future legislation or potential legal action. The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 2001 made it a crime to access and distribute child pornography online. However, the law includes a proviso that ISPs are not required to assess the legality of content or to take action unless there is a judicial determination as to the legality of the content. Even so, the law does require that ISPs must provide all information required regardless of its content in return for immunity over the nature of its content. Therefore, ISPs cannot choose which information to pass on to law enforcement officers and which information to restrict access to. Section 36 of the Canadian Telecommunications Act indicates that without the approval of the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), a Canadian carrier "shall not control the content or influence the meaning or purpose of telecommunications carried by it to the public[37]."

In November 2006, Canada launched Project Cleanfeed, a voluntary collaboration between Bell, Bell Aliant, MTS Allstream, Rogers, Shaw, SaskTel, Telus, and Vidéotron Canada[38]. Although the government was not directly involved, they did indicate their approval. The processes involved in

Project Cleanfeed are as follows: A member of the public or an authority notifies assessors when questionable images or content are found online. Two analysts assess that content and decide either to reject or approve it. If the site is to become listed, the URL is added to the Cleanfeed distribution list which is sent out to all ISPs who have agreed to voluntarily block sites on the list. This also prevents the ISPs from having to evaluate the URLs themselves, which would be considered illegal. ISPs will only block specific URLs and not a generic IP address to prevent overblocking, since overblocking could be illegal under the Telecommunications Act. Additionally, given that accessing child pornography is illegal in Canada it does not infringe on the right of access or free speech under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Similarly, however, it is also illegal to publish the list of blocked sites because it is considered illegal to provide access to child pornography. These different considerations raise a number of controversial issues for project Cleanfeed such as: (1) it has not received authorisation from CRTC (2) the list needs to be keep undisclosed (3) the procedure for appealing the blocking of a site may have implications for anonymity.

3.3 New Zealand

Overall, New Zealand's implementation of internet filtering is much less onerous than that proposed for Australia. New Zealand law does define offensive content, which includes hate speech, and such content can be investigated by the Department of Internal Affairs. Upon investigation, the Department of Internal Affairs submits non-classified material to the Office of Film and Literature Classification for a ruling. However, unlike in Australia, there is no explicated mechanism under which the government can issue a takedown notice. The New Zealand system relies instead on a classification system and while there is no direct online regulation of content, officials agree that the Films, Videos and Publications Act (1993) applies equally to objectionable online material. New Zealand law defines objectionable material as any material that "describes, depicts, expresses or otherwise deals with matters such as sex, horror, crime, cruelty, or violence in such a manner that the availability of the publication is likely to be injurious to the public good." More specifically, any material that promotes "the exploitation of children, or young persons or both, for sexual purposes; or the use of violence or coercion to compel any person to participate in, or submit to, sexual conduct, or sexual conduct with or upon the body of a dead person; or the use of urine or excrement in association with degrading or dehumanising conduct or sexual conduct, or bestiality, or acts of torture or the infliction of extreme violence or extreme cruelty" is considered to be objectionable.

In July 2009, the New Zealand government's Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) announced that they would be introducing software for voluntary use by ISPs which would form the basis of 'The Digital Child Exploitation Filtering System.' The software is explicitly restricted to blocking sites which provide access to child sexual abuse images. An independent committee is to oversee the operation of the filter and anyone who believes a site may be wrongly blocked can request a review of the filter. Keith Manch, Deputy Secretary of the Department, commented that "Joining the filtering programme is voluntary and if any ISP subsequently is unhappy it will be able to withdraw. This is another way of ensuring that the Department gets the filter right."[39] There is some indication that ISPs servicing over 90% of NZ's internet market are willing to adopt the system.[40] A period of public consultation closed in September and the New Zealand government's intentions regarding the system are spelled out in terms of services provided by the DIA.[41] It is anticipated that the System will be operational early in 2010.

3.4 Reporters Without Borders

Reporters Without Borders (RWB) provides a list of countries that they consider to be enemies of the internet[42]. Enemies of the internet are those countries which "prevent[ed] Internet users from obtaining news seen as 'undesirable'. All of these countries mark themselves out not just for their

capacity to censor news and information online but also for their almost systematic repression of Internet users.[43]" This list comprises twelve countries[44]:

- Burma
- China
- Cuba
- Egypt
- Iran
- North Korea
- Saudi Arabia
- Syria
- Tunisia
- Turkmenistan
- Uzbekistan; and
- Vietnam

The report on enemies of the internet also includes a further eleven countries which RWB considers to be "under surveillance." Countries under surveillance are considered by RWB to "alternate between censorship and harassment of Internet users." Australia is the only western nation included in this list of countries, on the grounds of its intention to "force all service providers to filter private Internet connections in each home to remove all 'inappropriate' content". The list comprises:

- Australia
- Bahrain
- Belarus
- Eritrea
- Malaysia
- South Korea
- Sri Lanka
- Thailand
- United Arab Emirates
- Yemen
- Zimbabwe

3.5 Open Net Initiative (ONI) Study of Countries with Pervasive or Substantial Filtering

ONI is a global collaboration of four leading universities to monitor freedom on the Net. It is supported by Harvard, Toronto, Cambridge and Oxford Universities and researches and reports on a country by country and regional basis. While some western countries engage in selective filtering of certain types of content, usually within a cooperative and voluntary framework, a number of countries worldwide enforce more widespread forms of internet filtering. The following table[45] indicates how countries engaged in pervasive or substantial censorship implement such internet censorship, for example through centralised control of the internet backbone, or decentralised ISP level filtering. The level of consistency of the filtering efforts is also noted, as is whether the government conceals that it is filtering content, and the level of government transparency and accountability. If the proposed Australian ISP-level filter were to be implemented then it would be appropriate for Australia to occupy a place on this table as indicated. (In the absence of a mandatory filter, Australia is not currently included in this table). Regarding a possible Australian entry, a 'D' in the first column indicates that the filtering occurs at the level of the ISP. The second column indicates that there will be consistency

across users since all ISPs will be required to filter up to 10,000 named sites. Australians do not yet know whether users attempting to access a blocked site will be told that the site is blocked but it is clear that the introduction of a filtering regime will be acknowledged publicly. Also evident, from the regulations regarding the ACMA blacklist, is that the specific details of prohibited sites will be kept secret and thus beyond public scrutiny and debate.

	Locus	Consistency	Concealed Filtering	Transparency and Accountability
Australia*	D	High	No	High
Azerbaijan	D	Low	No	Medium
Bahrain	C	High	Yes	Low
China	C and D	Medium	Yes	Low
Ethiopia	C	High	Yes	Low
India	D	Medium	No	High
Iran	D	Medium	No	Medium
Jordan	D	High	No	Low
Libya	C	High	Yes	Low
Morocco	C	High	Yes	Low
Myanmar	D	Low	No	Medium
Oman	C	High	No	High
Pakistan	C and D	Medium	Yes	High
Saudi Arabia	C	High	No	High
Singapore	D	High	No	High
South Korea	D	High	No	High
Sudan	C	High	No	High
Syria	D	High	No	Medium
Tajikistan	D	Low	No	Medium
Thailand	D	Medium	No	Medium
Tunisia	C	High	Yes	Low
United Arab Emirates	D	Low	No	Medium
Uzbekistan	C and D	High	Yes	Low
Vietnam	D	Low	Yes	Low
Yemen	D	High	No	Medium

***Australia** is not currently included in this list. This inclusion here indicates how Australia's filtering regime is likely to be categorised were the proposed mandatory filter to be introduced.

Locus: C = centralised (internet backbone), D = decentralised (implemented by ISPs)

Consistency = the variation in filtering across different ISPs where applicable

Concealed Filtering = efforts to conceal the fact that filtering is occurring or the failure to clearly indicate when it occurs

Transparency and accountability = overall level of openness in regards to the practice of filtering.

Similarly, the table below[46] breaks into categories the type of internet censorship that countries actively pursue in terms of whether the material affected constitutes political censorship, social censorship, conflict and security censorship or the censorship of internet tools. According to the ONI, political censorship includes content that expresses views in opposition to those of the current government, or is related to human rights, freedom of expression, minority rights, and religious

movements[47]. Social content is content related to sexuality, gambling, and illegal drugs and alcohol, as well as other topics that may be socially sensitive or perceived as offensive[48]. Conflict and security content refers to armed conflicts, border disputes, separatist movements, and militant groups[49]. Internet tools refers to web sites that provide e-mail, Internet hosting, search, translation, Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephone service, and circumvention methods[50].

	Political	Social	Conflict and Security	Internet Tools
Australia*	•	•	-	-
Azerbaijan	•	-	-	-
Bahrain	••	•	-	•
Belarus	O	o	-	-
China	•••	••	•••	••
Ethiopia	••	•	•	•
India	-	-	•	•
Iran	•••	•••	••	•••
Jordan	•	-	-	-
Kazakhstan	O	-	-	-
Libya	••	-	-	-
Morocco	-	-	•	•
Myanmar	•••	••	••	••
Oman	-	•••	-	••
Pakistan	•	••	•••	•
Saudi Arabia	••	•••	•	••
Singapore	-	•	-	-
South Korea	-	•	•••	-
Sudan	-	•••	-	••
Syria	•••	•	•	••
Tajikistan	•	-	-	-
Thailand	•	••	-	•
Tunisia	•••	•••	•	••
United Arab Emirates	••*	•••	•	••
Uzbekistan	••	•	-	•
Vietnam	•••	•	-	••
Yemen	••*	•••	•	••

***Australia** is not currently included in this list. This inclusion here indicates how Australia's filtering regime is likely to be categorised were the proposed mandatory filter to be introduced

- ••• Pervasive Filtering
- •• Substantial Filtering
- • Selective Filtering
- o Suspected Filtering
- - No evidence of Filtering
- * According to website: http://opennet.net/research/profiles/

Given the way in which Australia treats radical Muslim materials it might earn • 'selective filtering' for Political material. Similarly, the way Australia proposes to filter legal but restricted content and materials such as those provided by Exit Australia, the voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide society, indicates that the Social category might also become • 'selective filtering'. According to the definitions above, there is little evidence of 'conflict and security' filtering other than that already identified in the 'political' category, while there is also little evidence currently of the blocking of internet tools. Such practices may emerge, however, when patches are created to circumnavigate the ISP-level filters.

Even at the level of 'selective filtering', such a practice could place Australia in the uncomfortable company of some comparatively restrictive regimes. The list created comes from a table in the ONI book 'Denied Access' (2008), with ratings checked against the current website[51]. This indicates that UAE[52] and Yemen[53] may have moved from being classified as selective filterers of political content of the internet to nations that use substantial filtering. According to the combination of the book and the website, countries that operate selective filtering of political content comprise: Azerbaijan, Jordan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Thailand. Those that practice selective filtering of social content are: Bahrain, Ethiopia, Singapore, South Korea, Syria, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

With regards to the specific countries that operative selective filtering of political content, the Open Net Initiative comments:

Azerbijan: "Azeri law does not require mandatory filtering or monitoring of Internet content … Anecdotal accounts claim that filtering of specific Web sites occurs, which is seemingly the result of informal requests to ISP managers by state officials from the Ministry of National Security, Ministry of Communications and Information Technologies, or the Presidency. These instances have been infrequent, and the resulting public outcry has led to a swift unblocking of the affected sites."[54]

Jordan: "ONI conducted in-country tests in Jordan on four ISPs: Jordan Telecom, Batelco, Orange, and Linkdotnet. Only arabtimes.com, a U.S.-based online newspaper often critical of Arab leaders, was found to be blocked."[55]

Pakistan: "Currently Pakistanis have unimpeded access to most sexual, political, social, and religious content. However, the Pakistani government continues to use repressive measures against antimilitary, Balochi, and Sindhi political dissidents, and it blocks Web sites highlighting this repression. The government also filters high-risk antistate materials and blasphemous content."[56]

Tajikistan: "Tajikistan does not have an official policy on Internet filtering. However, state authorities have been known to restrict access to some Web sites at politically sensitive times by communicating their "recommendations" to all top-level ISPs."[57]

Thailand: "ONI conducted testing after the [Thai] coup on three major ISPs: KSC, LoxInfo, and True. Of the sites tested, only a small percentage was actually blocked. The Thai government does implement filtering and primarily blocks access to pornography, online gambling sites, and circumvention tools. Outside these categories, only a few sites were blocked by all three ISPs." [58]

If a country such as Australia were to operate a mandatory filter at the level of the ISP, with a capacity to block up to 10,000 sites, with a secret blacklist less than 1/3 of which is child pornography (30 April 2009)[59], but which includes political/extremist publications such as *Join the Caravan* and *Defence of the Muslim Lands* among the materials refused classification, it might quite possibly find itself classified alongside the countries listed, judged as engaged in selective filtering of political content.

A similar picture emerges when considering countries that engage in selective filtering of social content. It should be noted here that while Bahrain was categorised in print as a selective filterer of social content, it is deemed on the ONI website to use 'pervasive filtering'[60]. Countries classified in both print and on the web as selective filterers of social content are: Ethiopia, Singapore, South Korea, Syria, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. The ONI website offers specific country comments:

Ethiopia: "Ethiopia's current approach to filtering can be somewhat spotty, with the exception of the blanket block on two major blog hosts … ONI conducted testing on Ethiopia's sole ISP, the ETC, in 2008 and 2009. The ETC's blocking efforts appear to focus on independent media, blogs, and political reform and human rights sites, though the filtering is not very thorough."[61]

Singapore: "The government of the Republic of Singapore engages in minimal Internet filtering, blocking only a small set of pornographic Web sites as a symbol of disapproval of their contents."[62]

South Korea: "ISPs have become increasingly responsible for policing content on their networks. In 2001, the state promulgated the 'Internet Content Filtering Ordinance', reportedly requiring ISPs to block as many as 120,000 Web sites on a state-compiled list, and requiring Internet access facilities that are accessible to minors, such as public libraries and schools, to install filtering software."[63]

Syria: "ONI testing results indicate that Syria's Internet filtering regime has increased the scope and depth of targeted content. Censorship has been extended to include high profile sites such as the video sharing Web site YouTube, the social networking Web site Facebook, and the online shop Amazon.com."[64]

Uzbekistan: "The 2002 Law on Principles and Guarantees on Access to Information reserves the government's right to restrict access to information when necessary to protect the individual 'from negative informational psychological influence' … ONI detected a consistent and substantial filtering system that employs blockpages as well as re-directs to other Web sites … Selective filtering of Web sites displaying social topics was also detected, including sites with religious, extremist, porn, gay, and lesbian content."[65]

Vietnam: "Surprisingly, Vietnam does not block any pornographic content (though it does filter one site ONI tested with links to adult material), despite the state's putative focus on preventing access to sexually explicit material. The state's filtering practices are thus in obvious tension with the purported justification for these actions."[66]

Although other countries do not seem to target pressure groups such as EXIT, Australia's filtering of such sites along with its stated intention to block, for example, MA15+ content which seems to fail restricted access tests, would likely see it categorised as at least a selective filterer of social content.

3.6 Conclusion

Although there are indications of a growing preparedness to filter content in some European nations, mandatory filtering at present is very restricted and very targeted. Germany and Italy have both legislated to block access to child pornography, while Italy also prevents access to some online gambling sites. It is clear that liberal democracies tend to adopt voluntary regulatory approaches that focus on narrowly defined segments of undesirable content – usually child pornography. The United States, New Zealand, Canada and Great Britain have implemented voluntary programs that delegate

the choice of what to filter and how to filter it to end-users, individual ISPs and/or filtering software vendors. The identification of undesirable internet content is usually retained under the purview of a not-for-profit organisation who maintains a blacklist through collaboration with the police, advocacy groups, the government and the general public. The majority of European ISPs filter content "voluntarily" under the implicit understanding that failure to do so will force the government to implement strict regulatory frameworks.

Given this general European and north American approach to the regulation of the internet, Australia is the only western country identified by the international NGO Reporters Without Borders (RWB) as being 'under surveillance' as a potential 'enemy of the internet'. Australia's proposed filtering regime, operating at the level of the ISP to "force all service providers to filter private Internet connections in each home to remove all 'inappropriate' content" is offered as the main justification for RWB setting it apart in this way from all other liberal democracies. Since Australia has been singled out in this way by RWB for discussing the possible introduction of an ISP-level filter, its implementation would be likely to have significant ramifications for Australia's place in lists which monitor internet freedoms, such as those compiled by the Harvard, Toronto, Cambridge and Oxford University-sponsored Open Net Initiative. An examination of ONI's evaluation of countries which engage in filtering of social and political content, which do not currently include any western liberal democracies, indicates that an Australian mandatory filter would probably qualify the country for inclusion as engaging in 'selective filtering' of social and political content. This is on the basis of material already judged by Australian courts to be legitimately repressed, although it is clear that there is no intention that the public should be allowed to scrutinise the up to 10,000 sites to be blocked by Australia's mandatory ISP filter, should it be enacted.

As a parting observation, using the printed charts from the Feb 2008 ONI-based publication, *Access Denied*, and comparing these with the online materials current in Nov 2009, of the 14 countries which were judged as using selective filtering of political or social content in the book, two had since been re-classified as using 'substantial filtering' while a third had become labelled as a 'pervasive' filterer of online material. All changes over this comparatively short time frame had been in the direction of greater repression of material: none of the regimes indicated had become more liberal.

4.0 Public Interest Matters: A Summary

A range of public policy issues and matters of public interest arise from the matters we have considered above.

Scope of Content

What types of content will be filtered under a centralised mandatory internet filtering program? Will it just focus on child pornography or will broader categories also be included?

A pressing issue that needs to be resolved concerns the scope of content that is likely to be filtered under a mandatory internet filtering regime. As discussed above, according to the current Federal Government's statements the proposed policy has been framed as an approach to prevent the dissemination of child pornography. The question then arises of whether the Federal Government should not simply define and circumscribe in law the actual categories of material to be filtered, with child pornography being the highest priority category.

While this may be considered acceptable where filtering is opt-in by an end user (or parent for family computers), under a mandatory filtering regime this would result in capturing material that is clearly legal but restricted in availability (off the internet) through classification restrictions. Therefore, the following questions need to be resolved:

- Will the types of content that are to be blocked under the mandatory internet filter be defined in new legislation or will this remain under the purview of existing classification legislation?

- How will content which is considered legal content but potentially offensive to minors be dealt with?

Balancing rights to free speech

Unlike all other liberal democratic nations, Australia has no explicit protection of the rights to free speech or access to information. Whereas in the United States, the first amendment has been used to strike down mandatory internet filtering laws; no such protections are afforded to Australians either through the constitution or through subsequent Acts of Parliament. The Labor party upon election in 2007 indicated that they would provide a comprehensive review of human rights issues in Australia, and that report was delivered in September 2009[67]. The *National Human Rights Consultation Report* 2009[68] references findings from a Colmar Brunton survey of Australians and their beliefs about human rights issues in Australia. This focuses on which rights Australians believed should be protected. One of the findings of this research was that those surveyed believed that freedom of speech was one of the most important rights, and that people considered it to be one of the "absolutes."[69] The committee recommended that amongst other things:

> ...the Federal Government immediately compile an interim list of rights for protection and promotion, regardless of whether a Human Rights Act is introduced. The list should include rights from the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as the following rights from the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that were most often raised during the Consultation: the right to an adequate standard of living (including food, clothing and housing); the right to the highest attainable standard of health; and the right to education.[70]

If the government were to implement a mandatory filter, the extent to which this would conflict with the right to freedom of speech and access to information is uncertain although it is clear that the scope of the content caught would certainly increase the level of the conflict. Australia is a signatory to the UN Declaration of Human Rights which explicitly upholds the right to freedom of opinion and expression, as well as access to information (see below). Similarly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), in which Australia is also a participant, states that "everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference and everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression[71]." These rights are often used by courts as constituting basic human rights. However, the statements are broad in meaning and also carry with them certain "special duties and responsibilities." Article 20 of the ICCPR states that restrictions need to be placed on communications intended to promote or incite war or "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence."

Article 17(2) states that "(1) no one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation; and (2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.[72]" Article 19 (2) states that:

> Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.[73]

However, this is followed by article 19(3) which qualifies this right:

> The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:
>
> > (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others;
> >
> > (b) For the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals.

In this sense, while the state has the obligation to protect the inalienable human right of freedom of speech and freedom of association, there is also an obligation to protect people from defamation and also protect national security, the public order and uphold public morals. It is on such grounds that most states which engage in internet filtering have sought to justify its use. The question is not so much whether states have a right to protect citizens from a degradation of public morals in the form of preventing access to child pornography or offensive material, but whether mandatory internet filtering is the most appropriate method with which to pursue this aim. Likewise, in the case of defamation and hate speech, the state is in fact obligated under international treaties such as UNDHR and ICCPR to uphold the rights of citizens to be protected from communication that undermines the rights of others. As stated by Zittrain and Palfrey (2008)[74]:

> The strongest argument for [an] internet filter is that it is a legitimate expression of the sovereign authority of states to prevent its citizens from unfettered access to the internet when doing so would adversely affect local morals and norms…A state has the right to protect the morality of its citizens, the arguments goes, and unfettered access to and use of the internet undercuts public morality in myriad ways. Many regimes, including those in Western states, have justified online surveillance of various sorts on the grounds of ordinary law enforcement activities, such as the prevention and enforcement of domestic criminal activity. Most recently, states have begun to justify online censorship and surveillance as a measure to counteract international terrorism. More simply, internet filtering and surveillance is an expression of the unalienable right of a state to ensure its national security.

In regards to internet filtering there is a fundamental conflict between protecting the rights to freedom of expression and access to information and upholding the state's obligations of maintaining national security and protecting public morals. The conflict stems from the nature of the technology and the potentially capricious and arbitrary manner in which regulations could be applied. There is no evidence to suggest that any state has ever managed to regulate a foolproof system in which underblocking or overblocking does not occur[75].

Similarly, there is evidence to suggest that all systems can be evaded by some internet users and that no technical means of filtering can be implemented that prevents such evasion. The question as to whether overfiltering or underfiltering is preferable remains a matter that individual states must decide. While it seems that many states have delegated responsibility to individual ISPs, this question raises two important public policy questions:

- **In the case of overfiltering**: is the potential of unwittingly restricting the lawful expression of a citizen and their access to information so offensive to fundamental human rights that it conceivably constitutes a breach of Australia's international obligations?

- **In the case of underfiltering**: is the inexact implementation of internet filtering satisfactory given that much content which may be deemed grossly offensive to public morals will not be

successfully blocked and may also leave parents and teachers with a false sense of security when it comes to children accessing the internet.

Transparency

How transparent will the regulatory approach be? Will citizens be made aware if certain websites have been prohibited?

While it is clear that the government's stated intention is the adoption of a mandatory internet filter to prevent access to prohibited content, it is unclear exactly how the mechanisms for this will be implemented. While preventing access to child pornography is clearly one of the primary reasons for implementing this filter, the current ACMA blacklist suggests that majority of websites (61%) on the blacklist fall outside this category of material.

A further critical concern is that, under the present system, the ACMA blacklist is not released for public comment and, while those hosting content which is put on the list have a right of appeal, content creators or other people who could be deemed to have standing in the matter, have no right of appeal. Without a right of appeal under public administrative law, there is also no avenue of judicial review. While there are well established precedents for exemption from administrative appeal – for instance if matters pertaining to national security or the broad protection of public morality – the offence to established democratic practice arguably increases exponentially in relation to the scope of content being filtered. Given the breadth of material that exists online and is potentially caught by the prohibited content provisions it seems to us, imperative, that at the very least the Federal Government commits to a clear system of appeal and judicial review of decisions and that there is transparency about what is put onto such a blacklist with rare exceptions.

As of the time of writing, the following questions about how internet filtering will proceed need to be resolved:

- Will the blacklist be made publicly available? If not, is there a potential cause of action for discovery or redress?
- Will content providers or other citizens be able to appeal the blocking of individual websites? How will such an appeals process be facilitated?
- Will there be a system of judicial review?

Peer-to-Peer Content

The growth of peer-to-peer and user generated content with the advent of Web 2.0 generates some additional regulatory challenges for the Federal Government. A mandatory filter will not catch illegal material disseminated through these channels. Indeed, one of the key challenges in identifying those who disseminate and consume child pornography is that much of it is not openly displayed on websites but is exchanged in a covert and encrypted manner via bulletin boards. More recently, evidence is emerging that child pornography is also increasingly being covertly housed on third party websites through the use of malware bots. The international evidence clearly suggests that the majority of child abuse prevention resources need to be targeted towards coordinated policing of those who manufacture and share child abuse materials, often in contexts where they are involving their own family members or children known to them[76]**.** A key issue that needs consideration is that even if abhorrent and inappropriate content is identified and notified to ACMA, or another appropriate authority, there is strong evidence that the creators of such material will simply upload or download the same material in a different online context once detected.

International Implications

The proposed filtering regime has a number of implications for Australia in an international context. Firstly, the proposal would set Australia apart from other western liberal democracies that have opted for a transparent, voluntary filtering regime that involves interactions between governments, the police, advocacy groups, ISPs, not-for-profit organisations and the general public in determining how to counteract access to undesirable content. This approach has been successfully applied in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and New Zealand. While it is clear that in Europe there is a trend towards greater regulation of internet content, especially in Italy, most European countries still maintain a voluntary regulatory approach.

Australia's treaty obligations under the United Nations Declaration for Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) clearly establish Australia's commitment to freedom of speech and expression. While it is clear that if the mandatory internet filter were to focus narrowly upon instances of child pornography it could hardly be consider a breach of Australia's international treaty obligations, the implementation of a non-transparent, a widely scoped filtering system that captures not only child pornography but legal content could constitute a fundamental departure from Australia's commitments.

Balancing Risks with Responsibility

A mandatory policy also raises the issue of how we balance the need for the government to protect children and teenagers from harmful material with the importance of involving parents and teachers in helping children negotiate the online environment and make decisions about what is age appropriate. International research has repeatedly shown the importance of involving parents, educators and children in a dialogue about both their media consumption and the risks and opportunities of the online environment. If parents and educators believe that the government has made the internet safe for children they may no longer feel obligated to engage in these discussions. It is critical that we continue to focus resources on educating and supporting children and young people to become media literate and responsible consumers and producers of online material. Getting the policy balance between protection, education and family- based negotiation is critical if we are to produce future citizens who are prepared for a digital, online and mobile future.

Appendix One - The Practice of Filtering

Any discussion of public policy related to internet filtering is linked to the technology which facilitates it. More specifically, the degree to which the technology underblocks or overblocks the content which is seeks to filter. The following table provides an overview of the types of different filtering options available and their concomitant advantages and disadvantages:

Technique	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
IP Blocking	**TCP/IP Header filtering** is where routers inspect the IP packet header with the destination IP being located. Routers can be configured to put packets destined for an IP on a list. They only block communication on the basis of where packets are going to or coming from, not what they contain.	• Effective in blocking a requested target. • No new equipment needs to be purchased. • Instantaneous implementation • Required technology and expertise is readily available. • Potential to block at or near international gateways so that blocking is uniform across ISPs.	• Can result in significant overblocking as all other (unrelated) websites hosted on that server will also be blocked.
	TCP/IP Content Filtering is where the contents of a certain packed are examined for banned keywords.	• Greater specify with regards to the type of content which can be filtered – based on keyword. • By filtering based on keywords, the whole IP is not blocked, only those packets with the banned keywords. This reduces the potential for over filtering.	• Extra equipment may be needed. • Typical hardware may be unable to react fast enough to block the infringing packets, • As packets have a maximum size, the full content of the communication will likely be split over multiple packets. • Keywords might be split over a number of packets which means devices may fail to identify banned keywords. • For packet inspection to be fully effective, the stream must be reassembled, which adds additional complexity. • Sites can be aware of this technique and simply not use the offending keyword and select an equivalent term.

DNS (domain name server) Tampering	Most websites use domain names not IP addresses. If the domain name resolution stage can be filtered, access to infringing sites can be effectively blocked. A list of banned domain names can be configured which will display an error message if a user tries to access a listed site.	• Purposefully disrupting DNS servers which resolve domain names into IP addresses. • Can target a particular website by configuring the DNS server to return the wrong IP address.	• Comparatively easy to bypass by the user selecting an alternative recursive resolver. This type of circumvention might be made more difficult by blocking access to external DNS servers, but doing so would be disruptive to normal activities and could also be bypassed.
Proxy-based filtering strategies	Prevents users from directly connecting to a website but requires users to go through a proxy server. The proxy server may temporarily store information in a cache. The proxy decides whether request for webpages should be permitted, and if so, sends the request to the web server hosting the requested content. Since the full contents of the request are available, individual web pages can be filtered, not just entire websites or domains. Also, a transparent HTTP proxy may intercept outgoing web requests and send them to a proxy server.	• Permits the greatest flexibility, allowing blocking both by full Web page URL and by Web page content. • Internet traffic passing through the filtering system is reassembled and the specific HTTP addressing being accessed is checked against a list of blocked websites (can be individual domains, subdomains, specific long URL paths, or keywords in the domain or URL path). This permits greater specificity. • Can also be programmed so that internet traffic passing through the filtering system is reassembled and the specific HTTP address requested is checked against a list of blocked keywords.	• More complex to establish. • This can be fooled by redirecting traffic through an open proxy server. Such servers may be set up accidentally by computer users who misconfigure their own computers. Alternatively, a proxy could be specifically designed for circumventing Internet filtering. Here, the main challenge is to discover an open proxy as many are shut down rapidly due to spammers abusing them, or blocked by organisations that realise they are being used for circumvention. • Encrypted proxy servers may be used to hide what is being accessed through them
Hybrid TCP/IP and HTTP Proxy	Requests are intercepted by an HTTP proxy and are then reassembled from the original packets, decoded and then retransmitted. The system operates by	• Allows the greatest flexibility. • Reduces overblocking	• Hardware required to keep up with a fast Internet connection is very expensive.

	building a list of the IP addresses of sites hosting prohibited content, but rather than blocking data flowing to these servers, the traffic is redirected to a transparent HTTP proxy. There, the full Web address is inspected and if it refers to banned content, it is blocked; otherwise the request is passed on as normal.		

The degree to which an internet filter either over blocks or under blocks websites has important ramifications for public policy. Many countries internationally have declared internet filtering illegal because of the chance that overblocking content might constitute an infringement of the rights of access to information and free speech. The Received Operating Characteristic (ROC) is a hypothetical curve which models the trade-off between overblocking and underblocking. For example, it is possible to obtain fewer instances of underblocking but this is at the cost of more overblocking. In general, the way to improve this trade-off is to devise more precise ways of discriminating between desired and undesired results such as results from a greater investment in internet filtering hardware and software.

There is also the issue of transparency of internet filtering. In some cases a blocked site will simply return an error message giving no indication that the site has been intentionally blocked. Alternatively, a warning label can be applied to sites which have been intentionally blocked and also provide users with information to allow them to write to authorities to register a complaint that a given website has been wrongly blocked.

Another issue comes in the form of under blocking. If filtering is conducted at a centralised location, perhaps on the internet backbone at the county's international gateway, then all internet traffic will encounter the same filters. This means that all users in a country will experience the same access to the internet. Alternatively, if filtering is decentralised amongst ISPs, then this could result in a different level of access to users based on who their ISP is. Therefore, access could be subject to the marketing policies of the ISP provider.

Appendix Two – National Classification Code for Films

Item	Description of Publication	Classification
1	Films that: (a) depict, express or otherwise deal with matters of sex, drug misuse or addiction, crime, cruelty, violence or revolting or abhorrent phenomena in such a way that they offend against the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults to the extent that they should not be classified; or (b) describe or depict in a way that is likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult, a person who is, or appears to be, a child under 18 (whether the person is engaged in sexual activity or not); or (c) promote, incite or instruct in matters of crime or violence	RC
2	Films (except RC films) that: (a) contain real depictions of actual sexual activity between consenting adults in which there is no violence, sexual violence, sexualised violence, coercion, sexually assaultive language, or fetishes or depictions which purposefully demean anyone involved in that activity for the enjoyment of viewers, in a way that is likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult; and (b) are unsuitable for a minor to see	X 18+
3	Films (except RC films and X 18+ films) that are unsuitable for a minor to see	R 18+
4	Films (except RC films, X 18+ films and R 18+ films) that depict, express or otherwise deal with sex, violence or coarse language in such a manner as to be unsuitable for viewing by persons under 15	MA 15+
5	Films (except RC films, X 18+ films, R 18+ films and MA 15+ films) that cannot be recommended for viewing by persons who are under 15	M

6	Films (except RC films, X 18+ films, R 18+ films, MA 15+ films and M films) that cannot be recommended for viewing by persons who are under 15 without the guidance of their parents or guardians	PG
7	All other films	G

Appendix Three – National Classification Guidelines (Extract)

RC – REFUSED CLASSIFICATION

Note: Films that exceed the R 18+ and X 18+ classification categories will be Refused Classification.

Computer games that exceed the MA 15+ classification category will be Refused Classification.

Films and computer games will be refused classification if they include or contain any of the following:

CRIME OR VIOLENCE
Detailed instruction or promotion in matters of crime or violence.

The promotion or provision of instruction in paedophile activity.

Descriptions or depictions of child sexual abuse or any other exploitative or offensive descriptions or depictions involving a person who is, or appears to be, a child under 18 years.

Gratuitous, exploitative or offensive depictions of:

(i) violence with a very high degree of impact or which are excessively frequent, prolonged or detailed;
(ii) cruelty or real violence which are very detailed or which have a high impact;
(iii) sexual violence.

SEX
Depictions of practices such as bestiality.

Gratuitous, exploitative or offensive depictions of:

(i) activity accompanied by fetishes or practices which are offensive or abhorrent;
(ii) incest fantasies or other fantasies which are offensive or abhorrent.

DRUG USE
Detailed instruction in the use of proscribed drugs.

Material promoting or encouraging proscribed drug use.

Note: Some of the terms used in this category are defined in the List of Terms at the end of these

Guidelines.

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Risks and safety for Australian children on the internet

Full findings from the *AU Kids Online* survey of 9-16 year olds and their parents





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www.eukidsonline.net

This report presents the AU findings for research in Australia which parallels the *EU Kids Online* project (see www.eukidsonline.net). Specifically, it includes selected findings, calculated and interpreted for Australia only, but with some comparisons made with the survey data and analysis reported in Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children*. *Full Findings.* LSE, London: EU Kids Online, and comparisons with some country reports of the 25 nations participating in EU Kids Online II.

The Australian research was funded by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation in 2010 and involved 400 children and their families, a smaller sample than the 1,000 families per country in the other 25 nations. The fieldwork used the EU Kids Online surveys and protocols, but was conducted about 6 months later than in Europe.

In line with the 'Country report template', the structure of this report and some of the background text is consistent with other country reports. The only original contribution made here is the data and analysis relating to Australia.

Previous reports and publications from *EU Kids Online* include:

- *Final recommendations for policy, methodology and research* (O'Neill, B., Livingstone, S. and McLaughlin, S., 2011)
- *Disadvantaged children and online risk* (Livingstone, S., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K., 2011)
- *EU Kids Online Final Report* (Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K., 2011)
- *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full findings* (Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K., 2011)
- *Risky communication online* (Livingstone, S., and Ólafsson, K., 2011)
- *Digital literacy and safety skills* (Sonck, N., Livingstone, S., Kuiper, E., and de Haan, J., 2011)
- *Social networking, age and privacy* (Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K., and Staksrud, E., 2011)
- *Patterns of risk and safety online. In-depth analyses from the EU Kids Online survey of 9-16 year olds and their parents in 25 countries* (Hasebrink, U., Görzig, A., Haddon, L., Kalmus, V. and Livingstone, S., 2011)
- *Cross-national comparison of risks and safety on the internet: Initial analysis from the EU Kids Online survey of European children* (Lobe, B., Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K. and Vodeb, H., 2011)
- *Who bullies and who is bullied online? A study of 9-16 year old internet users in 25 European countries* (Görzig, A., 2011)
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- *What do we know about children's use of online technologies? A report on data availability and research gaps in Europe* (2nd edn) (Staksrud, E., Livingstone, S., Haddon, L. and Ólafsson, K., 2009)
- *Best practice research guide: How to research children and online technologies in comparative perspective* (Lobe, B., Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K. and Simões, J.A., 2008)

EU Kids Online II: Enhancing Knowledge Regarding European Children's Use, Risk and Safety Online

This project has been funded by the EC Safer Internet Programme, http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/ from 2009-2011 (contract SIP-KEP-321803). Its aim is to enhance knowledge of European children's and parents' experiences and practices regarding risky and safer use of the internet and new online technologies in order to inform the promotion among national and international stakeholders of a safer online environment for children.

Adopting an approach which is child-centred, comparative, critical and contextual, EU Kids Online II has designed and conducted a major quantitative survey of 9-16 year olds experiences of online risk in 25 European countries. The findings will be systematically compared to the perceptions and practices of their parents, and they will be disseminated through a series of reports and presentations during 2010-12.

For more information, and to receive project updates, visit www.eukidsonline.net

CONTENTS

FIGURES

TABLES

1. KEY FINDINGS

1.1 Context

This report presents initial findings from an Australian survey of children and their parents designed to provide a unique insight into the balance of opportunities and risks experienced by these children as a result of their internet use. A random stratified sample of 400 9-16 year olds who use the internet, and one of their parents/carers, was interviewed between November 2010 and February 2011.

The 'AU' survey was conducted in parallel with a 25 nation survey carried out by *EU Kids Online* (see Annex 1) and funded by the EC's Safer Internet Programme. The questionnaire was designed by the *EU Kids Online* network, coordinated by the London School of Economics and Political Science. Ipsos MORI and its international affiliates conducted the research in all 26 countries.

In what follows, AU findings are compared with those from 25 other countries, all of which are European nations, although not all of which are members of the European Union. The results of this overarching European-level research in 25 nations, with 25,142 families each represented by a child aged 9-16, and the parent who knows most about the child's internet use, are reported in Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full findings*. LSE, London: EU Kids Online. See www.eukidsonline.net.

Where reference is made in this report to *EU Kids Online*, or to 'in Europe', this entails reference to the findings based on the 25,142 children involved in the *EU Kids Online* research, not to European children as a whole, nor to the children of the European Union. The 25 nations involved in the EU Kids Online research are Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Cyprus (CY), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (EL), Hungary (HU), Italy (IT), Ireland (IE), Lithuania (LT), Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Poland (PO), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovenia (SI), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE), Turkey (TU), and the United Kingdom (UK).

It should be noted that this report adopts a template used by the two other English language country-level reports, the United Kingdom and Ireland. It uses the same structure, graph placement and introductory statements to set the scene of the research and to allow easy navigability of the report for people familiar with other outputs of the *EU Kids Online* team. Although the structure of the Conclusions section differs somewhat from usual *EU Kids Online* reports, in including tables which compare Australian data with the data from the 25 other countries, the original contribution made by this report is limited to the presentation of the actual Australian data, and its analysis within the context of the report structure. The authorship of the main body of the report is the authorship for the first country-level report to be produced, which served as the basis for other country-level reports: Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risks and safety for children on the internet: The UK Report*. LSE, London: EU Kids Online.

1.2 Usage

What do 9-16 year old children in Australia say about how they access the internet?

- Compared to the 25 country average, more AU children go online at school (96% vs. 63%), at home (96% vs. 87%) and when 'out and about' (31% vs. 9%).
- 46% of AU kids go online in their bedroom or other private room and over two thirds (70%) at a friend's house. More girls (56%) than boys (38%) can access the internet from their bedroom, while in Europe these numbers are equivalent.
- Three in five AU children go online via a mobile device - 46% report handheld access to the internet (e.g. iPod Touch, iPhone or Blackberry) and an additional 14% access the internet via their mobile phone. The 25 country data is lower for handheld devices, 12%, and consequently a little higher for mobiles, 22%.

More access results in more use, and the internet is now taken for granted in many children's daily lives.

- AU children (9-16) were, on average, a little under eight years old when they first used the internet, putting them amongst the youngest first-time-users in the 26 nation study.
- 76% of AU kids go online daily or almost daily, 22% use the internet once or twice a week, leaving just 2% who go online less often. In terms of frequency of use, higher figures are seen in Sweden, Bulgaria, Estonia, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands and Finland. Australia is eighth.

- The average time spent online by AU 9-16 year olds is just over an hour and a half per day (99 minutes), higher than the 25 nation average (88 minutes).

But some children still lack key digital and safety skills, especially younger children.

- Most Australian children report being able to bookmark websites, find information on how to use the internet safely and block messages, but only just over a third (37%) say they can change filter preferences.
- Among younger Australian children there are some significant gaps in their safety skills which policy initiatives should address. Around one third of 11-12 year olds cannot block messages from people they don't wish to hear from.
- One in four (26%) of Australian 9-16 year olds say the statement "I know more about the internet than my parents" is 'very true' of them, four in ten (40%) say it is 'a bit true' and one third (34%, though 62% of 9-10 year olds) say it is 'not true' of them.

Arguably, some children use the internet too much.

- Australian children's experience of spending 'too much time' on the internet is more common than the 25 country average. 55% say they have spent less time with family and friends than they should have because of time they spent on the internet, and almost half (49%) have tried unsuccessfully to spend less time on the internet.

1.3 Activities

What do AU 9-16 year old internet users do online?

- Top activities are using the internet for schoolwork (86%), watching video clips (85%) playing games (78%), emailing (67%) and social networking (63%).
- Creating content is less common than receiving it. Even so, while 85% have watched video clips online, almost half the cohort (45%) actively contribute their own media and distribute it to friends and family. Fewer AU children have spent time in a virtual world (16%), or blogged (9%), but their participation is a little higher than in most countries involved in the research.

Social networking sites (SNS) are very popular.

- Two thirds (65%) of Australian children who use the internet have their own SNS profile, a little more than the 25 nation average of 59%.
- Only 29% of AU 9-10 year olds, but 59% of 11-12 year olds, have a SNS profile, suggesting that it is the start of secondary school, rather than the minimum age set by popular SNS providers, that triggers social networking activity.
- AU children report substantially more SNS contacts than most EU kids, with 16% saying they have over 300, equal second with the UK to Greek children's 20%. 63% of AU children have over 50 contacts, the highest percentage in all 26 nations studied.

Some of children's online communication practices could involve risk.

- Most AU SNS users have their profile set to private or partially private. Only 9% of Australian children make it public, much lower than the 26% across Europe.
- 29% of Australian 11-16 year olds (more boys than girls, more teens than younger children) say they are in communication with people they first met online, unconnected with their offline social networks.
- In the past year fewer than one in four (24%) AU 9-16 year old internet users have looked for new friends on the internet, 21% have added contacts they don't know face to face, and 10% have sent an image of themselves to someone not met face to face. Such figures are less than the 25 country average.
- One reason for using the internet to look for new friends might be that just under half (46%) of AU 11-16 year old internet users say they find it easier to be themselves online. Also, 47% talk about different things online than offline, and more than one in five (22%) talk about more private things online than when present with other people face to face.

1.4 Subjective harm

Before asking children about specific online risk experiences, we asked them about experiences online that had bothered them in some way, explaining that **by *'bothered'* we meant, *"made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen it."***

- 30% of Australian children say they have been bothered or upset by something online in the past year: two and a half times the European average (12%) and more than any other of the 25 countries. The next four countries were Denmark (28%), Estonia (25%), Norway and Sweden (both 23%). 79% of AU children say that there are things on the internet could bother other children. The European average for this is 55%, but Denmark (94%), Spain (92%), Norway (89%) and Sweden (88%) all rate more on this scale than Australia.
- By implication, one in five 9-16 year olds (21%) do not see the internet as problematic for children of their age. Younger AU children are least likely to be concerned that what's on the internet might bother other children, but equally likely to have felt bothered themselves.
- Parents seem a little less likely to see the internet as problematic for boys than for girls.

- While 30% of AU 9-10 year olds say they've been bothered by something online, their parents are less likely to recognise this. 16% of these children's parents say 'something has bothered my child online'.
- Among the next age group, 11-12 year olds, 30% also report that they have encountered something that bothered or upset them. 23% of their parents recognise this. The fact that the problematic exposure is established among 9-10 year olds indicates that the factors concerned pre-date the challenges of moving to high school.

1.5 Specific risks

The *EU Kids Online* survey explored children's experiences of a range of possible risks online. The nature of these experiences, which groups of children are most affected, and how children respond, are questions to be pursued in the future.

Sexual images

- More than two in five (44%) Australian 9-16 year olds say they have encountered sexual images in the past 12 months, whether online or offline. This is close to double the average of the other 25 countries, 23%. It is important to note that a wide range of images is included as 'sexual', reflecting the 9-16 year old interviewees. This finding does suggest that parents and teachers need to continue working to ensure children are not troubled by viewing unwanted or age inappropriate material.
- 28% of AU 11-16 year olds have seen sexual images online. 24% say they have seen online sexual images including nudity, 17% have seen someone's genitals online, 16% (more teenagers than young children) have seen images of someone having sex, and 6% say they have seen violent sexual images. Once more, it is important to bear in mind the large age range of the children in interpreting this finding.
- Regarding Australian children who have seen online sexual images, 49% of parents say their child has not seen this, while 38% recognise that they have and 14% say they don't know.
- As in other countries, 9-10 year olds are less likely to see sexual images online but are more likely to be bothered or upset by the experience if they do.
- Overall, most children have not experienced sexual images online and, of those who have, most say they were not bothered or upset by the experience.

Bullying

- In relation to online bullying, 29% of AU children (19% across Europe) say they have been bullied, and 13% say this occurred on the internet. This is more than double the average for the 25 European nations (6%).
- The most common form of bullying is nasty or hurtful messages sent to the child (7%), followed by messages being posted or passed on (4%) and other nasty things online (3%). 3% say they have been threatened online.
- 17% of Australian children say they have bullied others, though only 5% say they have bullied others online in the past 12 months.

Sexual messages ('sexting')

- 15% of AU 11-16 year old internet users have received sexual messages ('sexts'). This is an average result across the study, and most recipients are 15-16 years old. 4% of Australian children have sent sexts online, and the average EU figure is 3%. Sexts are more commonly associated with mobile phones than with internet use and are currently the subject of intensive research.[1] Some older teenagers seem to use sexts to help build trusting intimate relationships. While sexts should not automatically be seen as damaging to self or other, sending sexually suggestive texts or images poses a risk that this material can be passed on without consent, and that unwanted material may be sent and received.
- 9% of AU 11-16 year olds have been sent a sexual message, 6% have been asked to talk about sexual acts with someone online, and 5% have seen others perform sexual acts in a message. 3% have been asked for a photo or video of their 'private parts'.

Meeting online contacts offline

- 34% of Australian children have had contact online with someone they have not met face to face (the 25 nation average is 30%).
- 5% of AU kids have gone to an offline meeting with someone they first met online. This is about half the European average, which is 9% across all countries.
- Older teenagers (13-16 year olds) are much more likely than younger children to have online contact with someone they have not met face to face. They are also more likely to have gone on to meet them in person – though such instances are rare.

Other online risks

- 34% of AU 11-16 year olds have seen one or more type of potentially harmful user-generated content, ranking at 6 of 26 countries for this risk. 52% of 15-16 year old Australian girls report seeing such content. 'Harmful content' in this study takes into account the broad age range of the children and a diverse range of reasons for accessing material. For example, some older teenagers in the sample might have accessed drug-use sites to gain information about harm minimisation or to understand drug taking from a public health perspective. Others may access sexually explicit material to guide them in sexual ethics, identity, relationships and health.

- Most common are hate messages (26%), followed by ways of hurting yourself (14%) and sites talking about drug experiences (12%). 'Ways to be very thin' are reported by 9%, while 4% have visited a suicide site.
- 17% of Australian children aged 11-16 report misuse of personal data, the second highest in 26 countries (after Estonia, 18%). The main reported misuse was when someone else used a child's password or pretended to be them (13%). Some had had personal information used in a way they did not like (9%).

1.6 Parental mediation

While 76% of AU 9-16 year olds go online daily or almost daily, the same is true for 79% of their parents. Younger parents are more likely to go online often: 82% of parents of 9-12 year olds, and 75% of parents of 13-16 year olds, go onto the internet almost daily, or every day.

How do Australian parents manage their children's internet use?

- Most notably, the survey shows that parents and children in three in five AU families agree about parental mediation practices, although this is slightly lower than the EU average (about 70% agreement).
- Two thirds of AU parents talk to their children about what they do on the internet (67%), making this, as in the other 25 countries generally, the most popular way to actively mediate children's internet use.
- AU parents report considerably more active mediation of younger girls' use of the internet, and older boys', including talking to them, staying nearby, encouraging them or sharing internet use. But about one in ten parents (9%) never do any of these things.
- Helping when something is difficult to do or find (79%), suggesting how to use the internet safely (75%), and explaining why websites are good or bad (74%), are common strategies of AU parental safety mediation. Australia is ranked second (95%) of the 26 countries (after the Netherlands, 98%), in terms of children's accounts of their parents' active mediation.
- 91% of AU children say either that they are not allowed to do some of a list of online activities (disclose personal information, upload, download, etc.) or that restrictions apply. 99% of younger Australian children (9-12) report restrictive mediation.
- Monitoring strategies are adopted by almost three in five (59%) AU parents, yet this is the least favoured mediation approach compared with safety guidance (94%), positive support (91%) and making rules about internet use (91%). Monitoring is least popular throughout the 26 nations.
- 35% of AU parents block or filter websites, and 36% track the websites their children visit, according to their children. Australia ranks at 6 out of 26 countries in this respect, higher than most European nations.
- Both children and parents consider parental mediation helpful to some degree. Over two thirds of children (74%) say it helps a lot or a little.
- 86% of Australian parents are confident they can help their child a fair amount, or a lot, if something bothers their child online.
- However, 47% of AU children think that parental mediation limits what they do online, with 14% saying that their activities are limited a lot.
- Three quarters of AU children (75%) pay attention to parental mediation, this being above the 25 nation average (64%). However, 20% say they ignore their parents' mediation 'a little' and 5% say 'a lot'.
- 33% AU parents think it fairly or very likely that their child will experience something that bothers them online in the next six months.
- 18% of AU children (and 30% of 9-10 year olds) would like their parents to take more of an interest in their internet use, while 55% of parents think they should do more in relation to their child's internet use.

1.7 Other forms of mediation

In addition to parents, other sources, including teachers and friends, may support children's internet use and safety.

- 97% of AU children say their teachers have been involved in at least one of the forms of active mediation asked about. This is substantially higher than the 25 nation average of 73%, and means that Australia leads a ranking of all 26 countries.
- Friends are likely to mediate in a practical way, helping each other to do or find something when there is a difficulty (75%). When Australian children are bothered by something online, 37% say they have turned to a friend for help, but they are more likely to turn to a teacher (70%) or a parent (67%).
- While 32% of AU children say they have received some guidance on safe internet use from their friends, 52% say they have also provided such advice. This is a high percentage, ranking Australia second out of 26 nations. However, most internet safety advice is received from teachers (83%), then parents (75%), then peers (32%): even though children in most European countries choose their parents as the first people to turn to for safety advice.
- Other relatives (57%) are also important in providing advice to AU children on how to use the internet safely.

- Australian parents receive internet safety advice first and foremost from family and friends, and their child's school (both 58%), then the traditional media (42%) government (34%), internet service providers (32%), and websites (30%). In Australia, a higher percentage of parents is willing to acknowledge the sources of their information about internet safety (96%) than is the case in Europe (87%).
- Almost all Australian parents say they want further information on internet safety. Only 1% (2% of parents of children aged 15-16) say they don't want any more safety information.

1.8 Conclusions

It would seem that in spite of very considerable efforts put into raising awareness and improving safety online for Australian children in recent years, a comparatively high proportion (30%) are bothered by some things they experience online, predominantly related to online bullying and seeing sexual images. Australian children experience a high degree of access and use, but also a high degree of risk. AU parents are very active in pursuing positive mediation strategies, however, as are Australian teachers and risks should be understood in relation to the age of the children concerned and the reasons they have for accessing or sending risky material.

Future safety efforts should focus especially on younger children as they gain internet access, and on the diversification of platforms (access in bedrooms, via mobile phones and handheld devices). The array of possible risks online continues to change, with emerging risks including potentially harmful user-generated content such as anorexia, self-harm or suicide sites. Notable here are the one in two older Australian girls, aged 15-16, reporting that they have accessed such potentially harmful content, with 47% seeing hate messages.

When looking to policy recommendations arising from these findings, it is important to acknowledge that high internet skills, and high internet use, are associated with increased risk[2]. Children with less access to the internet are also less likely to experience online risks, but reducing exposure to risk may not always be the best answer if the aim is to promote children's safe, confident and creative internet use. The *EU Kids Online* research indicates that "children encounter a fair number of risks that, at least as they see it, are not problematic, upsetting or harmful [...] children learn to cope by encountering some degree of risk and, it seems, many do cope successfully." [3] While it remains important to address children's exposure to risk, especially for younger children, the critical issue is where children experience distress or harm as a result. The 25 nation *EU Kids Online* study (which provided the blueprint for the Australian study) reveals that while a minority of children are upset by online risks, many benefit from the advice and tools available to them to cope with such upsetting circumstances.

Given that online risk and opportunity go hand-in-hand, and building the future digital workforce is a national priority, policies to reduce harm should not unduly prevent children from developing confidence and competence in their use of the internet. Nearly half of Australian children (47%) say their parents' efforts at mediation have the effect of restricting their online activities. The trade-off is clear, if difficult for parents and policymakers to manage.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Overview

Over the past fifteen years, children and teenagers have increasingly gained access to the internet and to other forms of convergent and digital media. Domestic access, in particular, has progressed from a dial-up connection, through broadband to wireless technologies. Internet access has become pervasive with young people accessing and contributing data to websites and online services using smart phones and other handheld media. Policy makers, educators, industry, welfare organisations, parents and children all have a stake in the debates around access, opportunity and harm. The challenge is to maximise the benefits flowing from internet access while minimising harm.

This report presents the initial findings from an Australian survey of 9-16 year olds (see Annex 2) and provides a unique insight into the balance of opportunities and risks experienced by Australian children on the internet. It compares findings by age, gender and socioeconomic status; it compares the accounts of children and their parents; and it compares Australian children's experiences in relation to those across 25 European nations.

The Australian survey was conducted in parallel with, but 6 months later than, a 25 country survey carried out by the *EU Kids Online* network and funded by the EC's Safer Internet Programme. The *EU Kids Online* project aims to enhance knowledge of children's and parents' experiences and practices regarding risky and safer use of the internet and new online technologies, and thereby to inform the promotion of a safer online environment for children. The countries of the *EU Kids Online* network are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the UK. Australia was invited to participate as part of a commitment to internationalise the findings.

For the Australian survey, a random stratified sample of 400 9-16 year olds who use the internet, together with one of their parents/carers, was interviewed during Nov/Feb 2010-11. This contrasts with survey dates of Spring/Summer 2010 in Europe. The survey questionnaire was designed by the *EU Kids Online* network, coordinated by the London School of Economics and Political Science. Fieldwork in Europe was conducted by Ipsos MORI, and in Australia by their local affiliate company, Ipsos/I-view social research.

Where the Australian findings are compared with those from other countries, the international findings are taken from the pan-European report: Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K. (2011). R*isks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full Findings*. LSE, London: EU Kids Online, or from individual country reports, all available at www.eukidsonline.net.

2.2 Theoretical framework

The research and policy agenda regarding online opportunities remains contested, focused on access to education, communication, information and participation, alongside risks of harm posed to children by internet use. The pan-European report clarifies the approach taken by the *EU Kids Online* network in terms of the project's theoretical framework, including a critical analysis of the relation between use, risk and potential harm to children associated with the internet.

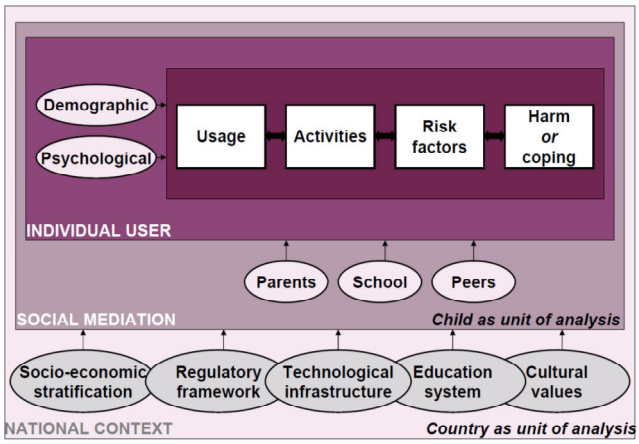
The EU Kids Online research suggests that a range of factors relating to internet use may contribute to the possibility of children experiencing harm. The first pre-requisite is access to the internet: the amount of time spent online, the technology used and the location. Use leads to opportunities around skills development and to the experience of risks. Experience of risk can lead to the development of coping strategies and resilience, but it can also lead to harm. Online risks are sometimes directly related to offline risks.

Six sets of risks were investigated. These are: seeing sexual images/ encountering pornography; being bullied and engaging in bullying; 'sexting' (which is constructed as sending and receiving sexual messages); meeting strangers offline where first contact was via the internet; engaging with negative user-generated content; and the misuse of personal data.

The research did not assume that exposure to risk means exposure to harm. Children and young people respond to risk and cope with challenging experiences in different ways. The study investigated whether children were upset by their online activities, how upset they were, and how

long they were upset for. For most children, there is a low probability that a risky online activity will lead to harm.

Figure 1: Relating online use, activities and risk factors to harm to children[4]



As shown in Figure 1, many external factors may influence children's experiences. In this report, we examine the role of demographic factors such as the child's age, gender, and socio-economic status (SES). Socio-economic status was assessed by combining two measures – the level of education and the type of occupation of the main wage earner in the household. Educational systems vary across countries, so national measures were standardised using the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED).

In subsequent reports 2012-14, analysis will encompass the role of (1) psychological factors such as emotional problems, self-efficacy, risk-taking, (2) the social factors that mediate children's online and offline experiences, especially the activities of parents, teachers and friends, and (3) the economic, social and cultural factors that may shape the online experience at the national level.

2.3 Methodology

It is particularly difficult to measure private or upsetting aspects of a child's experience. The EU Kids Online network's approach to mapping risky experiences of children centred on several key responses to the methodological challenges faced. **The survey was conducted as a face to face interview in the children's own homes. The questionnaire included a self-completion section for sensitive questions to avoid the requirement for the child to verbalise their response, and to alleviate the risk of them being heard by parents, family members or the interviewer.** The Australian research used an interviewer supported computer-assisted self-completion segment for questions on risk and harm.

The methodology was approved by the *LSE Research Ethics Committee* and appropriate protocols were put in place to ensure that the rights and wellbeing of children and families were protected during the research process. In Australia, the Human Research Ethics Committee at Edith Cowan University, and Ms Kim Gifkins, ECU's Research Ethics Officer, monitors ethical compliance. At the end of the interview, children and their families were provided with a leaflet providing tips on internet safety and details of relevant help lines.

Key features of the methodology include:

- Cognitive testing and pilot testing, to check thoroughly the children's understandings of and reactions to the questions.
- A detailed survey that questions children themselves, to gain a direct account of their online experiences.
- Equivalent questions asked of each type of risk to compare risks, and online and offline dimensions.
- Matched comparison questions to the parent who knows most about the child's internet use.
- Measures of mediating factors – psychological vulnerability, social support and safety practices.
- Follow up questions to pursue how children respond to or cope with online risk.
- The inclusion of the experiences of young children, aged 9-10 years (are often excluded from surveys).

Full details of the project methodology, materials, technical fieldwork report and research ethics are available at www.eukidsonline.net.

Throughout this report, 'children' refers to 9-16 year olds in Australia who use the internet at least rarely. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that in 2009, rates of internet use were similar for boys and girls (80% and 79% respectively). The proportion of children using the internet increased with age; 60% of 5-8 year olds used the internet, increasing to 96% of 12-14 year olds.[5]

3. USAGE

What do 9-16 year old children in Australia say about how they use the internet? The face to face interview with children included a range of questions about 'using the internet'. The interviewer reminded children that, 'using the internet' includes any and all devices by which, and any and all places where, the child goes online.

3.1 Where/how children go online

With the spread of mobile and personalised devices, the ways in which children go online are diversifying. In their bedroom, or when 'out and about', children may escape supervision entirely, using the internet privately. Further, while schools are generally highly supervised locations, cybercafés are popular in some countries, allowing children relatively unsupervised use.

Table 1: Where Australian children use the internet

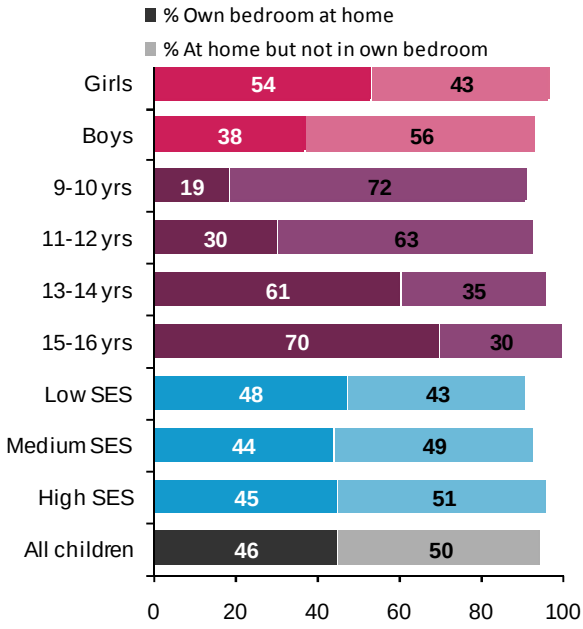
% children who say they use the internet at the following locations	
At school or college	96
Living room (or other public room) at home	87
At a friend's home	70
At a relative's home	62
Own bedroom (or other private room) at home	45
When 'out and about'	31
In a public library or other public place	26
In an internet café	6
Average number of locations	4.2

QC301a-h: Looking at this card, please tell me where you use the internet these days.[6] *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: All children who use the internet.

- **As shown in Table 1, nearly all AU children who use the internet go online both at school or college (96%) and at home in a public room (87%). Additionally, 70% use it at a friend's house, 45% in their bedroom, and 31% have mobile access**.
- Since Australian children on average can access the internet in about four different places, they clearly enjoy considerable flexibility as regards when and how they go online.
- **Compared to the European average, more Australian children go online at school (96% vs. 63%), in a public space in the home (87% vs. 62%) and when 'out and about' (31% vs. 9%), reflecting widespread adoption of mobile phones and handheld devices. Access in libraries is also higher in Australia (26% vs. 12%).**
- Australian children have about the same amount of access from the privacy of a bedroom (45% vs. 49%) as in Europe generally. Fewer Australian children use internet cafés (6% in the Australian vs.12% in Europe).

Figure 2: Children's use of internet at home



QC301a, b: Looking at this card, please tell me where you use the internet these days.

Base: All children who use the internet.

- Figure 2 shows that, as in Europe, private use in the child's bedroom is strongly differentiated by age. For younger children use is generally in a public room, while teenagers often have private access.
- Unlike Europe, there are clear differences by gender with girls more likely to have bedroom access. Further, in Europe as a whole, the tendency is for children of higher SES to have more private access but this is not the case in Australia.

Table 2: Devices by which children go online

% children who use the internet	
Shared PC	76
Games console	51
Other handheld portable device/smartphone	45
Television set	43
Mobile phone	40
Shared laptop	38
Own laptop	31
Own PC	26
Average number of devices of use	3.5

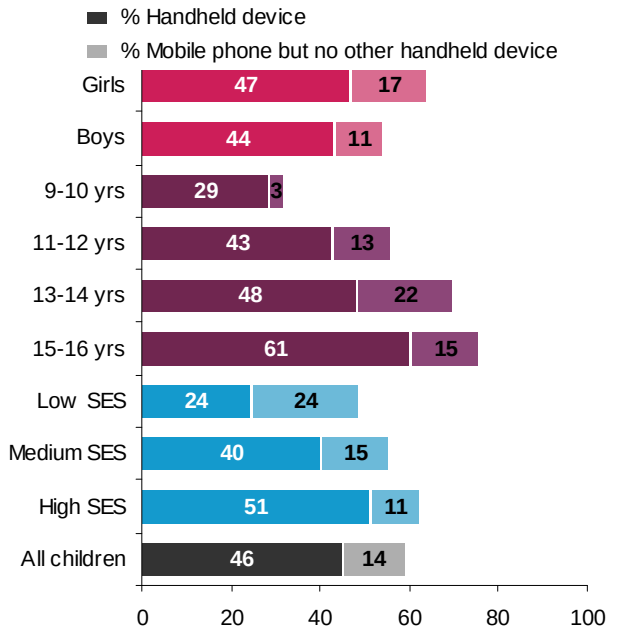
QC300a-h: Which of these devices do you use for the internet these days? *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: All children who use the internet.

- As shown in Table 2, Australian children's use of the internet via private platforms (own laptop, mobile phone) is substantial. Private use is, it may be suggested, catching up with use via shared platforms (shared computer or laptop, television set).
- **Compared with the European average, Australian children are more likely to access the internet using a range of platforms, including: own laptop (31% vs. 24% in Europe); via the television (43% vs. 32%), and via a games console (51% vs. 26%).**
- **Australian children are also more likely than children in Europe to go online via their mobiles phone (40% vs. 31%) or other handheld device (45% vs. 12%).**
- The average number of devices used is slightly higher in Australia than Europe (3.5 vs. 2.5).

It seems that Australian children use the internet from a wider range of devices than is the average for Europe. These devices are distinctive also in offering private, personalised internet access.

Figure 3: Child accesses the internet using a mobile phone or a handheld device



QC300h, e: Which of these devices do you use for the internet these days? [7]

Base: All children who use the internet.

- Figure 3 shows gender difference in handheld access unusually favouring girls. There is significantly greater use in Australia than in Europe (64% girls and 55% boys in Australia, compared with 11% and 13% respectively across European countries).
- The pattern of age differences is the same as in Europe generally, with greater use by older children.
- The SES differences in going online via a handheld device are similar in Australia to those across Europe, but access is far more pervasive in Australia, with 60% of Australian children using a mobile/handheld device compared with 34% of European children.

Beyond matters of access, there are several dimensions of internet usage that are explored below: age of first internet use, frequency of internet use, and time spent online.

- Children across Europe are going online ever younger, with the average age of first use among 9-16 years old being nine years old. This varies by age group, with the youngest group saying they were seven, on average, when they first went online while 15-16 year olds say they were eleven on first use.

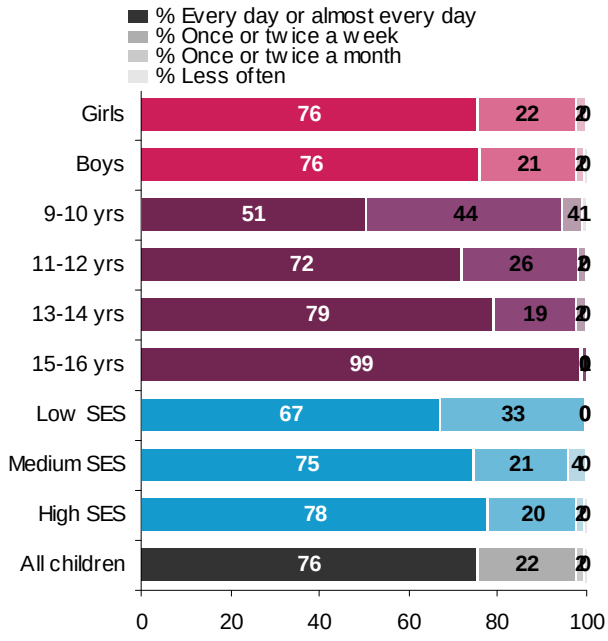
- **In Australia, children are on average a little under eight years old when they first use the internet, putting Australia amongst the 'youngest first use' countries in Europe, where children start to use the internet at a relatively early age.**

As Livingstone et al found for Europe[8], in terms of the frequency of internet use, the findings suggest a division of children into two groups: those who use the internet daily or almost daily (60%) and those who use it once or twice a week (33%). Combined, this is 93% of all children who go online regularly; 5% go online once or twice a month, 2% less often.

By contrast, in Australia, children who use the internet go online more often than in Europe (Figure 4):

- **76% go online daily or almost daily, 22% use it once or twice a week, leaving just 2% who go online less often than weekly.**
- Daily use is far more common among teenagers than younger children, with 99% of Australian 15-16 year olds saying they use the internet every day. There are no gender differences, but some small SES difference.

Figure 4: How often children use the internet

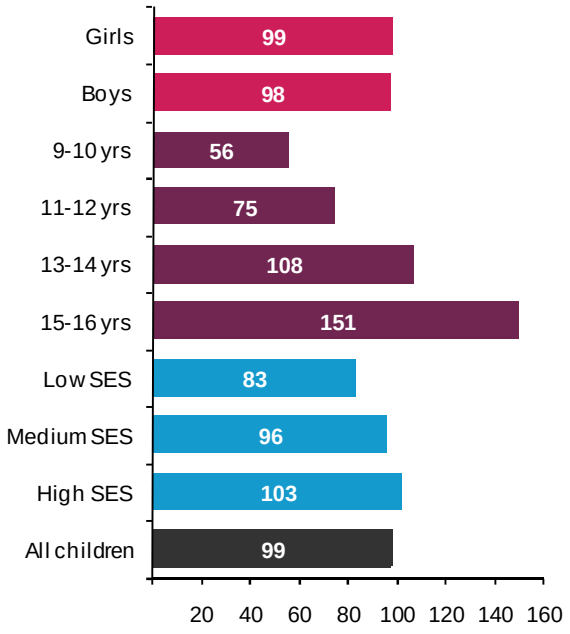


QC303: How often do you use the internet?

Base: All children who use the internet.

How long do Australian children spend online each day (Figure 5)? Time spent online was calculated using a method widely used to measure television viewing. It asks children for separate estimates for an average school day and an average non-school day. These are combined to estimate average internet use each day, noting that *time spent online is difficult to measure because children multi-task, going online while doing other activities while not turning off the internet.*

Figure 5: How long children use the internet for on an average day (in minutes)



Derived from QC304 and QC305: About how long do you spend using the internet on a normal school day / normal non-school day?

Base: All children who use the internet.

- **The average time spent online by Australian 9-16 year olds is a little over an hour and a half per day (99 minutes), higher than the 25 nation average (88 minutes).**
- Gender differences in time spent online are negligible, although there are SES differences.
- The largest difference in time spent online is by age. The 15-16 year olds spend over two and a half hours per day online on average (151 minutes): this is over 2.5 times that of the youngest group. Australia 9-10 year olds spend 56 minutes per day online, on average.

3.2 Digital literacy and safety skills

Digital literacy and safety skills play a vital role in children's use of the internet, argues *EU Kids Online,* observing that these skills are assumed to result from, and further stimulate, the range and depth of children's online activities. Whereas 'digital literacy' encompasses a wide variety of skills and competencies, digital safety skills comprise a subset of these capabilities. It might be hoped that children who have advanced digital skills will also be safer online, but *EU Kids Online* research has identified the phenomenon of 'high use/high risk'[9]. Even so, "Policy makers anticipate that the more digitally literate or skilled children become, the more they will gain from the internet while also being better prepared to avoid or cope with online risks."[10]

Table 3 shows the skills which children were asked about in the survey.

- **Bookmarking websites, finding information on how to use the internet safely and blocking messages are skills that most Australian children have. Fewer (just over a third, 37%) claim to be able to change filter preferences.**
- **On average, Australian children said they have 5.4 of the eight skills asked about, which is somewhat above the European average (of 4.2). Finland is the only European country to record an average of more skills per child than Australian kids.**
- Even so, among younger children there are some gaps in safety skills which could be addressed by policy initiatives. Around one third of 11-12 year olds cannot block messages from people they don't wish to hear from.

Since, in past research, boys have often claimed to have more digital skills than girls, it is noteworthy that the Australian data indicates some gender dimensions to the different skills assessed, related to age. In particular, younger girls are more likely than boys to know how to block messages from people they wish not to hear from, but a higher percentage of older boys than girls claim this skill. Whereas younger boys are more likely than girls to say they can compare websites to decide if information is true, older girls overtake boys in this competency area. These changes may indicate the different fears and interests held by Australian children at different ages.

Table 3: Children's digital literacy and safety skills (age 11+)

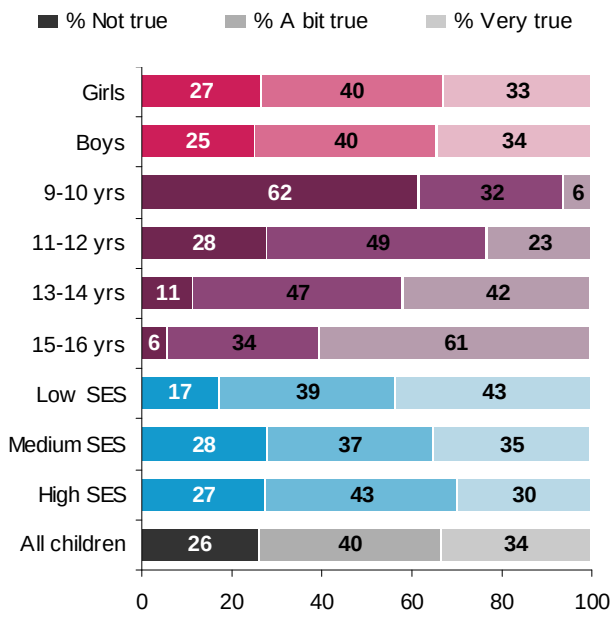
	11-12 year old		13-16 year old		
% who say they can…	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	All
Bookmark a website	84	80	90	92	88
Block messages from someone you don't want to hear from	63	72	92	81	80
Change privacy settings on a social networking profile	58	62	82	87	76
Find information on how to use the internet safely	67	62	79	83	76
Compare different websites to decide if information is true	67	56	71	77	70
Block unwanted adverts or junk mail/spam	65	47	79	72	69
Delete the record of which sites you have visited	57	39	78	70	65
Change filter preferences	26	13	54	37	37
Average number of skills	4.6	4.2	6.1	5.9	5.4

QC320a-d and QC321a-d: Which of these things do you know how to do on the internet? Please say yes or no to each of the following... If you don't know what something is or what it means, don't worry, just say you don't know.

Base: All children aged 11-16 who use the internet.

Additionally, as a simple, global measure of online self-confidence among young people, the *EU Kids Online* survey also asked the children (now including the 9-10 year olds once more) to say how true it is for them that "I know more about the internet than my parents" (Figure 6).

Figure 6: "I know more about the internet than my parents"



QC319a: How true are these of you? I know more about the internet than my parents. Please answer not true, a bit true or very true.

- **On average, one in three AU 9-16 year olds (34%) say that the statement, "I know more about the internet than my parents," is 'very true' of them, four in ten (40%) say it is 'a bit true' and just over a quarter (25%) say it is 'not true' of them.**
- There is a smaller gender difference in Australia than in Europe, with about as many boys as girls claiming this is 'very true': 33% AU girls and 34% AU boys, compared with 34% girls and 38% boys in the European research.
- Unsurprisingly, the older the children the more confident they are that they know more than their parents – among 15-16 year olds, 95% say it's 'a bit' or 'very' true that they know more than their parents. (This figure is 87% in Europe.) However, **62% of Australian 9-10 year olds say they do not know more about the internet than their parents, suggesting plenty of scope for parents to guide younger children in using the internet.**
- Children from lower SES homes are more confident that they know more about the internet than their parents, reflecting the same pattern found for European children.

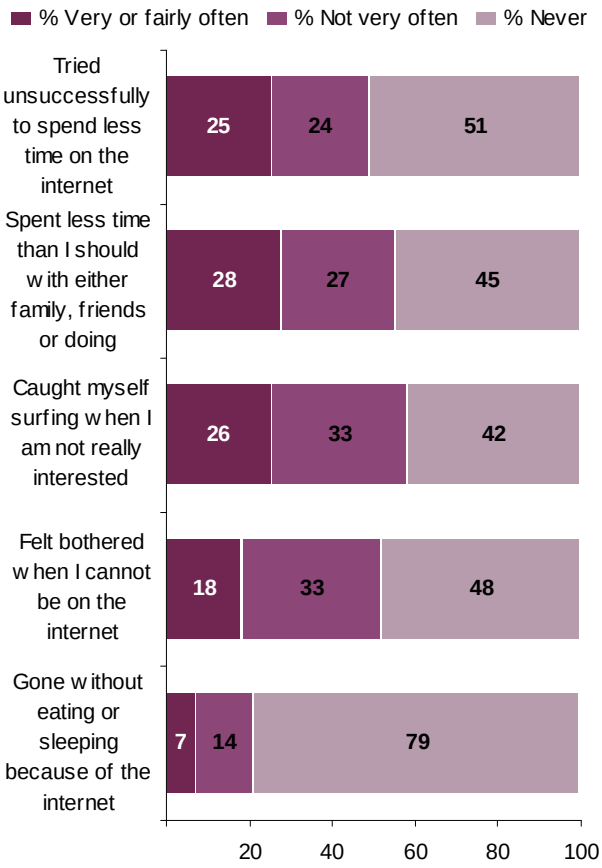
3.3 Excessive use of the internet

There has been considerable discussion over the past decade as to whether the internet is addictive[11]. A part-UNESCO-funded report, looking at the effects of game-playing on gamers, comments that "addiction in a non-medical sense is an extremely controversial concept […] For example, the concept is almost exclusively used by people who perceive the activity in question as a deviation from the norm and a deviation from the desirable"[12]. Such statements highlight the fact that people might make comments about 'addiction' as a part of passing judgement on other people's internet activities. Such judgements can lead to power struggles, especially between older children and their parents, resulting in conflict and concern. Even so, there is a growing interest in investigating 'excessive' internet use[13] . Drawing on prior measurements of computer or games addiction, *EU Kids Online* asked 11-16 year olds questions about their internet use. The focus was on the conflict their online activities might introduce with their family, or schoolwork tasks, together with whether the child had experienced not being able to reduce or stop their internet use.

Although many children report little experience of these indicators of excessive use, AU children's experiences are higher, compared with the European rankings (See below, Figure 7).

- **Over half (55%) agree that they have spent less time with family and friends than they should have, because of time they spend on the internet (higher than the 35% European average).**
- Three in five (59%) say they have caught themselves surfing when they were not really interested, with over half (51%) feeling bothered when they could not go online: higher than the European average (42% and 33%, respectively).
- Almost a half (49%) of AU kids say they have tried unsuccessfully to spend less time on the internet.
- As in Europe, it is much less common to go without sleeping or eating because of internet use (21%).

Figure 7: Excessive use of the internet among children (age 11+)



QC144a-e: How often have these things happened to you?

Base: All children aged 11-16 who use the internet.

We then calculated the percentage of children who answer 'fairly' or 'very often' to one or more of these five experiences. This revealed that Australia's profile is joint first with Estonia, leading the 26 country comparison in terms of excessive internet use. 50% of Australian children answer 'fairly' or 'very often' to one or more of these five experiences, compared with a European average of 23%.

4. ACTIVITIES

4.1 Range of online activities

What do AU children aged 9-16 say they do when they go online? The *EU Kids Online* survey asked children about which online activities they take up, so as to understand the opportunities they enjoy and to provide a context for the subsequent investigation of online risks.

Table 4 shows what Australian children do online.

- **Use of the internet for school work is the top online activity out of the 17 activities asked about - 86% of AU children use the internet for schoolwork, just above the 25 nation average (85%). This affirms the importance of incorporating the internet into educational contexts.**
- Watching video clips (85%) is the next most popular activity, followed by playing internet games (78%). In contrast, European kids rank playing games more highly (83%) followed by watching video clips (76%).
- Other forms of engaging with user-generated content, such as visiting a social networking site profile are similar in Australia (63%) and in Europe (62%).
- **Australia ranks email as the fourth most important use, with two-thirds of children doing this (67%), while half use instant messaging (51%, sixth priority). Only 18% of AU Kids say they've visited a chatroom in the past month. In Europe, communicating with others is also important (e.g. email 61%, instant messaging, 62%, visiting chatrooms 23%). Interestingly, 30% of Australian children have used a webcam, equivalent to their European counterparts (31%).**
- **Although creating content is generally less common than receiving content, Australian children do this more than in many other countries.** More children have created a character, pet or avatar (26% in AU vs. 18% in Europe), while the same percentage (16% in AU and in Europe) have spent time in a virtual world. 19% of Australian kids have used a file sharing site (18% in Europe generally), and 9% have blogged (11% in Europe).

Table 4: Children's activities online in the past month

	9-12 year old		13-16 year old		
% who have…	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	All
Used the internet for school work	84	84	88	88	86
Watched video clips	80	77	89	92	85
Played internet games on your own or against the computer	94	78	75	61	78
Sent/received email	48	55	74	91	67
Visited a social networking profile	35	50	85	84	63
Used instant messaging	29	36	63	74	51
Put (or posted) photos, videos or music to share with others	18	35	57	72	45
Played games with other people on the internet	60	39	54	20	44
Downloaded music or films	25	23	57	66	43
Put (or posted) a message on a website	23	28	49	64	41
Read/watched the news on the internet	26	19	52	38	34
Used a webcam	22	29	32	37	30
Created a character, pet or avatar	42	34	15	13	26
Used file sharing sites	8	8	30	26	19
Visited a chatroom	19	19	17	15	18
Spent time in a virtual world	20	17	14	13	16
Written a blog or online diary	7	5	6	17	9
Average number of activities	6.2	6.2	8.5	8.7	7.3

QC102: How often have you played internet games in the past 12 months? QC306a-d, QC308a-f and QC311a-f: Which of the following things have you done in the past month on the internet?[14] *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: All children who use the internet.

Table 4 also reveals some noteworthy age and gender differences.

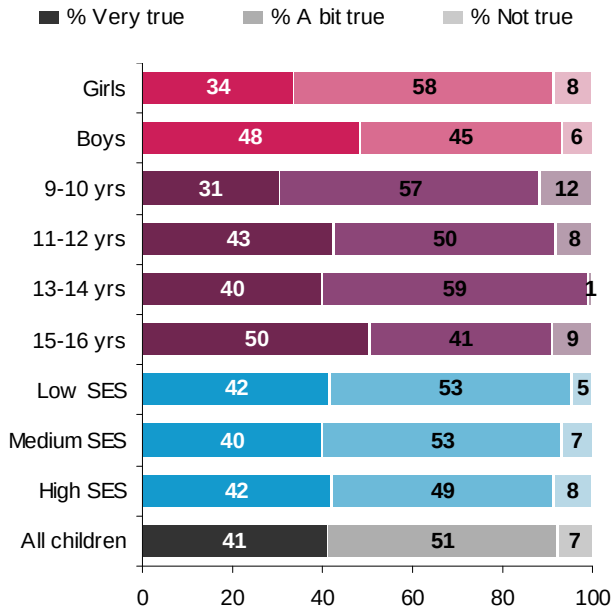
- **Comparatively few activities span the age range (for example, using the internet for school work, visiting a chatroom). Some activities increase substantially over the years (email, social networking, posting videos or music to share, instant messaging and downloading music or films). Some decrease: playing internet games, creating avatars.**
- Some participatory activities (e.g. writing a blog) and some that may be considered risky (e.g. using file sharing sites) attract few younger children.
- **Both across the 25 nations, and in Australia, gender differences are generally small (except that boys play games more), this marking a change from earlier research, where many activities were found to differentiate girls and boys.**
- However, it is the case that, among younger children (9-12 years), girls use email, instant messaging and social network sites more, and are more likely to post photos and videos and use a webcam than boys. On the other hand, boys are more likely to watch the news online, create an avatar and play computer games alone or with others than are girls.
- Among teenagers (13-16 years), gender differences are still marked in relation to games, with boys playing more against the computer, and with others online, and using online news services. Girls are still more likely to email, to use instant messaging, to post photos, videos or music to share with others, and are almost three times more likely to say they blog.

4.2 Quality of online content

Children do not enjoy equivalent opportunities to access 'good' material produced by their own cultural or language group, or reflecting their social and community values. **Although an objective assessment of online opportunities is difficult, the *EU Kids Online* survey asked children for their own assessment of 'good' content** (Figure 8).

- It is perhaps surprising, since Australia is a comparatively wealthy country, and since its national language dominates the internet worldwide, that Australian children are not more satisfied with online provision. Given the huge array of content online in the English language, one might conclude that what is offered online should be very satisfactory for Australian kids. This is not the case in Australia, Ireland or the UK. In contrast, the children in Lithuania, Greece and Belgium are the most satisfied in the European study.
- Nonetheless, 41% of AU children say it is 'very true' and 51% say it is 'a bit true' that there are lots of good things for them to do online; while 7% say the statement is 'not true'. **Australian children are, therefore, in line with most European children, for whom, on average, 90% (compared with 92% in AU) say it is 'very true' or 'a bit true' that there are lots of good things to do online.**

Figure 8: "There are lots of things on the internet that are good for children of my age"



QC319c: There are lots of things on the internet that are good for children of my age. Response options: very true, a bit true, not true.

Base: All children who use the internet.

- Turning to the socio-demographic variables, Australian girls are less enthusiastic about online content (34% AU girls vs. 42% European girls answering 'very true'), whereas Australian boys (48%) are slightly more positive than their counterparts in the 25 nation study (46%).
- As in *EU Kids Online* generally, AU teenagers aged 15-16 years are especially positive. In Australia, as in Europe as a whole, there is little SES difference.

4.3 Children's use of social networking sites (SNS)

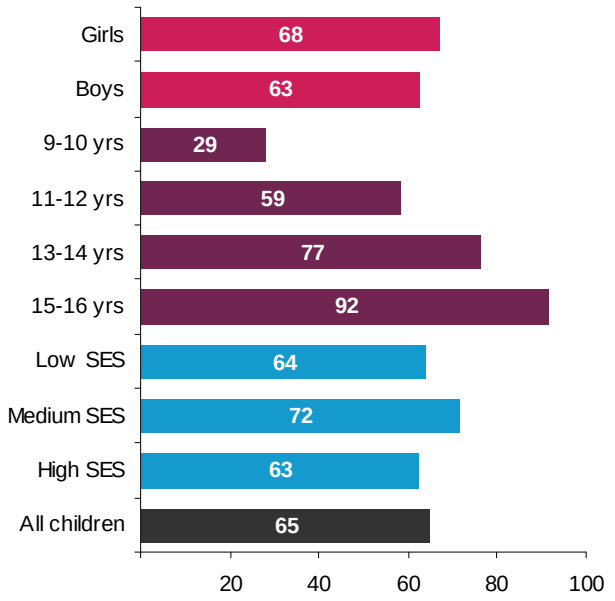
Many children in Australia have a social networking site (SNS) profile, and this is also true for children in Europe. Even though the rules of sites such as Facebook say that children must be 13 or over to have an SNS profile, more than half of 11-12 year olds in the AU study say they have an SNS profile, underlining worries around companies' age checks and restrictions. Most SNSs offer exceptional opportunities for interactivity and online participation and, as the *EU Kids Online* research makes clear, "By integrating chat, messaging, contacts, photo albums and blogging functions, SNSs integrate online opportunities and risks more seamlessly than previously."[15]

SNSs are one aspect of the growth of Web 2.0, which focuses on user-generated content, interactivity and participation. Other Web 2.0 applications include Wikis and blogs. Policy-makers, educators and parents can see the benefits of encouraging young people to use these opportunities to express themselves and collaborate with others, but SNS use raises issues about changing definitions of 'friendship', as well as concerns around privacy and the lasting nature of children's digital footprints. Further, integrating a range of social media applications within the SNS itself adds extra possibilities for perpetrating or experiencing anti-social online behaviour such as stalking, harassment and 'flaming'.

As shown in Figure 9:

- **65% of children who use the internet in Australia have their own SNS profile, this being a little higher than the European average of 59%.**
- **The older the child, the more likely they are to have profiles, rising to 92% of 15-16 year olds having an SNS profile.**
- **Since many SNSs have a minimum age of 13, the findings for 9-10 year olds (Australia 29%; 26% in Europe) and especially 11-12 year olds (Australia 59%; 49% in Europe) seem high, suggesting that some give a false age when setting up a profile.**
- The rise in SNS profiles for 11-12 year olds also suggests, in an Australian context, that the peer expectation of social networking starts before secondary school.
- More Australian girls than boys have profiles (68% vs. 63%): a bigger gap than in Europe (60% vs. 58%, respectively).
- It is perhaps puzzling that children from the highest SES homes are less likely to have a profile, even if almost two in three have one (63%). In contrast, in the European sample as a whole, 4% points differentiate all three SES groups (57-61%). Closer examination suggests that for Australian children from high SES homes, there are significantly fewer 'under-age' users (9-12 years).

Figure 9: Children who have a profile on a social networking site



QC313: Do you have your OWN profile on a social networking site that you currently use, or not?

Base: All children who use the internet.

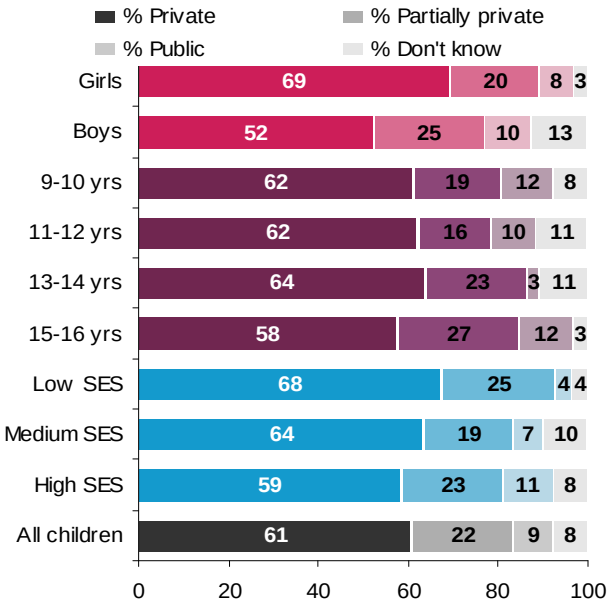
What do we know about how children use social networking, once they have a profile? The survey asked several questions of children with profiles.

- Despite popular media stories of children with hundreds of contacts, few European children report having more than 300 contacts on their social networking profile (9%), though one in five (20%) has between 100 and 300; and half have up to 50 contacts, 19% have fewer than 10.
- **Australian children report substantially more SNS contacts than in most of Europe, and more claim over 50 contacts than in any other country of the 26 compared. Among Australian SNS users, 16% report more than 300 contacts, 26% have between 100 and 300, 21% have between 51 and 100 and 24% have 11-50 contacts. Just 13% have fewer than ten contacts.**

Do such wide circles of contacts imply that Australian kids have no sense of privacy, including anyone as a 'friend'?

- **By contrast with many countries across Europe, Figure 10 shows that Australian SNS users are much more likely to have their profile set to private or partially private: 83% in Australia compared with 71% across the 25 European nations.**
- AU children are less likely to post their address or phone number (6%, compared with 14% in Europe).
- AU children are much more likely to say they show an incorrect age (34% compared with the Europe average of 16%).

Figure 10: Children's use of privacy settings on their social networking profile



QC317: Is your profile set to …? Public, so that everyone can see; partially private, so that friends of friends or your networks can see; private so that only your friends can see; don't know.

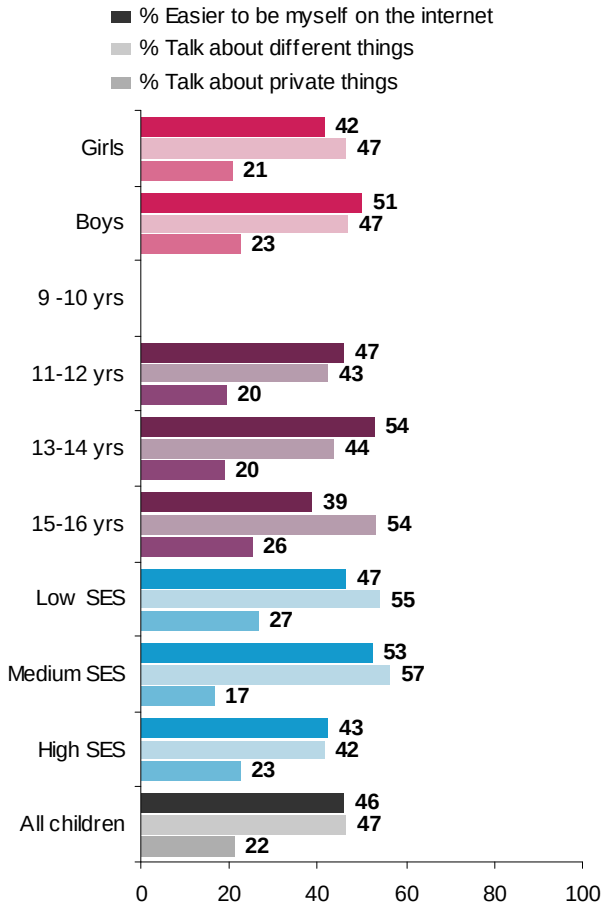
Base: All children who have a profile on a social networking site.

A breakdown of the use of privacy settings by socio-demographic factors is shown in Figure 10:

- **AU boys are more likely to have public settings (10% vs. 8% of girls), a much smaller prevalence but similar pattern to the European sample as a whole (where 30% boys v 23% girls use public settings).**
- Young teenagers (13-14) in Australia are least likely to have public settings (3%, compared to 25% in Europe). This rises to 12% for older children (15-16); while 12% (Australia) vs. 27% (Europe) have public profiles.
- Australian children from low SES homes are the most likely to choose private settings; in Europe it is high SES kids that are private.

One reason why children may use SNS communication is that it is easier for them to feel more confident online than in person. *EU Kids Online* explored this dimension by inviting children to compare their approaches to communication online and offline (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Online and offline communication compared (% 11+ who say a bit true or very true)



QC103: How true are these of you? Percentage who said 'A bit true' or 'Very true'

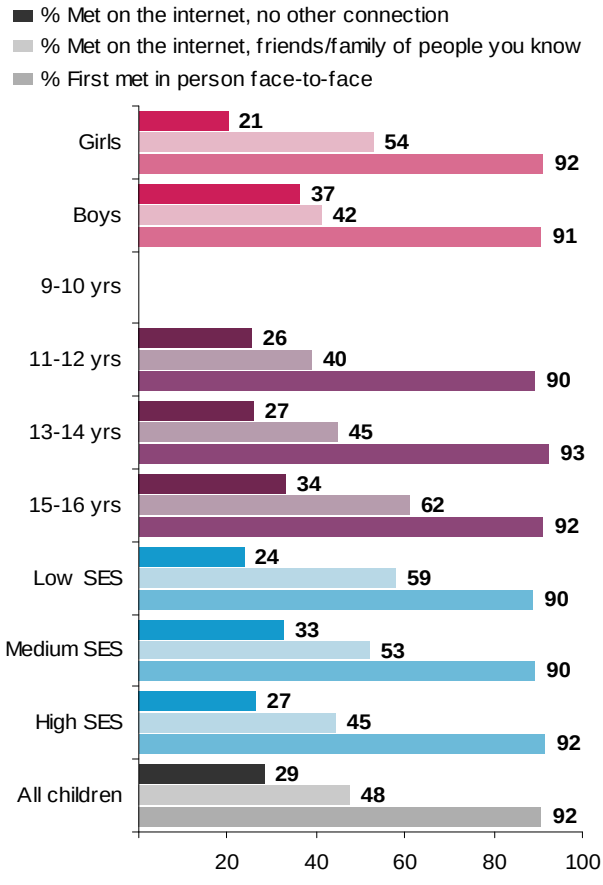
Base: All children aged 11-16 who use the internet.

- Roughly half (46%) 11-16 year old Australian internet users say they find it 'easier to be myself' on the internet, while 47% say they talk about different things. Slightly more than one in five children (22%) talk more about private things when online than is the case with face to face.
- This is especially the case for 15-16 year olds, who appear to find the internet a particularly good place to talk about private matters.

- Boys (51%) appear a little more likely than girls (42%) to find the internet a good place to be themselves.

Insofar as the internet offers some children an opportunity for more personal or intimate communication, this raises the crucial question, with whom are they communicating? For each platform (email, SNS, chatrooms, IM, games, virtual worlds) that the child had used in the past month, he or she was asked about "the types of people you have had contact with" (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Nature of children's online contacts (11+)



QC310: I'd like you to tell me the types of people you have had contact with when doing each of these things. Response options: people who you first met in person face to face; people who you first met on the internet, but who are friends or family of other people you know in person; people who you first met on the internet, but who have no other connection to your life outside of the internet. *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: All children aged 11-16 who use internet and have given at least one valid response about the nature of their online contacts.

This question pursued the common assumption that it is 'strangers' who threaten children's safety through online contact even though, as previous research suggests, people from within a child's social circle pose the greatest threat[16]. Findings showed that:

- **As in Europe, most Australian children who communicate online are in touch with people they already know face to face (Australia 92%; 87% in Europe). Thus online communication relies on and complements the communication that occurs in everyday social networks.**
- Almost half Australian kids, 48% (whereas in Europe it is 39%), are in touch with people that they first met on the internet but with whom they have a connection through friends or family offline. These people form part of the child's wider circle offline although the child may not have met them face to face.
- **Almost three in ten Australian 11-16 year olds (29%) say they communicate online with people whom they first met online and who have no connection with their offline social networks.** It is these contacts, arguably, that we need to understand better in the context of risk and safety issues. Further, the number who experience this risk in Australia is greater than the European average of 25%.
- **Almost twice as many boys (37%) as girls (21%) communicate online with people whom they only know online.** It may be that these are contacts sustained through online gaming (as shown earlier, gaming is the main online activity that distinguishes girls and boys).
- Over nine in ten respondents in each age group communicate online with their existing offline social circle. But, like their European counterparts, as Australian children grow older they widen their social circle by also communicating with people online who are connected to their offline circle but whom, nonetheless, they first met on the internet: 40% of 11-12 year olds, 45% of 13-14 year olds and 62% of 15-16 year olds. These figures are higher than European averages, which are: 31% (11-12), 38% (13-14) and 47% (15-16) respectively.
- **The age differences in making new contacts online (i.e. with people who have no other connection with the child's life) is similarly striking compared with Europe overall, especially in the youngest age range:**
- **26% of AU 11-12 year olds vs. 19% (Europe);**
- **27% of AU 13-14 year olds vs. 23% (Europe), and**
- **34% of AU 15-16 year olds vs. 33% (Europe).**

Drawing the line between activities which facilitate beneficial outcomes and those which increase risk of harm is not straightforward. A particular challenge for policy makers is that children's agency, although generally to be celebrated, may lead kids to adopt risky or even deliberately risk-taking behaviours[17]. This is explored in Table 5, recording children's answers when they were asked about their behaviour online.

Table 5: Children's actions in relation to online contacts

% who have, in the past 12 months . . .	Never/ not in past year	Less than monthly	More often
Looked for new friends on the internet	76	9	15
Added people to my friends list or address book that I have never met face to face	80	10	11
Sent a photo or video of myself to someone that I have never met face to face	89	6	4
Sent personal information to someone that I have never met face to face	94	2	4
Pretended to be a different kind of person on the internet from what I really am	94	4	3

QC145a-c and QC146a-b: Have you done any of the following things in the PST 12 MONTHS; if yes, how often have you done each of these things?

Base: All children who use the internet.

- Whereas children from medium SES households in Australia are more likely to have an SNS profile, they are also more likely than other SES groupings to have diverse circles of online contacts, communicating with more people they meet on the internet who are unconnected with existing family and friends. In Europe, the higher the SES ranking, the more diverse the child's online contacts.

As Drawing the line between activities which facilitate beneficial outcomes and those which increase risk of harm is not straightforward. A particular challenge for policy makers is that children's agency, although generally to be celebrated, may lead kids to adopt risky or even deliberately risk-taking behaviours. This is explored in Table 5, recording children's answers when they were asked about their behaviour online.

Table 5 indicates, children were asked about possibly risky practices relating to online contacts:

- **The vast majority of AU children aged 9-16 say that in the past year they have not sent a photo or video of themselves (89%) or personal information (94%) to someone they have never met face to face. Nor have they pretended to be a different kind of person on the internet (94%).**
- These findings indicate that Australian children may be less risk-taking than the European average, where such activities are more common.
- Four in five Australian kids (80%) say they have not added people to their friends' list or address book that they have never met face to face, nor have three-quarters (76%) looked for new friends on the internet.
- **However, a minority of Australian children say they have done some of these things. One in four (24%) has looked for new friends on the internet, while almost two-thirds (of these one in four, i.e. 15% of 11-16 year olds) have done this more often than monthly. One in five (21%) Australian kids has added contacts they don't know face to face, half of these more often than monthly.**
- Very few have sent images of themselves (10%), or personal information (6%), to people they haven't met in person.

Some of these approaches to communication might be judged to involve children in risky practices but, as the *EU Kids Online* overall framework asserts, the key question is whether or not these practices result in more risk-related behaviours or, importantly, more harm to children. This is a key question for further analysis.

5. RISK AND HARM

5.1 Overall experiences of harm

Before asking children about their specific online experiences associated with risk, we included both closed and open-ended questions in the survey that invited an overall view from the children.

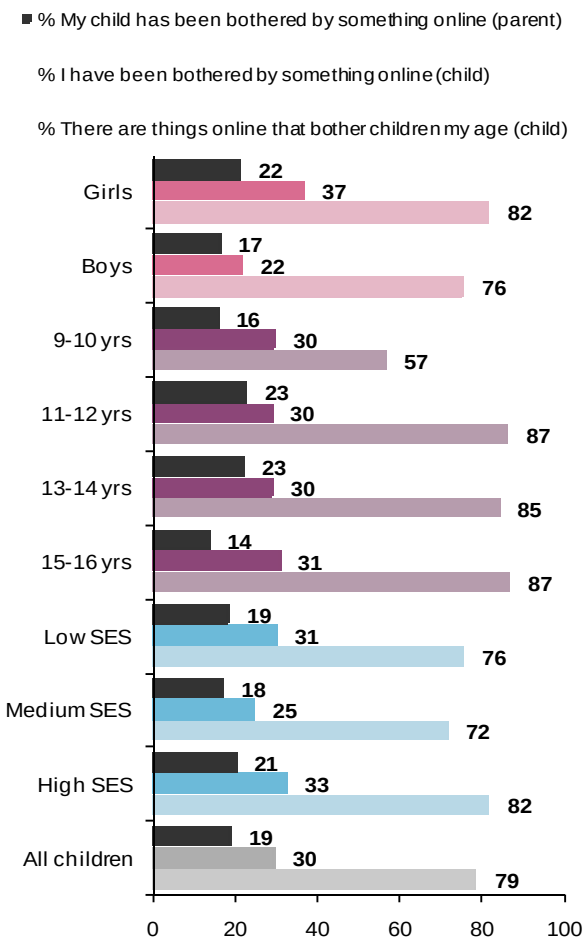
Following the approach of *EU Kids Online*, we asked children about experiences that had bothered them in some way, explaining that by *'bothered'* we meant, *"made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen it."* The aim was to focus on the child's self-report of concern or distress, avoiding an adult framing (e.g. danger, risk, bad things). After this introduction, children were asked two closed questions:

- *Do you think there are things on the internet that people about your age will be bothered by in any way?*
- *In the past 12 months, have you seen or experienced something on the internet that has bothered you in some way?*

Also, parents were asked: *As far as you are aware, in the past year, has your child seen or experienced something on the internet that has bothered them in some way?*

- Clearly, many children don't see the internet as a completely safe environment. In Figure 13, more than three-quarters of Australian 9-16 year olds think that the internet bothers people their own age, the 79% figure is a much higher percentage than the 55% of children from the 25 nation study who say the same.
- **Australian children are over two and a half times more likely to say that in the past 12 months things on the internet bothered other children (79%) than they are to say that they have been personally bothered (30%). However, 30% is a high proportion of Australian children to have been bothered; the average finding from the European study is 12%**. Possibly kids worry for each other; possibly it is easier to say 'there are bad things out there' than to say 'it's happened to me.'
- **Only one in five (21%) of Australian 9-16 year olds do not see the internet as problematic for children their age. Younger children are least likely to be concerned about other children (57%), though equally likely to have been bothered themselves (30%). Strikingly, in the 25 nation study, the likelihood of a child finding something on the internet that bothers them rises with age (Europe 9-10, 9%; Europe 11-12, 11%; Europe 13-14, 12%; Europe 15-16, 15%): not so in Australia.**

Figure 13: Online experiences that have bothered children, according to child and parent



QC110: In the PAST 12 MONTHS, have you seen or experienced something on the internet that has bothered you in some way? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen it. QP228: As far as you are aware, in the past year, has your child seen or experienced something on the internet that has bothered them in some way? QC322: Do you think there are things on the internet that people about your age will be bothered by in any way?

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents.

- **A higher proportion of Australian children say they have been bothered by something they have experienced online in the past 12 months than is the case in any European country. In ranked order, the next four countries are Denmark (28%), Estonia (25%), Norway and Sweden (both 23%). It is hard to determine how much the later survey (6 months) and the smaller sample (400 families, instead of 1,000) would have affected this.**

- **Australian girls (37%) are significantly more likely than boys (22%) to say that something on the internet has bothered them. Parents mirror this gender difference, seeing the internet as more problematic for their daughters than their sons.**
- **Even though 30% of 9-10 year olds say they've been bothered by something online, their parents are unlikely to recognise this. Only 16% of their parents say 'yes, something has bothered my child online'.**
- **Reported problems online are static at 30% for 9-10 year olds, 11-12 year olds, and 13-14 year olds while parents are more likely to report concerns over the 11-14 year old cohort (23%) than the 9-10 year olds (16%). Since Australian children usually start secondary school around 11, parents may assume that children are more likely to encounter problems online with greater internet use, or the influence of a new peer group encouraging risk-taking, or the onset of adolescence.**

5.2 Sexual images online

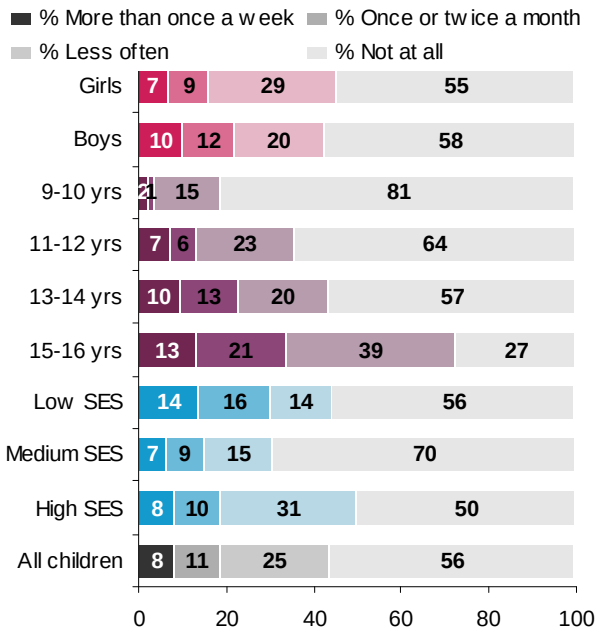
Pornography is not easy to define. It covers a wide range of material from the everyday to the illegal. For ethical reasons, pornography cannot be defined very explicitly in a closed-ended survey with children, for to do so might introduce new ideas to children who are hitherto unaware of such phenomena. Consequently, although this section broadly concerns pornography, the term itself was not used in the interview with children.

Questions about pornography were introduced thus:

"In the past year, you will have seen lots of different images – pictures, photos, videos. Sometimes, these might be obviously sexual – for example, showing people naked or people having sex."

To contextualise online pornography in relation to exposure to pornography across any media, children were first asked, "*Have you seen anything of this kind in the past 12 months?"*

Figure 14: Child has seen sexual images online or offline in past 12 months



QC128: Have you seen anything of this kind [obviously sexual] in the past 12 month? QC129: How often have you seen [images, photos, videos that are obviously sexual] in the past 12 months.

Base: All children who use the internet.

Figure 14 shows that:

- **Over two in five (44%) Australian 9-16 year olds say they have seen sexual images in the past 12 months, whether online or offline. This is much greater than the 25 country average of 23%. In the European study, only Norwegian children (46%) would have seen more.**
- As in Europe, age matters. More older children have seen sexual images. In Australia the biggest jumps in exposure are between 9-10 and 11-12 (17% more report seeing sexual images in the older cohort) and between 13-14 and 15-16 (30%).
- Gender differences are small, with Australian girls more likely than boys to have seen sexual images somewhere (45% vs. 42%); for Europe as a whole the likelihood is smaller, and 21% of girls say they have seen sexual images online or offline compared with 25% of boys.
- Like the European average, Australian children from higher SES homes say they see sexual images more frequently, though unlike their European counterparts, children from medium SES households in Australia are least likely to see sexual images. (In Europe, likelihood rises with SES ranking.)

Table 6 examines where children have seen sexual images, to put online sources into context.

Table 6: Child has seen sexual images online or offline in past 12 months, by age and gender

%	9-12 years		13-16 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
On any websites	16	13	45	39	28
On television, film or video/DVD	11	15	34	29	22
In a magazine or book	7	9	18	14	12
By text (SMS), images (MMS), or otherwise on my mobile phone	2	3	14	5	6
By Bluetooth	1	0	3	0	1
Has seen at all, online or offline	27	27	58	61	44

QC128: Have you seen anything of this kind [obviously sexual] in the past 12 month? QC130a-f: In which, if any, of these places have you seen [images, photos, videos that are obviously sexual] in the past 12 months? QC131: Have you seen [images, photos, videos that are obviously sexual] on any websites in the past 12 *months? (Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: All children who use the internet.

This data is divided into two age groups, 9-12 and 13-16, differentiating around teen years.

- **The internet is the most common source of sexual images for Australian children (28%), although 22% say they have seen sexual images on television. This is almost double the European average where the internet is also slightly more common than television (14%. vs. 12%).**
- With 28% of Australian children reporting that they have seen sexual images online, Australia would rank equal fourth in European terms, with Denmark and the Czech Republic (both 28%), while children in Norway are most likely to report this (34%), followed equally by Estonia (29%) and Finland (29%), just above Australia (28%).
- Australian kids see more sexual images in magazines than their counterparts in Europe (12% vs. 7%).
- Gender differences are striking and increase with age. Younger boys (9-12 years) have seen sexual images on websites, although girls are more likely to have seen them on television. By 13-16, Australian boys are more likely than girls to say they have seen sexual images across the board, on websites, on television, film and video/DVD, in magazines or books, by text/image etc on a mobile [18], or by Bluetooth. Counter-intuitively, however, more 13-16 year old AU girls (61%) have actually seen sexual images in any medium: more than is the case with boys (58%), indicating that boys are more likely to have seen sexual images in more than one medium. This differs somewhat from the European picture, where there are few gender differences apart from more 13-16 year old boys than girls (24% vs. 17%) saying they have seen sexual images on websites.

Table 7 shows the type of sexual images children have seen.

Table 7: What kind of sexual images the child has seen online in past 12 months, by age (age 11+)

%	Age				All
	9-10	11-12	13-14	15-16	
Images or video of someone naked	n.a.	11	14	45	24
Images or video of someone's 'private parts	n.a.	8	14	29	17
Images or video of someone having sex	n.a.	6	11	29	16
Images or video or movies that show sex in a violent way	n.a.	4	8	7	6
Something else	n.a.	2	3	6	4
Seen sexual images online[19]	11	17	25	56	28

QC131: Have you seen these kinds of things on any websites in the past 12 months? QC133: Which, if any, of these things have you seen on a website in the last 12 months? *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: All children 11-16 who use the internet.

- **24% of Australian 11-16 year olds say they have seen online sexual images including nudity; 17% have seen someone's genitals online; 16% (mostly 15-16) have seen images of someone having sex; and 6% say they have seen violent sexual images. These figures are all higher than the 25 nation averages which are 11% for nudity; 8% for genitals; 8% for seeing someone having sex and 2% for violent sexual images.**
- In all categories of Table 7, the Australian findings are higher than the European findings, although broadly in line with other countries where children go online at a young average age, especially Scandinavian and Baltic countries.

Previous research raised questions about what parents really know about their children's experiences online, such knowledge being an important prerequisite for supporting or guiding their children. Exploiting the unique features of the *EU Kids Online* survey, in which answers can be analysed for each child/parent pair, we asked how far parents are aware of children's experiences online.

Table 8: Children's and parents' accounts of whether child has seen sexual images online

Child has seen sexual images on the internet?	Child's answer	
	Yes	No
% Parent answer:		
Yes	38	17
No	49	47
Don't know	14	36
	100	100

QP235: [Has your child] seen images on the internet that are obviously sexual - for example, showing people naked or people having sex. QC131: Have you seen these kinds of things on any websites in the past 12 months?

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents.

- Across Europe, among just those children who have seen sexual images online, one in three (35%) of their parents agree this has occurred, and this is broadly similar in Australia (38%). Just over one in eight (14%) of Australian parents say they don't know whether their child has seen sexual images online and this contrasts with one in four (26%) of their European counterparts. Significantly, half (49%) the parents of Australian children who say they have seen sexual images on the internet say their child has not seen such images.
- **In Australia, parents are slightly less aware of their children's experiences of online sexual images than in Europe generally. Among European children who have seen online sexual images, 40% of parents say their child has not seen such images (compared with 49% in Australia), while 35% recognise that they have (Australia 38%), and 26% (Australia 14%) say they don't know (Table 8). Australian parents are more likely to be wrongly confident that their child has not seen sexual images online than is general in the other 25 countries.**

When does risk translate into harm? As argued by Livingstone and Haddon[20], risk is not always associated with harm. Instead, "the notion of risk refers to a probability, not a necessity, of harm"[21] Unless it is argued that all children will be harmed by any exposure to sexual images, it follows that some children may see pornography without necessarily experiencing ill effects. Others may be harmed: they may be upset at the time; they may worry later about what they have seen; and their attitudes or behaviour may be influenced in future years[22]. So as not to presume that all risks result in harm, those children who said they had seen sexual images online were asked some extra questions, prefaced as follows:

Seeing sexual images on the internet may be fine or may not be fine. In the LAST 12 MONTHS have you seen any things like this that have bothered you in any way? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen them.

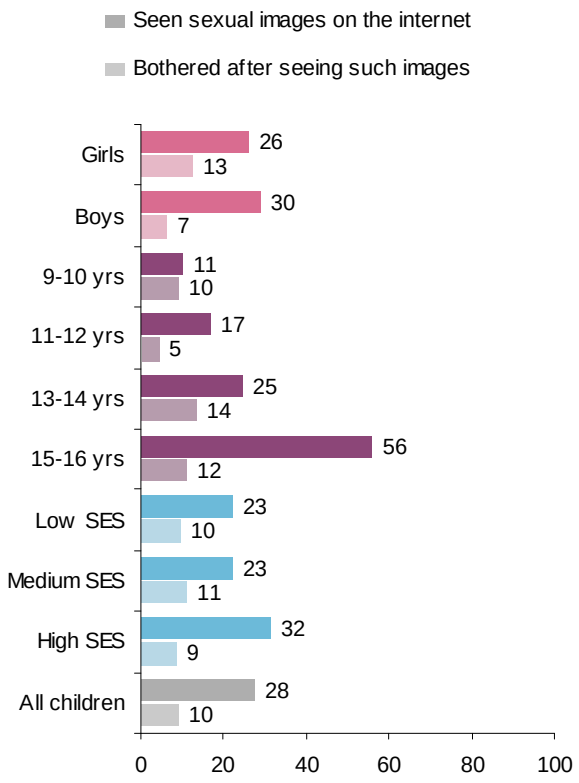
- **Australian children's responses are relatively high, compared with many European countries, in terms of overall exposure to online pornography (28%). Further, the percentage of Australian children who have been bothered by seeing such images (10%, i.e. over a third of those exposed) is also higher than the average for the 25 countries. This might be one of the factors contributing to the overall high number of Australian children that say they have been bothered by something on the internet (Section 5.1).**

Although Australian children are more likely to encounter sexual images they are not much more likely to be bothered by what they see than children in the other survey nations. Across Europe, 32% of those who have seen sexual images online were bothered by what they saw, compared with 36% in Australia.

Figure 15 shows which groups of children have seen sexual images on the internet and been bothered by this.

- Australian boys are slightly more likely to have seen sexual images online (30% vs. 26%, girls), the same pattern as in Europe generally (where the percentages are 16% vs. 12%). Across all European countries, boys had seen more sexual images online but girls were generally more likely to be bothered by such experiences.
- Seeing sexual images online is more common among teenagers than younger children. There are also more teenagers, especially those aged 13-14 years old, who report being bothered by this.
- **As in other countries, 9-10 year olds are less likely to see sexual images online but more likely to be bothered or upset by the experience if they do see them. In Australia 11% of 9-10 year olds had seen sexual images and almost all of these, a total 10% of Australian 9-10 year olds, reported feeling bothered.**
- While there are some SES differences in seeing these images, a higher proportion of children from lower SES homes are likely to be bothered by seeing sexual images online (as in Europe generally).

Figure 15: Child has seen sexual images online and was bothered by this



QC131: Have you seen these kinds of things on any websites in the past 12 months? And QC134: In the LAST 12 MONTHS have you seen any things like this that have bothered you in any way? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen them.

Base: All children who use the internet. Only children who have seen sexual images online.

In the full European report, further questions explore how upset children felt, for how long they were upset, who they told and what they did in response to such an experience. However, the *EU Kids Online* network has judged that in a single country report the sample sizes are too small to report in detail how children coped, or not, with upsetting online experiences. This is especially the case in Australia, where the sample size is 400 children in contrast to the 1000 children interviewed in European countries. Even so, there are indicators that Australian children may be comparatively resilient in these matters and more research is called for.

The key point from Figure 15, is that most Australian children (72%) have not experienced seeing sexual images online and, of those who have, almost two in three (64%,) say they were not bothered or upset by the experience.

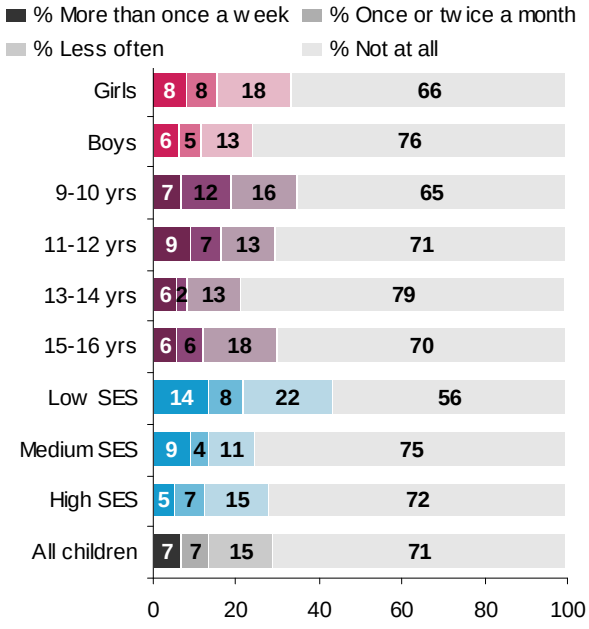
5.3 Bullying online

Being bullied is one of several risks that may lead to harm when children use the internet. "In some sense bullying builds on children's availability through and/or conduct in peer-to-peer exchanges and, often, the threat comes from a peer"[23]. Online bullying is sometimes, but not always, associated with offline bullying. Further, while 'bullying' is an accepted term in some countries and languages, it is not a recognised pattern of behaviours in others, which makes the term difficult to translate. So, as with 'pornography', the term 'bully' was defined in the questionnaire:

"Sometimes children or teenagers say or do hurtful or nasty things to someone and this can often be quite a few times on different days over a period of time, for example. This can include: teasing someone in a way this person does not like; hitting, kicking or pushing someone around; leaving someone out of things."

Children were then asked whether *someone has acted in this kind of hurtful or nasty way to you in the past 12 months.*

Figure 16: Child has been bullied online or offline in past 12 months



QC112: Has someone acted in this kind of hurtful or nasty way to you in the past 12 months? QC113: How often has someone acted in this kind [hurtful and nasty] way towards you in the past 12 months?

Base: All children who use the internet.

- **Three in five (29%) Australian children claim to have been bullied in the past year, according to the definition provided, with 7% bullied weekly** (Figure 16).
- Overall, bullying in Australia is fifty percent higher than across Europe (29% vs. 19%), though the European range is from 43% in Estonia, for having been bullied online or offline, to just 9% in Portugal.
- **The likelihood of online bullying in Australia is significantly more common than in the 25 countries: 13% (versus 6% in the study generally) have received a nasty or hurtful message online.**
- More Australian girls than boys claim to have been bullied (34% vs. 24%).
- More 9-10 year olds say they have been bullied (35%), the least bullied being 13-14 year olds (21%). This differs from the European pattern, where older children are most likely to be bullied.
- Children from lower SES homes in Australia claim to have been bullied most (44%), with those from medium SES homes the least (25%).

European comparisons suggest that, broadly, bullying online is more common in countries where bullying in general is more common, rather than, for instance, in countries where the internet is more established. This suggests online bullying to be a new form of a long-established problem in childhood rather than, simply, the consequence of a new technology.

Table 9 indicates the ways in which children are bullied.

Table 9: Ways in which children have been bullied in past 12 months

%	9-12 years		13-16 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
In person face to face	16	26	17	20	20
On the internet	4	19	11	19	13
By mobile phone calls, texts or image/video texts	0	5	3	7	3
Has been bullied at all, online or offline	26	39	22	29	29

QC114: At any time during the last 12 months, has this happened [that you have been treated in a hurtful or nasty way]? QC115: At any time during the last 12 months has this happened on the internet. *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: All children who use the internet.

- In Australia, face to face bullying is more common than online bullying (20% vs. 13%), while 3% have also been bullied by mobile phone.
- Gender differences are much larger in the younger age group than the older one, with 9-12 year old girls more likely to be bullied than the boys.

Table 10 examines what children say about how they have been bullied online in the past 12 months.

- **Most common is messages sent to the child (7%), followed by messages being posted online or passed on (4%), and other hurtful things online (3%). 3% have been threatened using the internet.**
- Unlike the European findings, where15-16 year olds are most likely to encounter the various forms of online bullying, there is little difference in the Australian findings relating to the variety of online bullying behaviours affecting 11-12, 13-14 and 15-16 year olds.

Table 10: What happened when child was bullied online in past 12 months (age 11+)

%	Age				All
	9-10	11-12	13-14	15-16	
Nasty or hurtful messages were sent to me	n.a.	5	6	10	7
Nasty or hurtful messages about me were passed around or posted where others could see	n.a.	5	5	3	4
Other nasty or hurtful things on the internet	n.a.	3	6	1	3
I was threatened on the internet	n.a.	3	6	1	3
I was left out or excluded from a group or activity on the internet	n.a.	2	0	4	2
Something else	n.a.	2	1	2	2
At all on the internet	6	15	14	15	13

QC115: At any time during the last 12 months has this happened on the internet? QC117: Can I just check, which of these things have happened in the last 12 months? *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: All children 11-16 years old who use the internet.

As with exposure to sexual images, the survey findings reveal the degree to which parents are aware of children's online experience of being bullied (Table 11).

Table 11: Parents' accounts of whether child has been bullied online

Child has been sent nasty or hurtful messages on the internet?	Child's answer:	
	Yes	No
% Parent answer:		
Yes	58	4
No	33	91
Don't know	9	6
	100	100

QP235: [Has your child] been treated in a hurtful or nasty way on the internet by another child or teenager? QC115: At any time during the last 12 months [have you been treated in a hurtful or nasty way] on the internet?

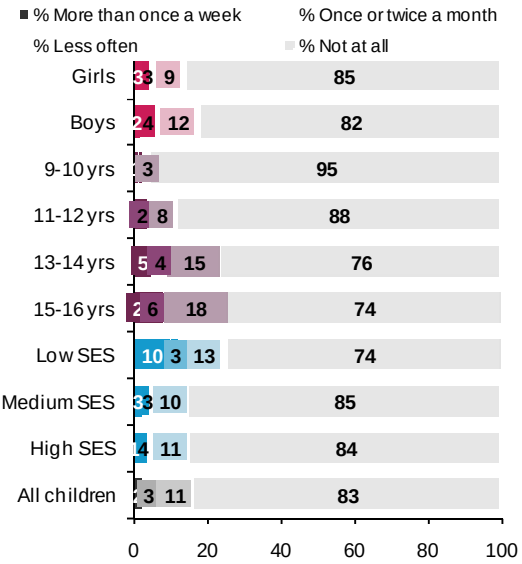
Note: sample sizes in this table are small (and confidence intervals high) so these findings to be treated as indicative only.

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents.

- Among the 13% of children who say they have been bullied online, most of their parents (58%) are aware of this, though one in three (33%) says this has not happened and 9% do not know.
- By comparison with parental awareness of children's exposure to online pornography, Australian parents seem more aware of when their child has been bullied online, in those cases where it has happened.

Since bullying is an activity that occurs largely among peers, children may not only be bullied but they may also bully others, either on the internet or in other ways. After asking children about their experiences of being bullied, children were asked if they themselves had acted in a hurtful or nasty way to others in the past year.

Figure 17: Child has bullied others online or offline in past 12 months



QC125: Have you acted in a way that might have felt hurtful or nasty to someone else in the past 12 months? QC126: How often have you acted in this kind [hurtful and nasty] way in the past 12 months?

Base: All children who use the internet.

- Figure 17 shows that, **in Australia, 16-17% (subject to rounding) of children say they have bullied others. This is more than half as many as say they have been bullied (29%).**
- **Bullying others (in general) is most common among the 15-16 year olds, and least common among 9-10 year olds, although 9-10 year olds are most likely to say they have been bullied.**
- Children from lower SES homes are most likely to say they bully others, and are also most likely to say they have been bullied.
- **13% said they are bullied online, less than the 16% who say they bully others, on or offline.**

A central question in the *EU Kids Online* project is to explore whether and when certain factors increase the likelihood of harm to the child.

In the full European report, children's experiences of online bullying are followed up to explore how upset children felt, for how long they were upset, who they told and what they did in response to such an experience. However, for a single country report the sample sizes are too small to report in detail how children coped, or not, with upsetting online experiences.

The key point, therefore, is that **most children have not experienced bullying, online or offline. In Australia however, as elsewhere, face to face bullying is more common than online bullying. Even so, the incidence of online bullying in Australia (13%) is twice as high as the European average (6%), although the small sample numbers prompt caution in interpretation.**

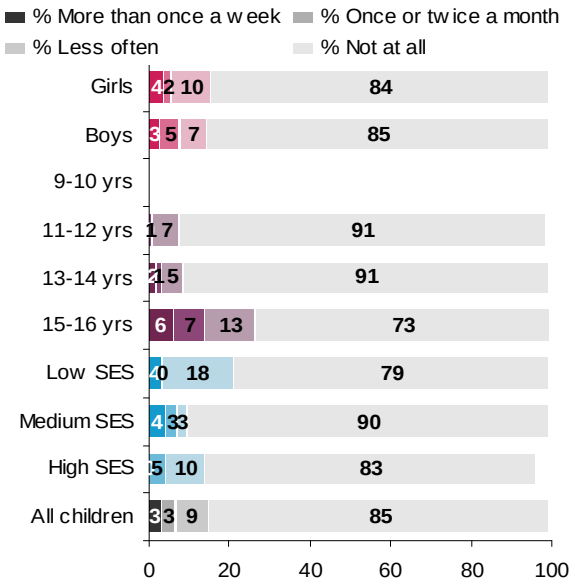
5.4 Sending and receiving sexual messages online

There are some reasons to believe that the internet, along with smart (camera)phones, may make it easier for peers to exchange sexual messages [24]. Popularly termed 'sexting' because of the link with mobile phones and texting, the exchange of sexual messages and images has become a focus for policy concern and legal debate. For reasons of both research ethics and interview length, questions about sending and receiving sexual messages were not asked of 9-10 year olds.

The term 'sexting' was not used in the questionnaire. Children (and parents) were introduced to the questions on sending and receiving sexual messages as follows:

"People do all kinds of things on the internet. Sometimes, they may send sexual messages or images. By this we mean talk about having sex or images of people naked or having sex."

Figure 18: Child has seen or received sexual messages online in past 12 months (age 11+)



QC167: In the past 12 months have you seen or received sexual messages of any kind on the internet? QC168: How often have you received sexual messages of any kind on the internet in the past 12 months? This could be words, pictures or videos.

Base: All children aged 11-16 who use the internet.

- **Some one in seven children in Australia (15%) have seen or received sexual messages online, 3% receiving them more than once a week** (Figure 18). This is in line with the 25 nation figures.
- In Australia, as in the European findings, there is no significant gender difference in receiving sexual messages.
- 15-16 year olds are more likely to receive sexual messages online than the younger age groups.
- Seeing/receiving sexual messages online is more common (though still a minority practice) than is posting/sending such messages. Only a very small proportion of children – 4% of 11-16 year olds – say they have posted or sent a sexual message online in the past 12 months.

Table 12 shows the type of sexual messages received by Australia children on the internet.

Table 12: Kinds of sexual messaging child has encountered online in past 12 months (age 11+)

%	Age 9-10	11-12	13-14	15-16	All
I have been sent a sexual message on the internet	n.a.	3	5	18	9
I have seen a sexual message posted where other people could see it on the internet	n.a.	1	2	9	4
I have seen other people perform sexual acts	n.a.	0	0	14	5
I have been asked on the internet for a photo or video showing my private parts	n.a.	0	2	7	3
I have been asked to talk about sexual acts with someone on the internet	n.a.	1	1	15	6
Has seen or received at all	n.a.	9	9	27	15

QC169: In the past 12 months, have any of these happened to you on the internet?

Base: All children aged 11-16 who use the internet.

- **9% of Australian 11-16 year olds have been sent a sexual message, and 6% have been asked to talk about sexual acts with someone on the internet. 3-5% have experienced one of the following: seen others perform sexual acts in a message, been asked for a photo or video showing their private parts or seen a sexual message posted online where others could also see it.**
- The older the child, the more likely they are to have experienced sexting. The same patterns apply to the European data generally, although the figures are higher in Australia. For example, for 15-16 year old Australians, 18% have been sent a sexual message (Europe 11%); 15% of Australians have been asked to talk about sexual acts with someone online (Europe 3%); and 14% of Australians have seen images of other people performing sexual acts (Europe 8%).

Parents were asked about their child's experiences regarding online sexual messages (Table 13).

Table 13: Parents' accounts of whether child has seen or received sexual messages online (age 11+)

Seen or been sent sexual images on the internet?	Child's answer	
	Yes	No
% Parent answer:		
Yes	27	5
No	51	83
Don't know	22	12
	100	100

QP235: [Has your child] seen or been sent sexual messages on the internet? QC167: In the past 12 months have you seen or received sexual messages of any kind on the internet? This could be words, pictures or videos?

Note: sample sizes in this table are small (and confidence intervals high) so these findings to be treated as indicative only.

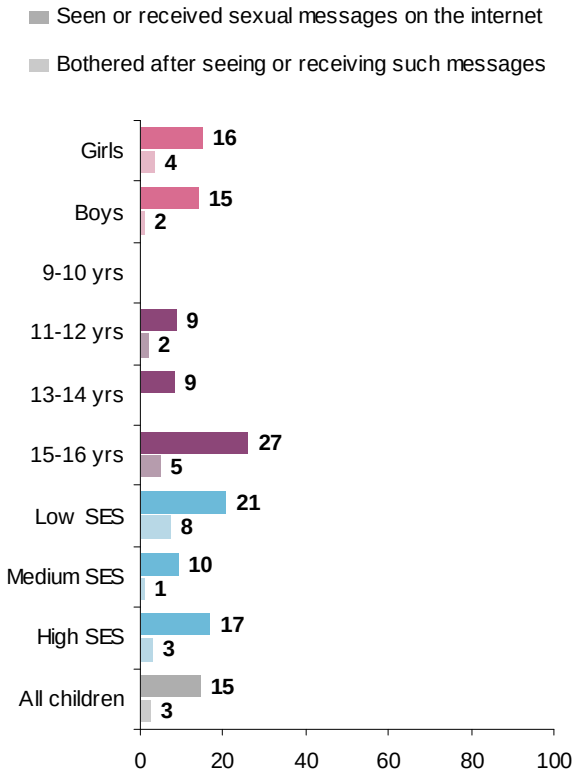
Base: All children aged 11-16 who use the internet and one of their parents.

- In Table 13, among the 15% of Australian children who say they have seen or been sent sexual messages online, a minority of their parents (27%) are aware of this, while half (51%) say this has not happened. One in five (22%) does not know.
- This level of parental awareness is a little higher than the European average, though findings are based on a subset of a smaller respondent population.

As noted in the discussion around seeing pornography, unless one makes the strong case that any exposure to sexual messages is inevitably harmful in some degree, it must be recognised that some children may receive sexual messages with no negative effects. Others, however, may be upset.

- Across the European study, although 15% of children have seen or received a sexual message online, only 4% of children aged 11-16 both received sexts and were bothered by the experience. However, looked at differently, one quarter (25%) of the 15% who have received sexual messages were bothered by them.
- In Australia, while 15% have seen or received such messages, a slightly lower percentage - 3% - have been bothered by them. To put it another way, 20% or one in five Australian children who receive sexual messages online are bothered or upset by the experience.

Figure 19: Child has seen or received sexual messages in past 12 months and was bothered (age 11+)



QC167: In the past 12 months have you seen or received sexual messages of any kind on the internet? This could be words, pictures or videos. QC171: In the last 12 months, has any sexual message that you have seen or received bothered you in any way?

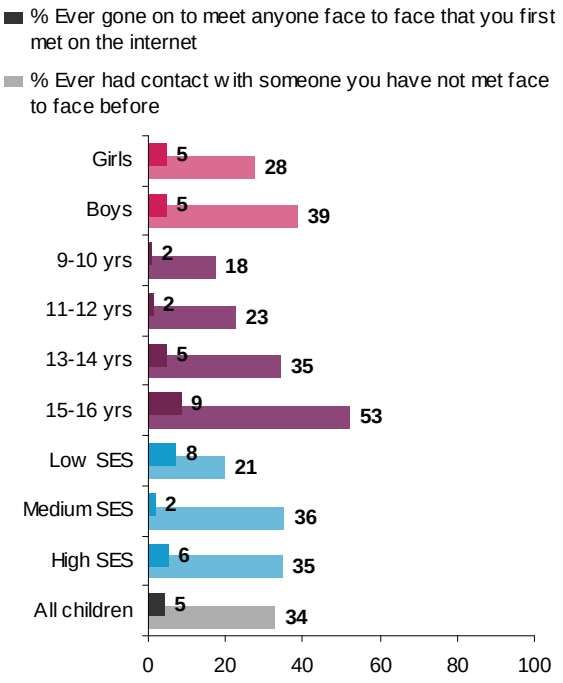
Base: All children age 11-16 who use the internet. Children who have seen or received sexual messages online in the past 12 months.

- Figure 19 shows that Australian girls are more likely than boys to have been bothered by receiving sexual messages (4% vs. 2%), in line with the 25 nation findings.
- The younger children, 11-12 year olds, are more likely to be bothered by these messages (as also indicated by the data from the larger study).

5.5 Meeting online contacts offline

One of the greatest fears held by many parents is that their child may meet a stranger online who subsequently abuses or exploits them in a face to face meeting. Even though this is a significant fear, and the focus of a number of policy interventions and extensive media debate, the risk of children coming to harm through a face to face meeting with a stranger they first met on the internet is small[25]. One reason for this is that when children use the internet to find new friends they are almost always looking to meet people of their own age. Very few use the internet to meet adults, deliberately or without meaning to[26]. "Further, although it is possible for contacts with new people online to result in harm, public concern tends to leave unclear just what harm may result (online exploitation or deception or offline abuse?)"[27]. Figure 20 indicates which Australian children make new contacts using the internet, and whether this leads to meetings offline.

Figure 20: Child has communicated online or gone to an offline meeting with someone not met face to face



QC147: Can I just check, have you ever had contact on the internet with someone you have not met face to face before? QC148: Have you ever gone on to meet anyone face to face that you first met on the internet in this way.

Base: All children who use the internet.

- **34% of Australian children have had contact online with someone they have not met face to face (the 25 nation average is 30%).**
- **5% have gone to an offline meeting with someone first met online. This is about half the study average (which is 9% across all 25 countries).** Indeed, as the pan-European report shows, children in the Baltic countries are most likely to have gone to an offline meeting with a contact first made online (25% in Estonia and 23% in Lithuania). Such offline meetings are comparatively uncommon in the UK and Portugal (each 5%), Italy and Ireland (each 4%), and least likely in Turkey (3%).
- **Older teenagers (13-16 year olds) are much more likely than younger children to have online contact with someone they have not met face to face. They are also more likely to have gone on to meet them in person – although such instances are rare.**
- Gender differences are minor, although girls (one in six, 5/28) are a little more likely to have gone on to meet someone than boys (one in eight, 5/39). This is contrary to the wider European pattern, although the age difference dimension is consistent with findings from the European study.
- Children from lower SES homes in Australia are less likely to have made contact, but more likely to have gone on to meet face to face, a person they first met online.

Are parents aware of such offline meetings? (Table 14)

Table 14: Parents' accounts of whether child has met online contacts offline

Met someone face to face that first met on the internet?	Child's answer	
	Yes	No
% Parent answer:		
Yes	11	0
No	78	98
Don't know	11	2
	100	100

QP235: [Has your child] gone to a meeting with someone face to face that he/she first met on the internet? QC148: Have you ever gone on to meet anyone face to face that you first met on the internet in this way?

Note: sample sizes in this table are small (and confidence intervals high) so these findings to be treated as indicative only.

Base: All children who use the internet, and one of their parents.

- The small sample size for meeting contacts offline means it is particularly difficult to extrapolate further valid information. Thus we note, as indicative only, that in most of the cases where a child has gone to such a meeting, parents seem unaware of this.

Making new contacts online and then arranging to meet these people offline is, perhaps, one of the most contested activities children may engage in. It may be a harmless means of widening a social circle, or it may be a risky or even dangerous means of contacting an abusive stranger. As before, questions about subjective harm were prefaced with the following explanation:

Face to face meetings with people that you first met on the internet may be fine or not fine. In the LAST 12 MONTHS have you gone to a meeting with someone you met in this way that bothered you? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have been there?

For the overall research in the 25 country study, some follow up questions on children's responses to such meetings can be reported (pp. 92-95). But for a single country sample, the number of children involved is too small to report reliable findings.

5.6 Potentially harmful user-generated content

There are online experiences that, although possibly harmful to children, have attracted little research as yet. These include exposure to potentially harmful user-generated content – i.e. not mass-produced commercial content but content generated through peer to peer activity.

Given the sensitive nature of the potentially harmful user-generated content shown in Table 15, only 11-16 year olds were asked if they had seen this. The question introduction clarified the potentially harmful nature of the content:

On some websites, people discuss things that may not be good for you. Here are some questions about these kinds of things. In the PAST 12 MONTHS, have you seen websites where people discuss…

Table 15: Child has seen potentially harmful user-generated content in past 12 months (age 11+)

%	Age				All
	11-13 years		14-16 years		
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Hate messages that attack certain groups or individuals	18	17	21	47	26
Ways to be very thin (such as being anorexic or bulimic)	6	9	4	18	9
Talk about or share their experiences of taking drugs	9	4	11	26	12
Ways of physically harming or hurting themselves	16	8	11	20	14
Ways of committing suicide	1	5	7	4	4
Has seen such material at all on any websites	31	22	34	52	34

QC142: In the past 12 months, have you seen websites where people discuss...?

Base: All children aged 11-16 who use the internet.

- **Overall, 34% of Australian 11-16 year olds have seen one or more type of potentially harmful user-generated content, rising to 52% of 14-16 year old girls. The overall Australian percentage (34%) is significantly higher than the percentage across the European study, where the average is 21%.**
- **The most common potentially harmful content is hate messages (26%), followed by people discussing ways of physically harming or hurting themselves (14%), and sites talking about drug experiences (12%). The first three percentages are above the European average. Few (5%) have visited a suicide site.** Sometimes such sites might assist in harm minimisation, or might be accessed by young people who seek to help friends.
- Older Australian girls are generally twice as likely as Australian boys to have visited troubling user-generated content sites, except that older boys are more likely to have visited sites that discuss ways of committing suicide (7% of Australian boys 14-16 vs. 4% Australian girls). The figures for younger children also show some gender differences, although young children are generally less likely to visit such sites than older children.

5.7 Misuse of personal data

As yet there is little research into the misuse of children's personal data online, although such data may enable ill-intentioned others to access children and/or their personal information. Questions on personal data misuse were asked of children aged 11-16:

In the PAST 12 MONTHS, has any of the following happened to you on the internet?

Table 16: Child has experienced misuse of personal data in past 12 months (age 11+)

%	Age				All
	11-13 years		14-16 years		
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Somebody used my password to access my information or to pretend to be me	15	15	9	12	13
Somebody used my personal information in a way I didn't like	11	15	3	8	9
I lost money by being cheated on the internet	6	4	0	3	3
Has experienced personal data misuse of any kind	21	22	9	17	17

QC143: In the past 12 months, has any of the following happened to you on the internet?

Base: All children aged 11-16 who use the internet.

- **The main misuse of personal data experienced by Australian children is when someone has used their password or pretended to be them (13%). Some have had personal information used in a way they did not like (9%). Findings are approximately double the 25 nation average, which are, in Europe: 7% (password), 4% (misuse) and 1% (cheated out of money).**
- Younger children have had these problems more than older children.

6. MEDIATION

A distinctive feature of the *EU Kids Online* survey is that it asked children about all the types of mediation practised by parents, and also by teachers and peers. Drawing on previous research[28], a series of questions were devised for children and their parents, distinguishing both 'active mediation' of internet use in general and active mediation of internet safety in particular. Together these reveal the main sources of support available to children. In terms of policy, this may pinpoint children's need for further support, differentiated by demographic factors and by country.

Both forms of active mediation may also be practised by teachers in school and, further, children may support each other through discussing and sharing details of their internet use. Although informal, this support of children by children constitutes a potentially valuable form of peer mediation [29] . **In sum, this section analyses eight sources of social support and mediation available to children[30]:**

- Active mediation of the child's internet use - the parent is present, staying nearby, encouraging or sharing or discussing the child's online activities.
- Active mediation of the child's internet safety – the parent guides the child in using the internet safely, before, during or after the child's online activities, maybe helping or discussing what to do in case of difficulty.
- Restrictive mediation – the parent sets rules that restrict the child's use (of particular applications, activities, or of giving out personal information).
- Monitoring – the parent checks available records of the child's internet use afterwards.
- Technical mediation of the child's internet use – the parent uses software or parental controls to filter, restrict or monitor the child's use.
- Teachers' mediation – these questions included a mix of active mediation of the child's internet use and internet safety, plus a question on restrictive mediation.
- Peer mediation of the child's internet safety – it was assumed that children talk about their online activities in general, so here the focus was on peer mediation of safety practices in particular. These questions were asked bi-directionally – do the child's friends help them, and also do they help their friends.
- Other sources – There are other sources of safety information apart from those mentioned above and both parents and children may benefit from accessing a range of sources of guidance, from the media, or from experts in their community. We also asked about the use of such sources.

6.1 Parents

The *EU Kids Online* project interviewed both the child and one of his or her parents. This section compares answers to matched questions asked of both child and the parent most involved in the child's internet use.

- **76% of Australian 9-16 year olds go online daily or almost daily, and the same holds true for 79% of their parents. Even so, this does not mean the samples match because the selection procedure ensured all children, but not necessarily their parents, used the internet. Around 82% of parents of 9-12 year olds (kids = 62%) and 75% of parents of 13-16 year olds (kids = 90%) use the internet daily or almost daily.**
- Although SES differences in whether children use the internet daily are small, they are substantially larger for their parents: 86% of high SES parents, but just 74% of medium and 49% of low SES parents use the internet every, or nearly every, day.

The fact that older Australian children use the internet more frequently than their parents, as do children from lower SES homes, should be borne in mind when asking how parents mediate their children's internet use.

However, **less than 7% of the Australian parents interviewed were non-internet users, suggesting that in recent years parents may have made considerable efforts to get online and 'keep up' with their children.**

Previous research has revealed a considerable generation gap, with parents reporting more mediating activities than are recognised by their children[31]. This gap has been interpreted as a sign of the barriers to parents taking responsibility for their children's internet safety – whether because parents and teenagers find it difficult to talk to each other, or because parents feel ill-equipped to understand the internet, or because children guard their privacy online and so evade parental oversight.

As will be shown below, this gap appears to have reduced in recent years. So, how do Australian parents mediate their children's internet use?

In what follows, *questions about active mediation of use and safety practices are asked of all children, and all parents of these children. Questions regarding parental restriction, monitoring and use of technical tools are asked only for children who use the internet at home.*

Table 17 examines supportive forms of active mediation and co-use by parents, as reported by the child.

Table 17: Parent's active mediation of the child's *internet use*, according to child

% who say that their parent does…	9-12 years		13-16 years		
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	All
Talk to you about what you do on the internet	68	70	69	59	67
Stay nearby when you use the internet	73	74	54	52	63
Encourage you to explore and learn things on the internet on your own	49	48	42	36	44
Sit with you while you use the internet	46	41	43	31	40
Do shared activities together with you on the internet	45	47	31	31	38
One or more of these	89	96	94	86	91

QC327: Does your parent / do either of you parents sometimes… *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: All children who use the internet.

- **Most Australian parents talk to their children about what they do on the internet (67%), making this, as in Europe generally, the most popular way to actively mediate children's internet use.**
- Second most popular mediation is staying nearby (63%), and third is encouraging the child to explore and learn things on the internet (44%). This and the other strategies are adopted by around two parents in five.
- **Overall, it seems there is a fair amount of general positive mediation taking place. These findings for Australia (91%) are a little higher than the 25 nation average (overall, 87% of European child respondents report one or more of these activities by parents).**
- Gender differences are often small in the European sample, and this is also the case with Australian kids, aged 9-12, although parents seems slightly more likely to say they sit with their son while he uses the internet. Apart from doing more shared activities online with both older boys and girls, Australian parents are more likely to mediate their teenage sons' internet use.
- **For most strategies, as in the European study generally, parents carry out more active mediation of younger children's use of the internet.**
- **Notably, about one in ten parents (9%) never engage in any of these forms of mediation, according to their children.**

Table 18: Parent's active mediation of the child's *internet use*, according to child and parent

% who say that their parents sometimes…	Child no parent no	Child yes parent no	Child no parent yes	Child yes parent yes
Talk to you about what you do on the internet	4	5	29	62
Stay nearby when you use the internet	17	12	20	51
Encourage you to explore and learn things on the internet on your own	25	9	31	35
Sit with you while you use the internet	37	11	23	29
Do shared activities together with you on the internet	40	8	22	30

QC327 and QP220: Does your parents/do either of your parents sometimes [which of the following things, if any do you (or your partner/other carer) sometimes do with your child]…

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents.

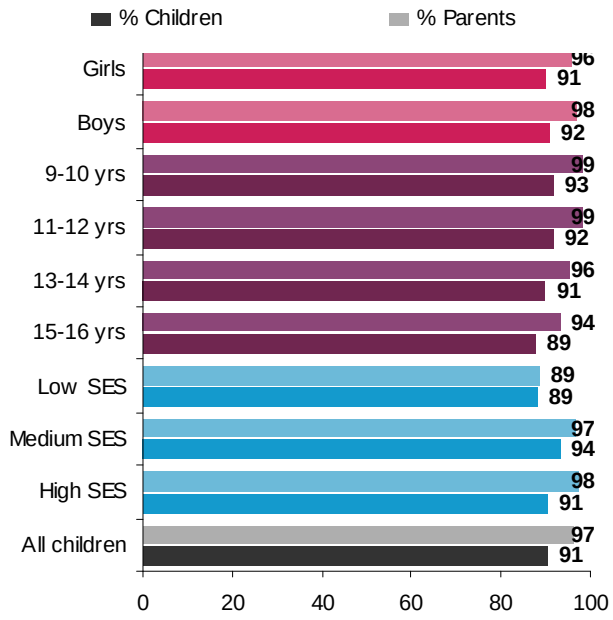
Table 18 compares the accounts of parents and children, examining the relation between the child's answers (yes, their parent does mediate or no, they don't) and those of their parent.

- In 20-31% of cases, parents claim a mediating practice that their child does not acknowledge (see third column). There could be a social desirability effect on the part of parents who wish to appear 'good'. Or, parents may be more aware of practices that their children might not notice or might forget.

- Interestingly, in 5-12% of cases, the child perceives parental mediation that the parent themselves does not report (second column). This may arise because children may wish to represent their parents as doing more than they do; or they may notice a practice that is so routine for the parent that it goes unnoticed.
- Adding the percentages in the second and third column suggests that **up to 40% of parents and children disagree about whether these different forms of mediation are taking place, depending on the strategy. Therefore, in about three homes in five, they agree. This ratio is a little less than that in the European study, where about seven in ten agree.**

To show demographic differences, Figure 21 is based on the row, 'One of more of these' responses in Table 17 – i.e. it combines the various forms of active mediation.

Figure 21: Parent's active mediation of the child's *internet use*, according to child and parent



QC327 and QP220: Does your parents/do either of your parents sometimes [which of the following things, if any do you (or your partner/other carer) sometimes do with your child]…

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents.

- Active mediation by parents is highest for young children and reduces as children grow older: 93% of parents do one of more of the activities shown in Table 17 in relation to their 9-10 year olds, according to the child, dropping to 89% for 15-16 year olds.
- Perhaps most notable is that even for the oldest group, almost 9 in 10 parents pursue some forms of active mediation with their teenagers.
- **There are few differences for sons and daughters, and differences by SES are also small.**

How does Australia compare to other countries?

- The pan-European report found that, overall, levels of active mediation range from 98% of parents in the Netherlands who engage in one or more forms of active mediation, down to 73% in Turkey, according to children. At 91%, active mediation of internet use in Australia is similar to the level for many other countries.

Table 21 examines the child's perception of the role their parents play in helping keep them safe online.

Table 19: Parent's active mediation of the child's *internet safety*, according to child

% who say that their parent does…	9-12 years		13-16 years		
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	All
Helped you when something is difficult to do or find on the internet	83	88	75	71	79
Explained why some websites are good or bad	72	78	80	67	74
Suggested ways to use the internet safely	76	78	72	76	75
Suggested ways to behave towards other people online	60	75	69	64	44
Helped you in the past when something has bothered you on the internet	41	51	35	48	67
Talked to you about what to do if something on the internet bothered you	57	72	61	67	64
One or more of these	94	99	95	90	94

QC329 Does your parent / do either of your parents sometimes… *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: All children who use the internet.

These children recognise their parents as involved in keeping them safe online.

- **Helping when something is difficult to do or find (79%), suggesting how to use the internet safely (75%) and explaining why websites are good or bad (74%), are all common strategies of safety mediation, used by three in four Australian parents.**
- **Less than half of Australian parents suggest how their child should behave towards others online (44%), while 67% have helped their child if something online bothered them, and 64% have discussed with their child ways in which they can respond to things that might bother them online.**

Children's and parents' answers are compared in Table 20.

Table 20: Parent's active mediation of the child's *internet safety*, according to child and parent

% who say that their parents sometimes…	Child no parent no	Child yes parent no	Child no parent yes	Child yes parent yes
Helped you when something is difficult to do or find on the internet	9	12	11	67
Explained why some websites are good or bad	7	7	19	67
Suggested ways to use the internet safely	8	14	16	61
Suggested ways to behave towards other people online	15	13	18	54
Helped you in the past when something has bothered you on the internet	39	16	16	29
Talked to you about what to do if something on the internet bothered you	16	13	19	52

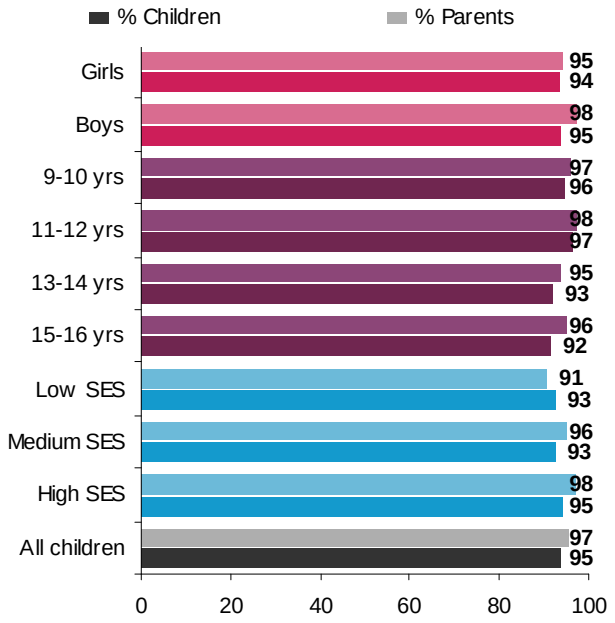
QC329 and QP222: Has your parent/either of your parents [have you] ever done any of these things with you [your child]?

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents.

- **Parents and children generally agree with each other whether or not safety mediation occurs.**
- Parents and children disagree between about a quarter and a third of the time, depending on the strategy, with parents a little more likely to over-claim compared with their children.

Figure 22 shows the demographic differences in parental mediation of the child's internet safety.

Figure 22: Parent's active mediation of the child's *internet safety*, according to child and parent



QC329 and QP222: Has your parent/either of your parents [have you] ever done any of these things with you [your child]?

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents.

- There are few gender differences in parental safety mediation.
- Parents mediate a little more for younger children and a bit less for older children.
- Differences are small, but higher SES parents are more likely to say they engage in safety mediation.

Looking across Europe, although there is a wide range in parents' safety mediation practices, the Netherlands has the highest rate (98% of parents mediate children's internet safety, according to their children) and Turkey, the lowest (73%). At 95%, Australia would be second in a ranking of countries in terms of parents actively mediating their children's safety online.

In addition to active mediation, which both enables opportunities and enhances safety, parents have long been advised to set rules or restrictions in order to manage their child's internet use. These may be simple bans such telling the child they are not permitted to undertake a particular online activity, or they may be partial restrictions such as permitting the child to do that activity only under supervision. Both these were treated as measures of restrictive mediation, compared with children for whom no restrictions apply (Table 21).

Table 21: Parents' restrictive mediation of the child's internet use, according to child

% who say that rules apply about…	9-12 years		13-16 years		
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	All
Give out personal information to others on the internet	95	100	83	79	89
Download music or films on the internet	89	91	42	32	63
Upload photos, videos or music to share with others	84	83	36	34	59
Have your own social networking profile	72	75	26	27	49
Use instant messaging	73	71	25	21	47
Watch video clips on the internet	54	64	20	19	39
One or more of these	99	99	83	83	91

QC328: For each of these things, please tell me if your parents CURRENTLY let you do them whenever you want, or let you do them but only with your parent's permission or supervision, or NEVER let you do them.

Note: The latter two options are combined to calculate the percentage for whom rules or restrictions apply.

Base: All children who use the internet.

- Table 21 shows that **parents impose most rules in relation to the child's disclosure of personal information online: 89% of Australian children say that they are either not allowed to do this, or that restrictions apply (i.e. they can only do it with specific permission or under supervision from the parent).**
- Next most regulated activity is downloading material (63%) and uploading material (59%), though possibly this reflects rules in cases where photos or videos are of the children themselves. In the European study generally, 57% of children are restricting in their downloading activities.
- Roughly one in two Australian children (49%) are restricted in their use of social networking sites, 47% are restricted in their use of instant messaging, and 39% experience rules around watching video clips.
- Gender differences vary by type of mediation. They are relatively small for disclosing personal information but younger girls generally experience more rules than do younger boys, while teenage boys face more rules than teenage girls.
- **Across all areas of internet use, younger children face more parental restrictions.**

Table 22: Parents' restrictive mediation of the child's internet use, according to child and parent

% who say that rules apply about …	Child no parent no	Child yes parent no	Child no parent yes	Child yes parent yes
Give out personal information to others on the internet	3	7	0	88
Download music or films on the internet	28	9	12	51
Upload photos, videos or music to share with others	27	14	6	53
Have your own social networking profile	39	12	6	43
Use instant messaging	44	10	7	39
Watch video clips on the internet	45	16	9	30

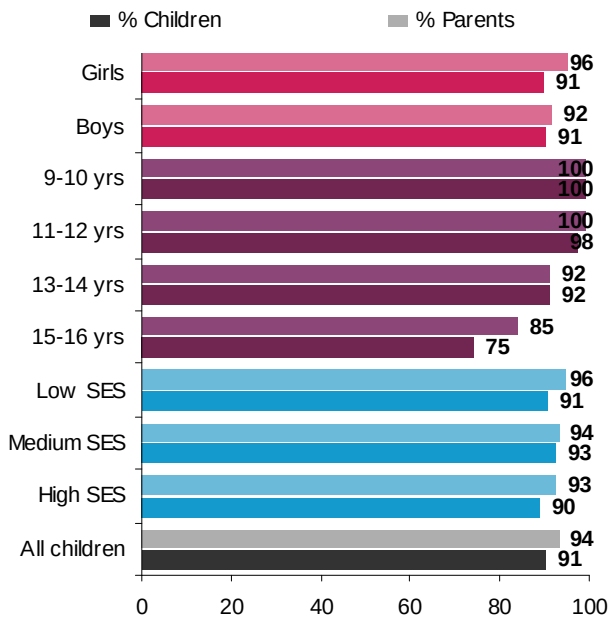
QC328 and QP221: For each of these things, please tell me if your parents CURRENTLY let you [your child is allowed to] do them whenever you want, or let you do them but only with your parent's permission or supervision, or NEVER let you do them.

Note: The latter two options are combined to calculate the percentage for whom rules or restrictions apply.

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents.

- Compared with the two types of active mediation discussed early, Table 22 shows that there is more agreement between parents and children about whether rules exist – 91% (i.e. 3% + 88%) – regarding rules related to giving out personal information, dropping to 75% in the case of watching video clips.

Figure 23: Parents' restrictive mediation of the child's internet use, according to child and parent



QC328 and QP221: Whether your parents let you [your child is allowed to] do this all of the time, only with permission/supervision or never allowed.

Note: The latter two options are combined to calculate the percentage for whom rules or restrictions apply.

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents.

- Compared with the various forms of active mediation (see Figure 21), **the decline in restrictive mediation with age is more dramatic, falling from 100% for 9-10 year old Australian child respondents facing such rules, to 75% for 15-16 year olds.**
- The majority of Australian teenagers are expected to follow rules when using the internet. According to parents, girls are slightly more restricted than boys, but the difference is only 4%. There is very little difference by SES.
- Looking across the 25 European countries the range of restrictions, according to the child, varies from 93% in Portugal and Ireland down to 54% in Lithuania – indicating that country differences in restrictive mediation are substantial.
- At 91% Australia would be relatively high up this list, joint fourth with France and Cyprus, behind Germany (92%, third) and Ireland and Portugal (93%, first). **Thus Australian parents are generally more likely than their counterparts in Europe to impose restrictions on their children's internet use.**

Given that a computer keeps a digital record of the sites it has accessed, it is comparatively easy for parents to check their children's internet activities during (or after) their time online. Monitoring as a means of overseeing children's online activities can raise issues of trust between parents and children. Consequently, monitoring is generally less favoured as a mediation strategy than restrictive mediation, even though restrictions can lead to arguments between parents and their children[32].

Table 23: Parent's monitoring of the child's internet use, according to child

% who say parents check...	9-12 years		13-16 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Which websites you visited	61	62	49	42	53
Your profile on a social network or online community	60	61	48	42	49
Which friends or contacts you add to social networking profile	46	56	29	35	38
The messages in your email or instant messaging account	41	28	15	8	18
One or more of these	54	64	60	60	59

QC330: Does your parent/either of your parents sometimes check any of the following things?

Base: All children who use the internet at home.

- **Monitoring strategies are adopted by almost three in five Australian parents, making this fairly common and yet the least favoured strategy by comparison with positive support, safety guidance or making rules about internet use (as in the European study generally).**
- Checking which websites children visit is the most common form of monitoring (53%) in Australia, perhaps reflecting the relative ease of doing this.
- Checking social networking profiles (49%) or the friends who are added to those profiles (38%) is a little less common, though still more practised than actually checking the content of children's messages.
- Some gender and age differences are striking. **Younger girls are monitored more than younger boys, apart from parents checking the contents of boys' messages. Teenage boys are monitored more than teenage girls, except for the friends that girls add to their SNS profiles.**

Table 24: Parent's monitoring of the child's internet use, according to child and parent

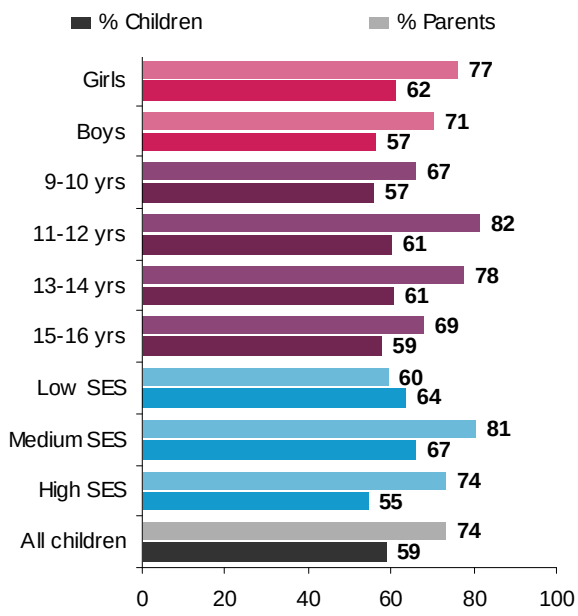
% who say parents check...	Child no parent no	Child yes parent no	Child no parent yes	Child yes parent yes
Which websites you visited	28	11	19	41
Your profile on a social network or online community	31	8	19	43
Which friends or contacts you add to social networking profile	41	9	21	29
The messages in your email or instant messaging account	63	5	20	13

QC330 and QP223: Does your parent/either of your parents sometimes check any of the following things?

Base: All children who use the internet at home and one of their parents.

- From Table 24, it can be seen that **Australian parents and children are mostly in agreement about whether parents monitor what the child does on the internet.** This applies both to things that parents are more likely to do (such as checking on which websites the children visit) and things that parents are unlikely to do (such as checking the messages in the children's email or instant messaging account).
- For the 21% of Australian parents who say they monitor their child's SNS contacts when their child says they do not, it may be that children simply do not know what monitoring their parents undertake.
- As with other mediation activities, parents are more likely than their children to claim that they do certain things, rather than their children saying that their parents do something that the parents themselves claim that they do not do.

Figure 24: Parent's monitoring of the child's internet use, according to child and parent



QC330 and QP223: Does your parent/either of your parents sometimes check any of the following things?

Base: All children who use the internet at home and one of their parents.

- Figure 24 reveals less monitoring of 9-10 year old Australians, a peak at 11-12 years, then a decline in monitoring as children grow older: 82% of the parents of 11-12 year olds say they use one or more forms of monitoring, but only 69% do so for 15-16 year olds.
- Parents from lower SES homes are less likely to say they monitor their children.

Country differences, as detailed in the cross-national report, are substantial, ranging from 61% of parents monitoring children's activities in one or more ways in Poland, according to the child, down to 26% doing this in Lithuania. At 59% Australia would be high up this list as Australian parents monitor their children more than parents in many other countries, according to their children. Parents generally report more monitoring than their children do, but at 74% Australia would be fourth in a combined 26 country ranking (after Norway, Poland and Ireland).

For the internet in particular, 'parental tools' have been developed as technical solutions to the challenge of parental mediation. Thus, finally, parents and children were asked if the parents use any technical means to monitor what the child does online (Table 25).

Table 25: Parents' technical mediation of the child's internet use, according to child

% who say parents check...	9-12 years		13-16 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Software to prevent spam/junk mail or viruses	74	73	80	80	78
Parental controls or other means of keeping track of the websites you visit	57	54	31	27	36
Parental controls or other means of blocking or filtering some types of website	50	34	29	34	35
A service or contract that limits the time you spend on the internet	28	21	19	20	21
One or more of these	83	68	85	84	81

QC331: Does your parent/either of your parents make use of the following?

Base: All children who use the internet at home.

Table 26: Parents' technical mediation of the child's internet use, according to child and parent

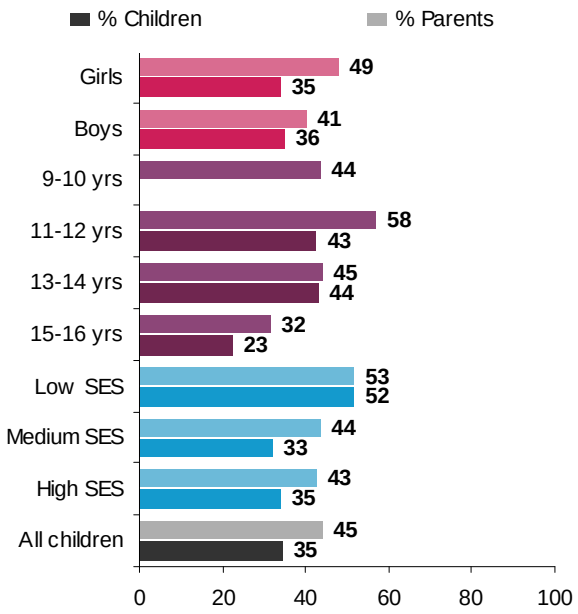
% who say parents check...	Child no parent no	Child yes parent no	Child no parent yes	Child yes parent yes
Software to prevent spam/junk mail or viruses	5	5	16	74
Parental controls or other means of keeping track of the websites you visit	49	8	15	28
Parental controls or other means of blocking or filtering some types of website	51	7	15	28
A service or contract that limits the time you spend on the internet	69	8	10	13

QC330 and QP223: Does your parent/either of your parents sometimes check any of the following things?

Base: All children who use the internet at home and one of their parents.

- **The major form of technical intervention, occurring in more than three quarters of households (78%) does not relate to children's safety concerns, but rather to security, being used to control spam and viruses** (Table 25). This is the same pattern as in Europe.
- Beyond this, use of technical tools is lower, especially by comparison with other parental mediation strategies. Still, **over one third of Australian parents (35%) say they block or filter websites, and a similar proportion track the websites visited by their child (36%), as reported by children. Both of these percentages are higher than in Europe generally (28% and 24% respectively).**
- Younger children face more technical restrictions, apart from the use of software to prevent spam, junk mail and viruses.
- **It seems children and parents largely agree over whether parents use technical tools to mediate their children's internet use** (Table 26).

Figure 25: Parents' use of parental controls or other means of blocking or filtering some types of websites



QC331: Does your parent/either of your parents make use of the following? Use of parental controls or other means of blocking or filtering some types of websites.

Base: All children who use the internet at home and one of their parents.

Figure 25 presents the demographic findings solely relating to parental use of filtering technology (the third row from Table 26).

- **Parents claim to use controls to filter or block the sites their child can visit somewhat more than their children believe happens (45% vs. 35%).**
- Boys claim to have their internet use blocked or filtered slightly more than girls claim this (36% vs. 35%).
- Apart from 9-10 year olds, filtering tools are used less for older children – and they are used by just under a quarter (23%) of parents of 15-16 year olds, according to their children (Figure 25).
- **Looking across the European study countries, UK parents top the rankings for their use of filtering technology. UK parents also filter more than Australian parents. According to parents, Australia (45%) would be third, after the UK (54%) and Ireland (48%). Australia would be sixth according to children (35%), behind the UK (46%), Ireland (41%), Turkey and France (both 38%) and the Netherlands (37%). The 25 nation average is 33% (according to parents; 45% in Australia) and 28% (according to children; 35% in Australia).**

6.2 Judging parental mediation

Does parental mediation work? *EU Kids Online* has observed that, while it is difficult to be sure that mediation works in terms of reducing children's exposure to risk and experience of harm, parents and children can be asked whether they think that what parents do makes a difference. For this reason, parents and children were asked to judge the effectiveness of parental mediation, hoping to throw some light on what seems to work and, if mediation does not, why not. In future analysis, *EU Kids Online* will pursue the statistical relations between parental knowledge of the internet, parental mediation and children's experiences of risk and, especially, of harm.

The survey asked children and parents whether parental mediation activities are generally helpful or not (Table 27). **Both children and parents consider parental mediation helpful to some degree. Almost three-quarters of Australian children (74%) say it helps a lot or a little; in line with the 25 nation European average.**

Table 27: Whether parental mediation is helpful, according to child and parent

% who say that what parents do helps to make the child's internet experience better		Yes		No
		A lot	A little	
9-12 years	Child says	38	44	18
	Parent says	38	44	18
13-16 years	Child says	13	53	34
	Parent says	40	32	28
All children	Child says	25	49	26
	Parent says	39	38	23

QC332: Do the things that your parent does/parents do relating to how you use the internet help to make your internet experience better, or not really? QP225: Do the things that you (and your partner/other carer) do relating to how your child uses the internet help to make his/her internet experience better, or not really?

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents.

- 9-12 year olds are more positive about what their parents do, perhaps reflecting their relative lack of skills. For them, parental mediation may indeed be more helpful.
- Parents in general are inclined to think their mediation is more helpful than their children think.

Why, overall, might a quarter of Australian children find parental mediation very helpful (25%), almost a half find it a little helpful (49%), and just over a quarter consider it not helpful (26%)? The *EU Kids Online* survey pursued several possibilities, including (i) whether children consider that their parents really know enough about the child's internet use, (ii) whether parental mediation is seen as more restrictive of online opportunities than beneficial, or (iii) whether parental mediation is just something that children ignore.

Table 28: How much parents know about their child's internet use, according to child

% who say that their parent(s) know(s)...	9-12 years		13-16 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
A lot	48	59	24	33	41
Quite a bit	33	27	52	30	36
Just a little	18	12	23	34	22
Nothing	1	2	1	3	2

QC325: How much do you think your parent(s) knows about what you do on the internet?

Base: All children who use the internet.

- Table 28 shows that **just over three quarters of Australian children (77%) think their parents know a lot or quite a bit about their child's internet use, a slightly higher percentage than in the European study (68%), while only 2% claim that their parent knows nothing.**
- Younger children are more likely to think their parents know more, in line with the finding that parents of 11-12 year olds mediate their experiences more than they do older children.
- Girls are more inclined than boys to think that their parents know a lot.

The balance between well-judged parental intervention in the child's internet use, and trusting the child to deal with online experiences by themselves, is difficult for any parent. Not all parents feel confident that they can help their child deal with anything on the internet that bothers them, and they may also feel that their child is themselves better able to cope with their online experiences than is the case.

Table 29: Parents' ability to help their child and child's ability to cope, according to parent

% of parents…	Extent			
	Not at all	Not very much	A fair amount	A lot
To what extent, if at all, do you feel you are able to help your child to deal with anything on the internet that bothers them?				
Parents of children aged 9 to 12 years	1	10	41	48
Parents of children aged 13 to 16 years	3	14	35	49
Parents of all children	2	12	38	48
To what extent, if at all, do you feel your child is able to deal with anything on the internet that bothers them?				
Parents of children aged 9 to 12 years	12	16	57	16
Parents of children aged 13 to 16 years	1	12	51	36
Parents of all children	6	14	54	26

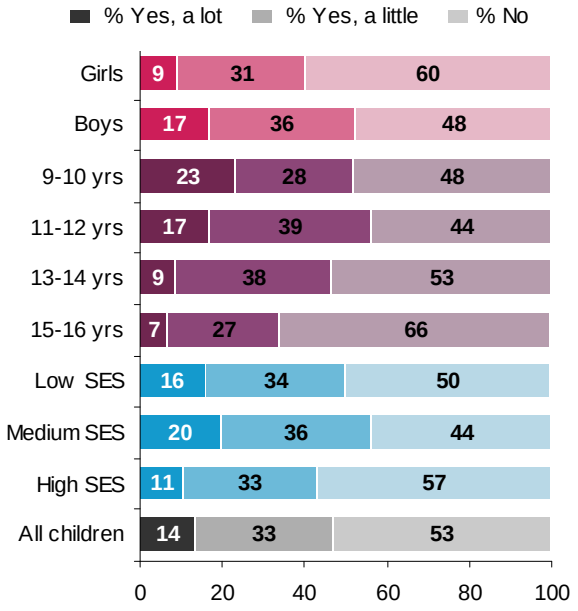
QP233: To what extent, if at all, do you feel you are able to help your child to deal with anything on the internet that bothers them?
QP234: To what extent, if at all, do you think your child is able to deal with things on the internet that bothers them?

Base: Parents whose child uses the internet.

- Table 29 shows that **the great majority of parents (86%) are confident about their role, feeling that they can help their child a lot, or a fair amount, if the latter encounters something that bothers them online.**
- Regardless of the child's age, almost half of Australian parents (48%) are inclined to say they can help a lot.
- Parents are also confident in their child's ability to cope with things online that may bother them, with four fifths (80%) indicating that they have a lot or a fair amount of confidence in their child – this is more the case for parents of older children.

Another source of doubt regarding the value of parental mediation is the possibility that parental mediation may limit opportunities as well as support online safety. Thus, children and parents were asked whether the parent's activities limit what the child can do online (Figure 26).

Figure 26: Whether parental mediation limits the child's activities on the internet, according to child



QC333: Do the things that your parent does (parents do) relating to how you use the internet limit what you can do on the internet or not really?

Base: All children who use the internet.

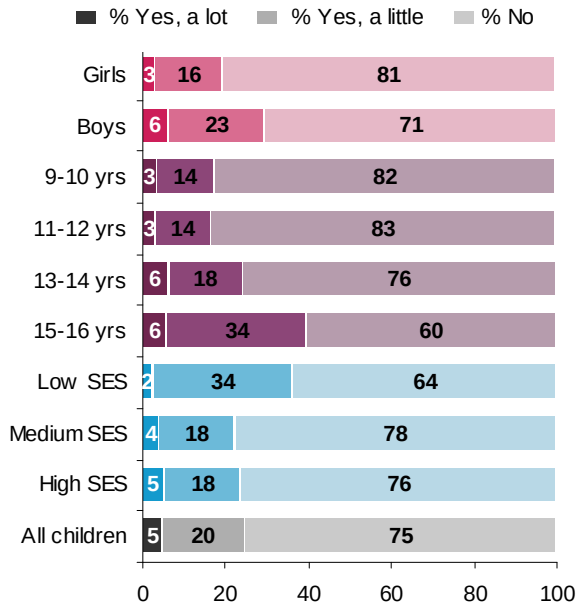
- Figure 26 shows that **almost one in two Australian children (47%) think that parental mediation limits what they do online; 14% say it limits their activities a lot.**

- As might be expected, given greater parental mediation, 11-12 year old children are more likely to say it limits them, while more 9-10 year olds believe that it limits them a lot. It is worth noting, however, that the opposite result might have been predicted, namely that teenagers would feel more restricted by parental activities than would younger children.
- Boys are more inclined to think that mediation limits them a lot or a little compared to girls (52% vs. 40%).
- Children in some countries feel rather more restricted by parental mediation (e.g. in Turkey [61%], Ireland [51%] and Bulgaria [51%]) than in others (e.g. Hungary [16%], and the Netherlands [24%]). At 47%, Australian children would rank at joint sixth (with Italy and Spain) in feeling limited by parental mediation.

Examining any association between the reported amount of parental mediation and children's sense of being restricted is a task for a future *EU Kids Online* report.

So, do children say that they simply ignore parental efforts to mediate their internet use, as is popularly supposed?

Figure 27: Whether child ignores what parents say when they use the internet, according to child



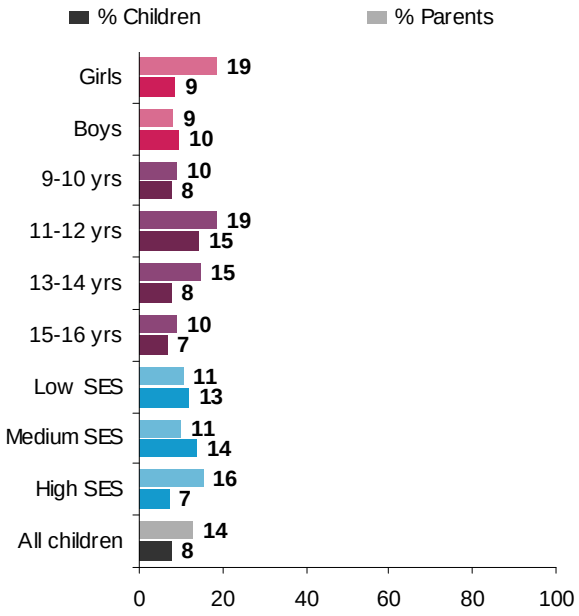
QC334: And do you ever ignore what your parent(s) tell you when use the internet, or not really?

Base: All children who use the internet.

- Figure 27 shows that **for many children, parental mediation is seen to have some effect. Three quarters of Australian children (75%) say they do not simply ignore it, which is some eleven percentage points higher than the European average (64%). However, 20% say they ignore their parents' mediation efforts a little and 5% of Australian children say they ignore their parents' mediation a lot.**
- 15-16 year olds are most likely to say they ignore what their parents do or say about their internet use, 34% saying they ignore it a little.
- Girls are less likely to claim they ignore their parents' mediation, which is similar to the European pattern.

Whether effective or not, there is clearly a considerable amount of parental mediation of different kinds being practised in Australian families. In a cross-sectional survey, it is not possible to determine whether this mediation reduces the risk of harm to children online. Indeed, it is possible that parents' mediating activities are a response to problematic experiences in the past. Or it may be that parents do what they do because they anticipate future problems, and seek to prevent them. The *EU Kids Online* survey asked both children and parents about this possibility.

Figure 28: Whether parents do anything differently because the child has been bothered by something on the internet, according to child and parent



QC335: Does your parent / Do your parents do anything new or different these days because you have been bothered by something on the internet in the past, or not really? QP227: Do you (or your partner/other carer) do anything different these days because your child has been bothered by something on the internet in the past or not really?

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents.

- Figure 28 shows that **only 14% of Australian parents claim that they mediate differently because of something that had bothered the child in the past. Just 8% of children give this as an explanation of their parent's current mediation.**
- 19% of Australian 11-12 year olds claimed that parents mediate differently because of a past event, and this may explain the increased rates of mediation evident in Figures 24 and 25.
- High SES children are half as likely as other children to say their parent is doing something differently.
- Looking at variation across the European study, 18% of children claim their parents mediate differently because of something that upset them in Estonia, compared with 3% in Hungary. Claims by parents reveal even greater national variation, from 29% in Turkey to 5% in Greece. Australia lies in the middle of the range, close to the 25 nation average of 6% (Australia is 8%) claimed by children; 15% by parents (Australia is 14%).

It may not be past problems, but rather the anticipation of future problems, that stimulates parents to mediate their children's internet use. Table 30 shows parental anticipation of future problems around internet use that lie ahead for their children.

Table 30: Whether parent thinks child will experience problems on the internet in the next six months

% of parents who say...	9-12 years		13-16 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Not at all likely	27	16	24	16	21
Not very likely	42	43	43	52	45
Fairly likely	25	31	26	21	25
Very likely	6	10	7	11	8

QP232: In the next six months, how likely, if at all, do you think it is that your child will experience something on the internet that will bother them?

Base: Parents of children who use the internet.

- Table 30 suggests **two thirds of Australian parents are confident (66%) that it is not very, or at all, likely that their child will encounter anything that bothers them online in the next six months.**
- **However, 33% think it fairly, or very, likely that their child will experience something that bothers them online in the next six months.**
- There is a gender and age effect - the proportion of parents who think it is fairly or very likely that girls aged 9-12 may experience something that will bother them (41%) is higher than same-aged boys (31%), whereas their concern for older girls decreases in the 'fairly likely' category (31% declining to 21%), while other cohorts remain broadly equivalent.
- The 25 nation findings indicate few age or gender differences.

Last, we explored whether children and parents think the level of parental mediation they receive is about right. We asked children if they would like their parents to take more or less interest in what they do online. And we asked parents if they think they should do more or not.

Table 31: Whether the child would like their parent(s) to take more interest in what they do online

% who say ...	9-12 years		13-16 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
A lot more	10	10	4	7	8
A little more	16	12	5	11	11
Stay the same	61	73	76	74	71
A little less	11	4	11	7	8
A lot less	2	1	4	1	2

QC326: Overall, would you like your parent(s) to take more or less interest in what you do on the internet, or stay the same?

Base: All children who use the internet.

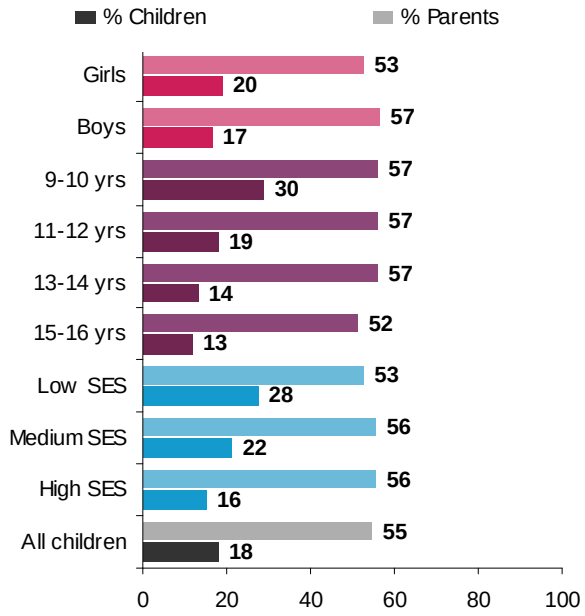
- Table 31 shows that **for most Australian children (71%), and slightly more for teenagers, parents have got it about right, according to their children. These children think the level of parental interest in their online activities should stay the around same.**
- **19% would like their parents to do a little or a lot more, however. On the other hand, some 10% would like their parents to do rather less.**
- These findings are broadly in line with the European study average.

Figure 29 examines more closely those children who would like their parents to take a bit or a lot more interest in their internet use. We also compare these with the proportions of parents who say that they should do a bit or a lot more.

- **18% of children would like their parents to take more of an interest in their internet use, while 55% of parents think that they should do more in relation to their child's internet use.**
- **9-10 year olds most want their parents to show more interest in their internet use (30%).**

- Gender differences are small. The lower the SES level, the more the children would like their parents to take more interest. This is in line with the European study pattern, where children from lower SES homes wish for more interest, and where there seems little difference between parents according to SES levels.

Figure 29: Children who would like their parent(s) to take more interest in what they do online, and parents who think they should do more



QC326: Overall, would you like your parent(s) to take more or less interest in what you do on the internet, or to stay about the same? And is that a lot/little more/less? QP226: Speaking of things you do in relation to your child's internet use, do you think you should do more, or not really?

Note: graph shows children who say yes, a bit or a lot more, and parents who say yes, a bit or a lot more.

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents.

- Country differences in children's desire for more parental input are noteworthy, with children in Eastern and Southern Europe greatly wishing that their parents would show more interest in what they do online – especially Romania, Portugal, Turkey, Cyprus, Spain and Bulgaria. By contrast, children in France, Denmark, and the Netherlands wish for little or no further input from their parents. Australian children are towards the top third of this ranking (joint seventh) in desiring more input from parents.
- Parents take a different view, and their views show little relation to their children's wishes. Thus parents in Cyprus, Romania, Bulgaria, Norway, Greece and Turkey, think they should do more; while parents in Austria, the Netherlands and Germany are least likely to think this. At 55%, Australian parental desire to do more is a little higher than the European study average (53%).

6.3 Teachers

Parents are not the only adults with a responsibility to mediate children's internet use or safety. To aid comparison, *EU Kids Online* decided to ask children about the kinds of mediating activities undertaken by their teachers.

One question was asked about active mediation in general ('have your teachers ever talked to you about what you do on the internet?'). Another asked about restrictive mediation ('have your teachers ever made rules about what you can do on the internet at school?').[33] Then we asked about mediation of internet safety, using questions also asked of parents (Table 31).

- **97% of children say their teachers have done at least one of the forms of active mediation asked about. This is substantially higher than the European average of 73% and makes Australia top of a combined 26 country ranking for reported teacher mediation.**
- Over four in five AU children think their teachers have engaged with their internet use in terms of suggesting ways to use the internet safely (74%), helping them when something was difficult to find or do (79%) and explaining why some websites are good or bad (30%).
- Over four fifths (83%) had talked to children about what to do if something bothered them, and over two thirds (70%) say their teachers have helped when something bothered them on the internet. As with other findings, this is substantially higher than the 24% reported by European study children overall.

Table 32: Teachers' mediation of child's internet use, according to child

% who say teachers at their school have ever...	9-12 years		13-16 years		
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	All
Suggested ways to use the internet safely	66	78	74	81	74
Explained why some websites are good or bad	33	41	22	26	30
Helped you when something is difficult to do or find on the internet	80	86	73	75	79
Suggested ways to behave towards other people online	66	73	75	84	75
Talked to you about what to do if something on the internet bothered you	80	83	80	90	83
Helped you in the past when something has bothered you on the internet	70	67	66	79	70
One or more forms of active mediation	97	98	96	96	97
Made rules about what you can do on the internet at school	97	96	96	90	95
Talked to you about what you do on the internet	69	77	74	78	74
One or more of all of the above	98	99	96	99	98

QC338: Have any teachers at your school ever done any of these things? *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: All children who use the internet.

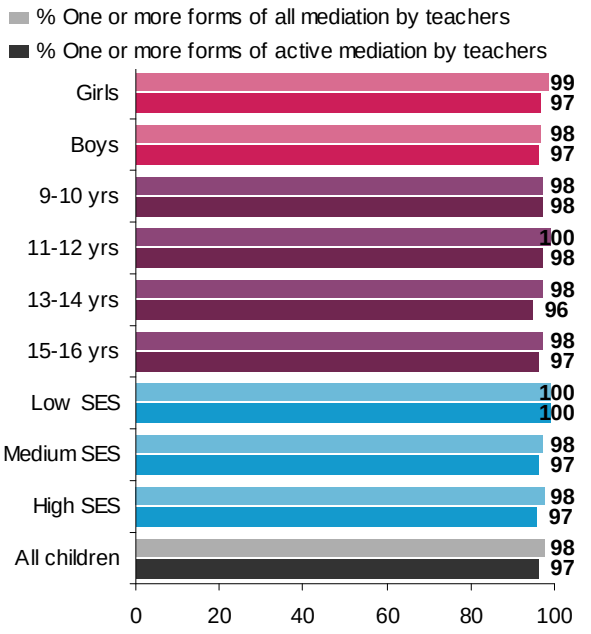
- **Older children and younger children report equivalent mediation by teachers, indicating little further scope for mediation in Australian schools. This differs from Europe, where one in ten children who use the internet has received no guidance or advice from their teachers.**

There are some gender differences, but this depends on age and the particular form of mediation. Older girls are more likely than older boys to say that teachers have helped them in the past when something has bothered them (79% vs. 66%), talked about what to do if something on the internet bothered them (90% vs. 80%) and how to behave towards others online (84% vs. 75%). Turning to the bottom section of Table 32, above, which focuses on active mediation, nearly all children (98%) say that teachers have made rules about what they can do on the internet at school. By comparison, only 62% of children across the 25 nation study say teachers make such rules.

- **Almost three in four Australian children (74%) say their teachers talk to them about what they do on the internet, more for older children. This is better than in Europe, where 53% of kids say this.**

Figure 30 reveals few differences by gender, age or SES in children's experience of mediation of the internet by teachers.

Figure 30: Teachers' mediation of child's internet use, according to child



QC338: Have any teachers at your school ever done any of these things? *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: All children who use the internet.

6.4 Peers

Some of the same questions regarding forms of mediation can also be asked of children's friends. Little is known about whether or how children really support each other in terms of internet safety, although previous research has often shown that children would rather turn to their friends than to an adult when something online bothers or worries them.

Five of the questions on active mediation of internet safety were also asked regarding children's friends (see Table 33).

Table 33: Peer mediation of child's internet use, according to child

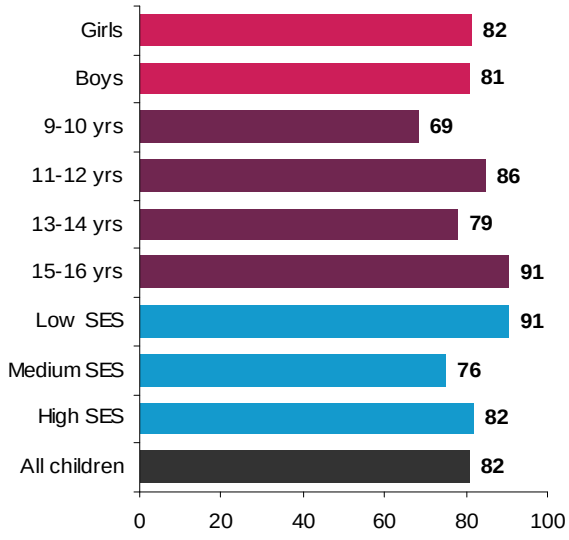
% who say friends at their school have ever...	9-12 years		13-16 years		
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	All
Helped you when something is difficult to do or find on the internet	69	72	80	79	75
Explained why some websites are good or bad	40	32	40	47	39
Helped you in the past when something has bothered you on the internet	25	37	29	56	37
Suggested ways to behave towards other people online	26	27	38	43	33
Suggested ways to use the internet safely	29	29	34	36	32
One or more of all of the above	80	76	83	88	82

QC336: Have your friends ever done any of these things? *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: All children who use the internet.

- **Over four fifths (82%) of Australian children say their peers have helped or supported their internet use in at least one of the five ways asked about** (Table 33).
- As was found for teachers, this suggests that children do consider other children supportive in general, more so in the case of older children.
- **Friends are much more likely to mediate in a practical way, helping each other to do or find something when there is a difficulty (75%). Fewer say that friends help when they are bothered by something (37%), but this may reflect the fact that few are bothered. When children are bothered by something online, more turn to a teacher (70%) than to a parent (67%), or a friend (37%).**
- Compared with help from teachers, it seems that friends of Australian kids are much less likely to give safety (32% vs. 74%), or ethical, advice (33% vs. 75%).
- **Younger Australian boys report more peer mediation than do younger girls (80% vs. 76%), while older girls report more peer mediation than do older boys (88% vs. 83%).**
- Specifically, older Australian girls claim more than older boys that friends help when something on the internet has bothered them (56% vs. 29%); and explain why some websites are good or bad (47% girls vs. 40% boys); and suggest ways to behave towards other people online (43% girls vs. 38% boys). Older boys and girls are more or less equivalent in asking friends for help when something is difficult to do or find on the internet (boys 80% vs. girls 79%) and in asking friends to suggest ways to use the internet safely (boys 34% vs. girls 36%).

Figure 31: Peer mediation of child's internet use, according to child



QC336: Have your friends ever done any of these things? *(Multiple responses allowed)*

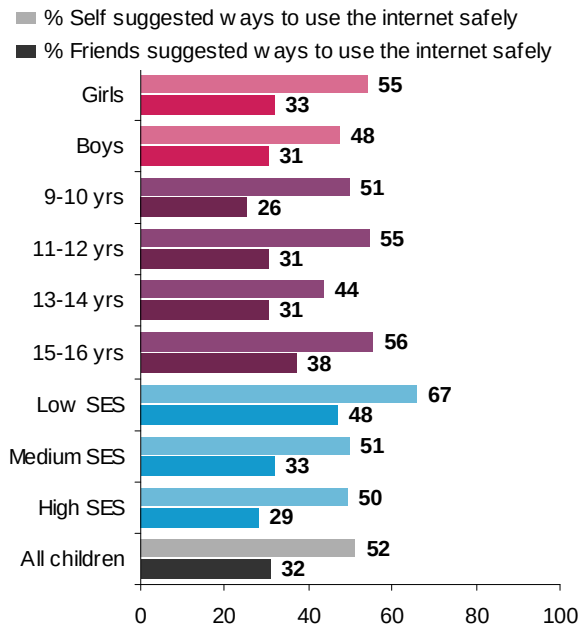
Base: All children who use the internet.

- Figure 31 indicates that looking across age groups, and types of mediation, peer support is equivalent for boys and girls.
- It reaffirms the finding that older children think their friends mediate more, the exception being the drop in mediation for 13-14 year olds.

The overall European study average is 73% of children say their friends help in term of one or more of the types of mediation asked about. The Australian finding is higher, at 82%, placing it in the company of many Scandinavian and Baltic countries: Finland and Estonia (tie first, 86%), Czech Republic (85%), Germany, Sweden and Norway (tie fourth, 83%), Australia and Belgium (tie seventh, 82%). France is at the bottom of the ranking (63%). **Thus it seems that Australian children rely more on peer support than in many other countries.**

EU Kids Online argues that, distinctively, peer mediation can work both ways. Thus children were also asked if they help their friends in similar ways with online matters, specifically as regards how to use the internet safely.

Figure 32: Peer mediation of child's safe internet use, according to child



QC337: Have you ever suggested ways to use the internet safely to your friends. QC336c: Have your friends ever done any of these things – suggested ways to use the internet safely.

Base: All children who use the internet.

- **While 32% of Australian children say they have received some guidance on safe internet use from their friends, 52% say that they have also provided such advice to their friends** (Figure 32).
- Australian girls report that they are more likely to help friends in this particular respect (55% vs. boys 48%).
- Older children both help and are helped by friends in terms of suggesting how to be safe online, with a drop for 15-16 year olds. 13-14 year olds children say they support others more than they themselves benefit from such help.
- Considerable national differences are evident in the degree of peer support reported. In a combined list of the 26 countries ordered in terms of children suggesting to their friends how to use the internet safely, Australia would come second (after Cyprus, 54%), with 52% saying they have provided help to friends. In the Netherlands (32%), Slovenia (31%), Belgium (29%), and France (28%), fewer than one in three children report helping friends. The differences are greater for children who say they receive advice from their friends on using the internet safely – 32% in Australia compared with 44% (average) across the 25 countries. Germany is highest at 73% vs. Netherlands lowest at 17%, and Australia is in bottom third at 32%.

6.5 Parent, teacher and peer mediation compared

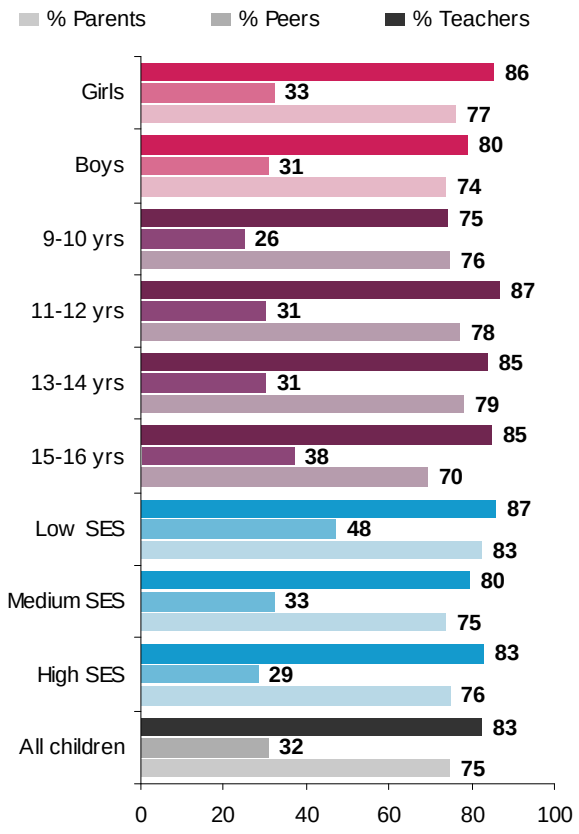
In designing the questionnaire, for reasons of both interview length and question repetition (which is useful for making comparisons but boring for the child respondent), not all questions were asked of all forms of mediation. **One question was repeated across all the contexts discussed above: have your parents/teachers/friends 'suggested ways to use the internet safely?'**

Figure 33 compares children's receipt of internet safety advice from parents, teachers and peers.

- **It seems that, for Australian children, internet safety advice is received first from teachers (83%), then parents (75%), then peers (32%), whereas the 25 European countries generally have parents, then teachers, then peers.**
- While the order is the same for boys and girls, boys are less likely to say that other people have suggested ways to use the internet safely.
- There is little difference between teachers and parents for the 9-10 year olds. Differences are more noticeable from ages 11-12 onwards, with parental influence waning for the 15-16 year olds.

- There is little difference in relative support from teachers or parents according to SES ranking, although Australian peers from lower SES homes are more likely to support their friends (48% [low] vs. 33% [medium] vs. 29% [high]).
- While in most of the 26 countries involved in this research parents give more advice, in the UK and Portugal, as in Australia, teachers give more safety advice; in Italy and Romania peers (after parents) give more advice than teachers; and in Germany it is peers who give the most advice.

Figure 33: Whether parents, peers or teachers have ever suggested ways to use the internet safely, according to child



QC329c: Have your parents ever suggested ways to use the internet safely? QC336c: Have your friends ever suggested ways to use the internet safely? QC338d: Have your teachers ever suggested ways to use the internet safely?

Base: All children who use the internet.

6.6 Sources of safety awareness

Parents, teachers and peers are clearly important, but there are also additional sources of information available to children regarding how to use the internet safely. How important are these? Use of other sources is shown in Table 34.

Note that the response options below do not include parents, teachers or friends, as these are reported above.

Table 34: Children's sources of advice on internet safety (other than parents, teachers or friends)

%	9-12 years		13-16 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Other relative	61	66	45	55	57
Television, radio, newspapers or magazines	27	29	34	45	34
Librarian	28	22	14	24	22
Someone whose job is to give advice over the internet	21	20	16	29	22
Websites	11	14	26	25	19
Internet service provider	2	7	20	13	11
Youth or church or social worker	9	3	15	15	11
I haven't received advice from any of these	29	24	18	17	22

QC339: Have you EVER received advice about how to use the internet safely from any of these people or places? *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: All children who use the internet.

- **Other relatives (57%) are important in providing advice to children on the safe use of the internet.**
- One in three Australian kids gets safety advice from traditional media (34%), more than from websites (19%).
- 22% of Australian children receive advice from online advisors, more than twice as many as in Europe (9%).
- 22% of Australian kids also get help from librarians. Rather fewer get advice from websites (19%), youth workers (or similar) or internet service providers (both 11%).

- Older children get more advice from traditional media, youth/church/social workers, websites and internet service providers; younger ones use relatives and librarians.
- Australian girls are more likely than boys to say they receive advice from other relatives and from traditional media, librarians and youth/church/social workers. Older girls receive more than older boys from librarians and from people whose job it is to give help over the internet, while older boys are more likely to turn to an internet service provider.
- Interestingly, in Table 34, **more than one in five children (22%) report that they have not received safety guidance from any of these sources, and younger children, especially boys, report receiving less advice than do teenagers.**
- These percentages are better than in the 25 European countries, where 34% of children report receiving no safety guidance from these sources.

Similar questions were asked of parents, although a somewhat different list of advice sources was provided. Additionally, the *EU Kids Online* survey asked parents where they would like to get information and advice about internet safety from, so as to focus future awareness-raising activities (Table 35 and Table 36).

- Table 35 indicates that A**ustralian parents receive internet safety advice first and foremost from family and friends, and from their child's school (58%), then from traditional media (42%), government and local authorities (34%), internet service providers (32%), and websites (30%); while one in four (25%) say they get safety advice from their child.**
- Those with the youngest children (9-10 years) seem not to have a preferred source of safety advice. This is the age group where least mediation is practiced in Australia, with a jump in mediation in the 11-12 year olds, indicating a possible benefit for bolstering services targeting advice for parents of younger children.
- About one in twenty parents (4%) reports getting no advice from any of these sources.

Table 35: Parents' actual sources of information on internet safety, by age of child

%	Age of child				All
	9-10	11-12	13-14	15-16	
Family and friends	56	59	59	57	58
Your child's school	45	71	61	55	58
Television, radio, newspapers or magazines	41	38	47	41	42
Government, local authorities	28	37	37	35	34
Internet service providers	18	35	36	36	32
Websites with safety information	30	29	29	32	30
From my child	16	21	31	33	25
Other sources	15	19	22	18	19
Manufacturers and retailers selling the products	18	16	23	15	18
Children's welfare organisations/charities	10	11	9	8	9
None, I don't get any information about this	3	4	1	6	4

QP238: In general where do you get information and advice on safety tools and safe use of the internet from? *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: Parents whose child uses the internet.

- When asked where they would like to get advice from in the future (Table 36), the child's school is the most popular choice for parents at 65%, with government and local authorities (55%), safety websites (47%), traditional media (44%) and internet service providers (43%) all coming before family and friends (37%).
- **Almost no Australian parents (1%) say they do not want further information on internet safety.**

Table 36: Parents' desired sources of information on internet safety, by age of child

%	Age of child				All
	9-10	11-12	13-14	15-16	
Your child's school	65	70	72	55	65
Government, local authorities	51	52	58	60	55
Websites with safety information	47	51	51	39	47
Television, radio, newspapers or magazines	46	41	52	37	44
Internet service providers	36	50	48	37	43
Family and friends	46	37	37	30	37
Manufacturers and retailers selling the products	35	31	38	20	31
From my child	23	24	32	22	25
Children's welfare organisations/charities	21	29	28	22	25
Other sources	22	18	18	10	17
None, I don't want more information about this	1	1	1	2	1

QP239: In general where would you like to get information and advice on safety tools and safe use of the internet from in the future? *(Multiple responses allowed)*

Base: Parents whose child uses the internet.

7. CONCLUSION

Smart handheld devices allow Australian children to access the internet from wherever they are. Compared with the children in the *EU Kids Online* study, Australian children are more likely to have access to mobile digital devices for going online This is especially true for teenagers and children in higher SES families. Figure 42 underlines the differences. Whereas 46% of Australian children say they access the internet via a smart handheld device other than a basic mobile phone, this is true of only 12% of European children. The next highest countries are Norway (31%) and the UK (26%). Mobility of access provides a new context for policy development, and for the many stakeholders working to support children's online opportunities while protecting them from harm.

A focus on younger children. As children go online at younger ages, so it becomes increasingly imperative to develop policy initiatives to help them keep safe. While support for older children remains important, campaigns should be developed to target primary school students. Children in the 9-10 year old age group are willing to defer to others: 62% say they do not know more than their parents about the internet, and 30% say they would like their parents to take more interest in what they do online (Figure 29). This provides an opportunity for parents and teachers to become more involved with helping younger children gain the skills they need to stay safe. There is a comparative lack of research with 5-8 year olds, but Australian parents need alerting to the risks younger children face. Given that many 11-12 year olds do receive active parental mediation, but that this is less true for 9-10 year olds (Figures 25 and 25), the challenge is urgent.

Are safer internet initiatives working? The overall relatively high levels of online risk experienced by Australian children, in line with children from Scandinavian and Baltic nations, suggests that the considerable efforts towards teaching protective skills and promoting online safety have not necessarily reached their targets. Even so, Australian children have learned it is unwise to post their address or phone number on their SNS profiles (6% compared to Europe, 14%), and four in five know it is best to keep their profile private or partially private. On the other hand, there less than average awareness among Australian parents of whether their child has seen sexual images online compared with parents in European countries. Australian parents are more aware of whether their child has experienced nasty or hurtful comments from online contacts.

Overall levels of risk found in the Australian survey are summarised in Table 37.

Table 37: Summary of online risk factors shaping children's probability of experiencing harm

%	Age				All
	9-10	11-12	13-14	15-16	
Seen sexual images on websites in past 12 months	11	17	25	56	28
Have been sent nasty or hurtful messages on the internet in past 12 months	6	15	14	15	13
Seen or received sexual messages on the internet in past 12 months	n.a.	9	9	27	15
Ever had contact on the internet with someone not met face to face before	18	23	35	53	34
Ever gone on to meet anyone face to face that first met on the internet	2	2	5	9	5
Have come across one or more types of potentially harmful user-generated content in past 12 months	n.a.	27	33	43	34
Have experienced one or more types of misuse of personal data in past 12 months	n.a.	20	17	14	17
Encountered one or more of the above	24	57	63	84	58
Acted in a nasty or hurtful way towards others on the internet in the past 12 months	0	5	7	8	5
Sent or posted a sexual message of any kind on the internet in the past 12 months	n.a.	5	0	5	4
Done either of these	0	8	5	8	5

Note: for the exact questions asked of children, see earlier sections of this report (indicated in the text next to this table).

Base: All children who use the internet.

Australian findings around risk are generally higher than across the 25 European countries, although the 400 case sample size (compared with 1000), and the six months later data collection, are reasons for caution. Examining the proportions of children who have experienced at least one of the types of risk asked about, there is a steady

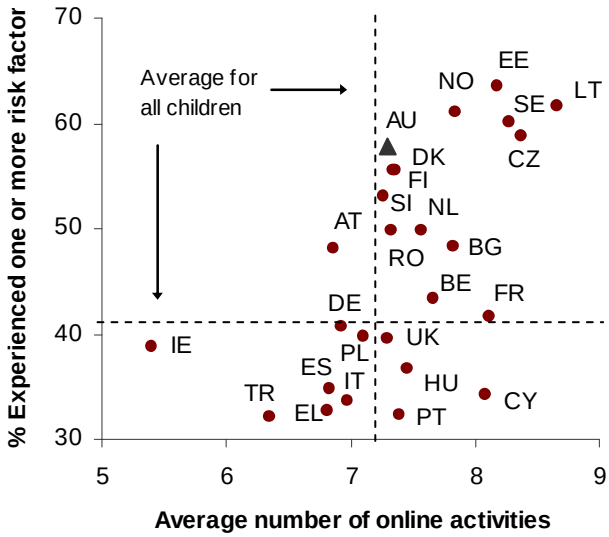
increase from a minority, but still one in four (24%), of 9-10 year olds who use the internet; to over half of 11-12 year olds (57%); rising to more than four in five of 15-16 year olds (84%). We urgently require more information about the intensity and duration of Australian children's reactions to risky online experiences that bother them.

Deliberate risk-takers? Australian children are more than twice as likely as their European counterparts to post an incorrect age on their SNS profile (34% compared with the European average of 16%) and more likely than is the case in any of the other 25 countries. Assuming that children say they are older than they are, this can lead to them experiencing risks that they are not yet equipped to handle. Further, where the fictional age is used to gain access to a SNS, the child might enter an environment which is not designed for under-13s. As well as studying the safety strategies of younger children who take risks and are not bothered by what they find online, we also need to know more about how children develop resilience in response to risk-taking, and whether an individual choice to take risks is important in this process.

Children are all different. Children differ by age, gender, socio-economic status and by where, when, how often and for how long they go online. Psychological and emotional factors differ, as do socio-cultural dimensions, such as religion. Even so, it is possible to use the 25 nation study to provide pointers to risk-taking that are also relevant in Australia. "Those who encounter most risk online (often, teenagers, boys) are not necessarily those most bothered or upset by the experience (often, younger children, girls)"[34]. The next stage of *EU Kids Online* research will investigate the specific characteristics of children who are distressed by the risks they encounter, to help inform policy supporting their internet use.

Increased internet use leads to increased opportunity and to increased risk. The *EU Kids Online* research, and this associated Australian study, both demonstrate that "opportunities and risks go hand in hand"[35]. Figure 34 is taken from the European report[36] with the addition of Australia (marked by a triangle). It plots the information from Table 37 (the percentage of children experiencing one or more "online risk factors shaping children's probability of experiencing harm") against that from Table 4 (The average number of "children's activities online in the past month").

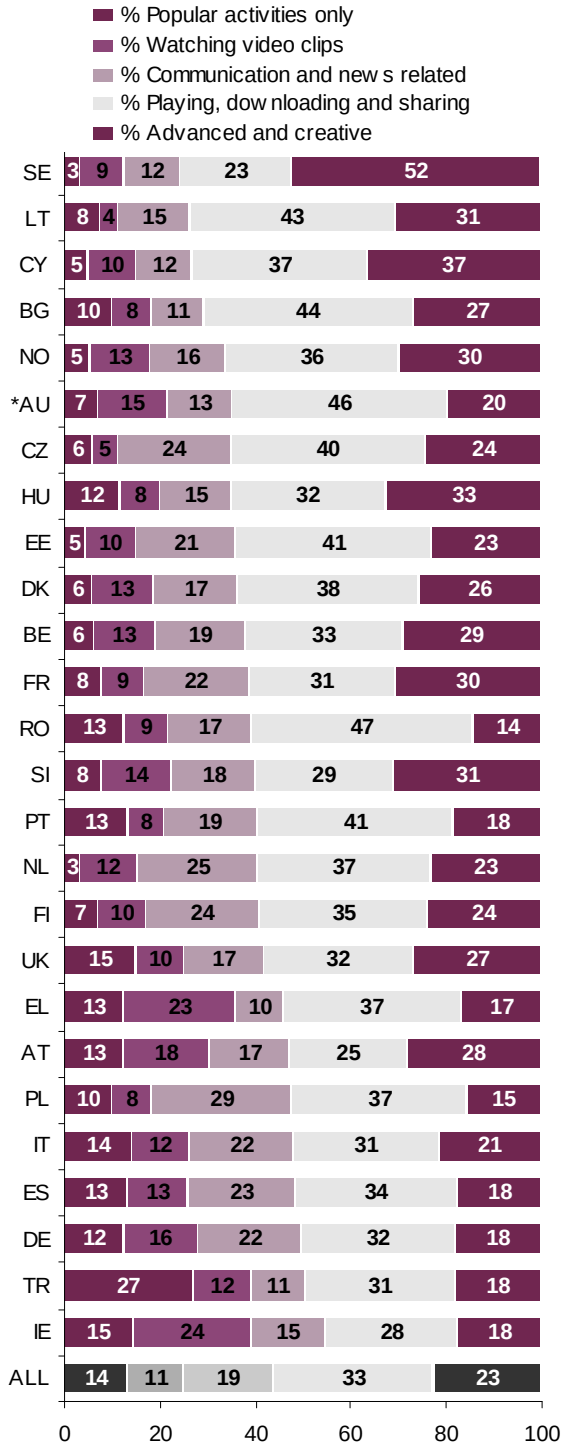
Figure 34: Children who have encountered one or more online risk factors by children's average number of online activities, by country[37]



The Australian position on this graph is particularly interesting, since it aligns Australia more closely with "high use, high risk" countries[38] in Scandinavia and the Baltic region, rather than with other first language English speaking nations such as Ireland and the UK, which are both slightly less than average in terms of children's experiences of risk. Of interest for future policy development is the 'slightly above average' status of Australian children in terms of the number of different online activities undertaken in the past month, compared with their 'substantially above average' experience of one or more risk factors. Even so, "what stands out here is the broad positive association between risks and opportunities, as experienced by children on a country level. The more of one, the more of the other, it appears"[39]

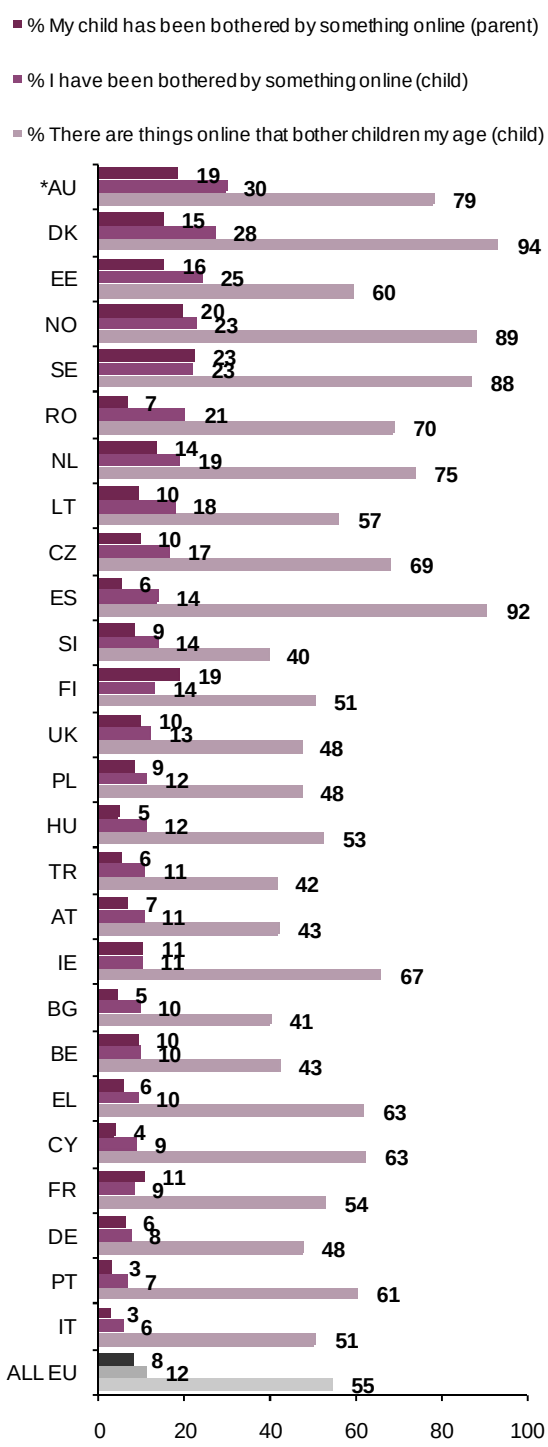
The ladder of opportunities.[40] The *EU Kids Online* project offers ways in which to identify and investigate policy frameworks adopted by nations which have optimised the balance between opportunity and risk. The ladder of opportunities categorises children's activities in increasing order of interactivity[41]. Two in three Australian children (66%) are operating beyond a basic level of activity and are involved in active and creative internet uses, viz: 'Playing, downloading and sharing' and 'Advanced and creative [use]' (Figure 35). Australian children rank 6th out of 26 countries, and are similar in a number of respects to other countries where children report a high number of activities, such as Norway (Figure 34). In many of these countries, as in Australia, children started going online at a comparatively young age.

Figure 35: Ladder of opportunities, by country



Increased internet use broadly correlates with advanced skills, as well as increased exposure to online risks. When children's likelihood of experiencing one or more risk factors is plotted against the average number of online activities, this positions Australia alongside Estonia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Denmark and Finland (Figure 34). Figure 35 indicates those countries where children are most likely to have creative and productive internet skills, including the capacity for advanced and creative work, and playing, downloading and sharing files. While the opportunities are chiefly in evidence among the high use, high risk countries, including Australia, it is interesting to note that Cyprus (third) and Belgium (fourth), are ranked highly on the Ladder of opportunities (Figure 35), even though Belgium is comparatively lower in risk exposure than most other high-opportunity countries (Figure 34), and Cyprus is significantly lower than average (also Figure 34). While exposure to risk does not necessarily entail experience of harm, future research will explore the dynamics of how to promote high online opportunities for children while minimising the experience of harm. The policy environment of Cyprus and Belgium may be interesting in this respect.

Figure 36: Online experiences that have bothered children, according to child and parent, by country



QC110: In the PAST 12 MONTHS, have you seen or experienced something on the internet that has bothered you in some way? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen it. QP228: As far as you are aware, in the past year, has your child seen or experienced something on the internet that has bothered them in some way? QC322: Do you think there are things on the internet that people about your age will be bothered by in any way?

Base: All children who use the internet and one of their parents.

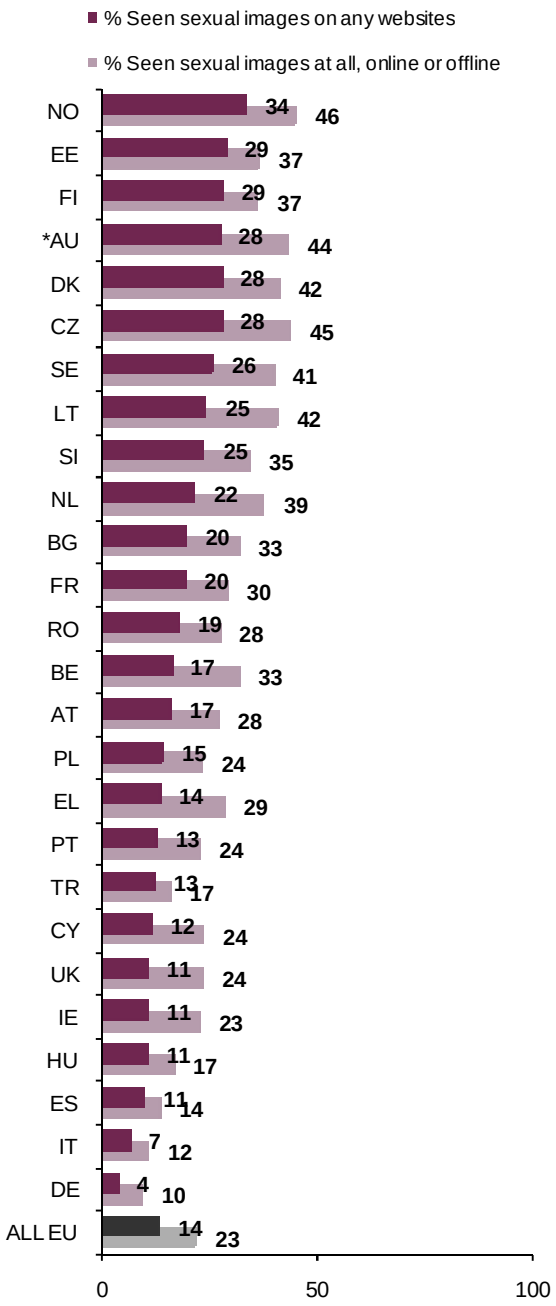
Although exposure to risk does not necessarily involve experience of harm, Australian children are particularly likely to have been 'bothered' by something they experienced on the internet. As illustrated in Figure 36, Australian children are more likely than children in any of the 25 European countries to say that 'I have been bothered by something online'. This is true of 30% of Australian children, compared with 28% in Denmark, 25% in Estonia and 23% in each of Norway and Sweden, across a 25 nation average of 12%.

Parents in Norway (23%), Sweden (20%) and Finland (19%, the same as Australia) are equally or more likely to identify that their child has been bothered by an online experience, but awareness in Australia lags behind that in Norway and Sweden, as a proportion of children bothered, while Finish parents are more likely to say that their child has been bothered than the child is. Analysis reported earlier, in Section 5, Risk and Harm, indicates that where parents' and children's perceptions are analysed together there are a number of false negatives (where parents say their child has not been bothered when the child has been bothered), and fewer false positives (where the parent thinks the child has been bothered and the child disagrees).

Six key risk areas were explored in depth in the *EU Kids Online* research as a means of identifying why a child might say that they are bothered as a result of an online experience. These risks comprise (i) seeing sexual images online, (ii) bullying, (iii) sending/receiving sexual messages (sexting), (iv) meeting new people online who are not already members of the child's offline social circle, (v) other and emerging risk factors such as hate sites, anorexia and bulimia sites, self-harm and suicide sites and (vi) the misuse of personal data.

Analysing the relative positioning of Australia in country-level comparative tables addressing these risk factors indicates the specific risks to which Australian children are most likely to be exposed, and which are most likely to account for their relative degree of feeling bothered. As indicated by Figure 37, Australian children, more than is generally the case for children in the 25 nation comparison, have been exposed to sexual images online and offline.

Figure 37: Child has seen sexual images online or offline in past 12 months, by country



QC128: Have you seen anything of this kind [obviously sexual]?
QC131: Have you seen these kinds of things on any websites in the past 12 months?

Base: All children who use the internet.

While some risk-taking older children may choose to seek out sexual images, this is less the case with younger children, and younger children are more likely to be bothered when they encounter sexual images online (Figure 15). More than one in four Australian children (28%) have seen sexual images online whereas more than two in five Australian children (44%) say they have seen sexual images in any location, both online and offline. In these respective cases, Australia is equal fourth (with Denmark) in terms of exposure to online images, and third (after Norway and the Czech Republic) in terms of all exposure to sexual images across the combined 26 countries. These figures also indicate that seven in ten 9-16 year old Australians have not seen sexual images online.

When exposure to sexual images is compared with the rates of children being bothered by such exposure, Table 38, Australia moves from fourth to fifth place, with 38% of those exposed to sexual images saying they were bothered by this. It should be noted, however, that numbers involved are small.

Table 38: Child has seen sexual images online and was bothered by this, by country

	All children who use the internet		Child bothered, of those who have seen sexual images online
%	Child has seen sexual images online	Child bothered by seeing sexual images online	
EE	29	14	49
TR	13	6	49
RO	19	8	44
IE	11	4	38
*AU	28	10	36
DE	4	2	35
PL	15	5	33
ES	11	3	32
FR	20	6	32
AT	17	5	30
BE	17	5	30
HU	11	3	30
DK	28	8	28
CY	12	3	26
IT	7	2	26
SE	26	7	26
UK	11	3	24
CZ	28	6	23
LT	25	6	23
NL	22	5	23
NO	34	9	23
PT	13	3	23
FI	29	6	20
BG	20	4	17
EL	14	2	15
SI	25	4	15
ALL	14	4	32

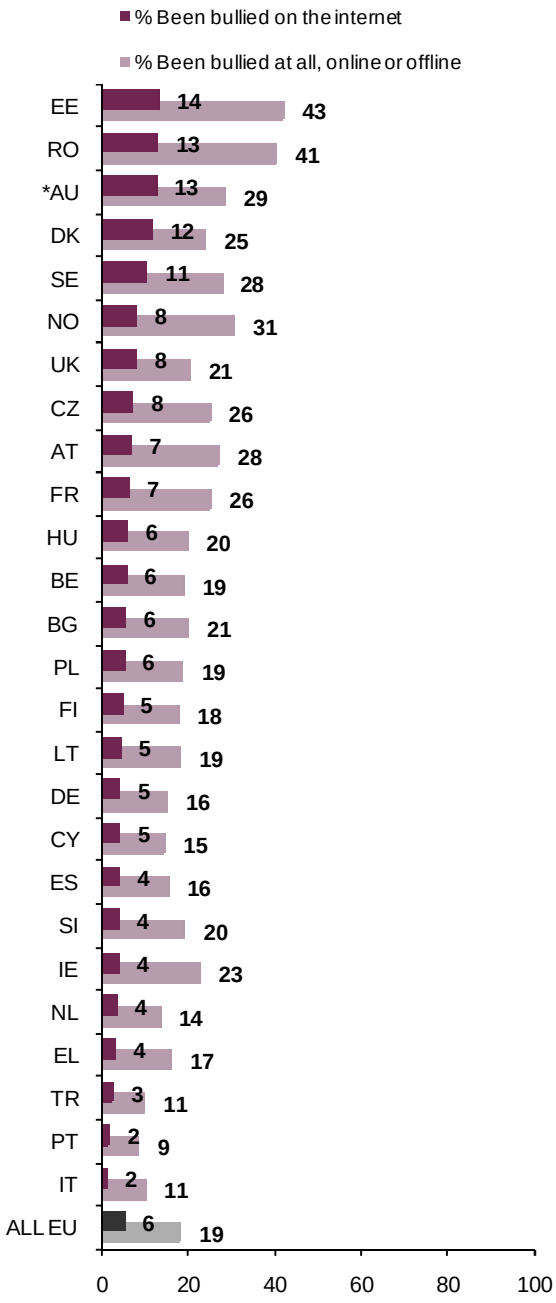
QC131: Have you seen these kinds of things on any websites in the past 12 months? And QC134: In the LAST 12 MONTHS have you seen any things like this that have bothered you in any way? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen them.

Base: All children who use the internet. Only children who have seen sexual images online.

Note: The 95% confidence intervals for the numbers behind this graph are fairly high (+/- 5-10%) or very high (+/- 10%). So the numbers for individual countries should be considered as indicative only.

Sexual images are not the only online risk experienced by a significant proportion of Australian children. As indicated in Figure 38, Australian children are third out of the 26 countries combined in being likely to say they have been bullied online. This might indicate that where an Australian child feels bothered by online experiences, this could reflect exposure to bullying, instead of, or as well as, exposure to sexual images. In the risk behaviour associated with 'sexting' however, AU children would rank 16 out of the total 26 countries, indicating that this risk behaviour is likely to be comparatively less important in explaining Australian children's feelings of being bothered (Figure 39).

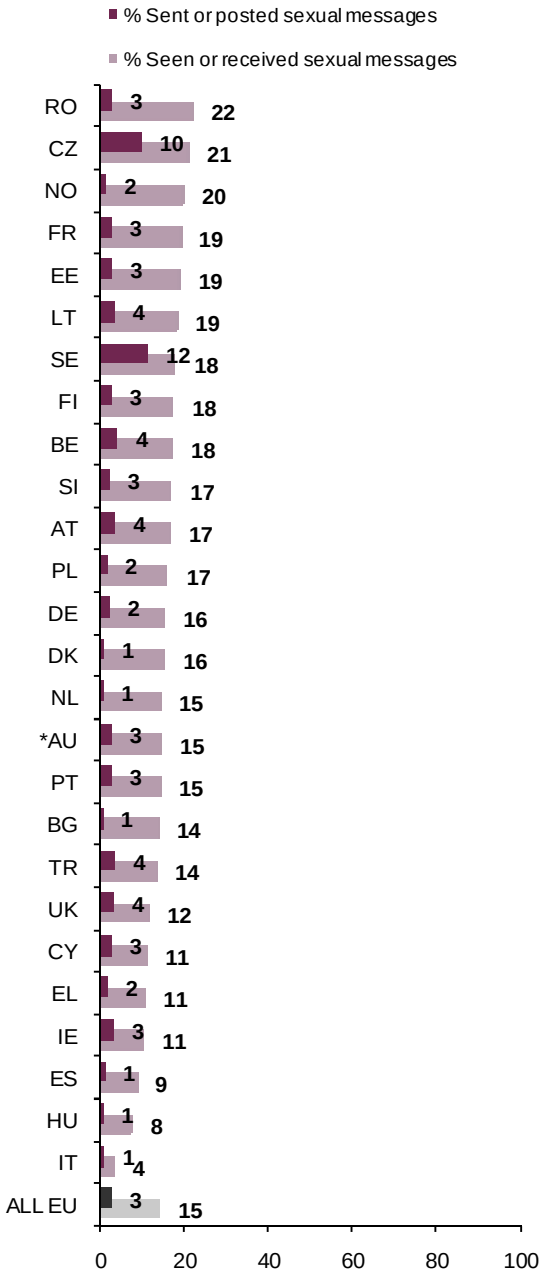
Figure 38: Child has been bullied online or offline in past 12 months, by country



QC112: Has someone acted in this kind of hurtful or nasty way to you in the past 12 months? QC115: At any time during the last 12 months has this happened on the internet?

Base: All children who use the internet.

Figure 39: Having seen or received or sent sexual messages in past 12 months (children aged 11-16), by country

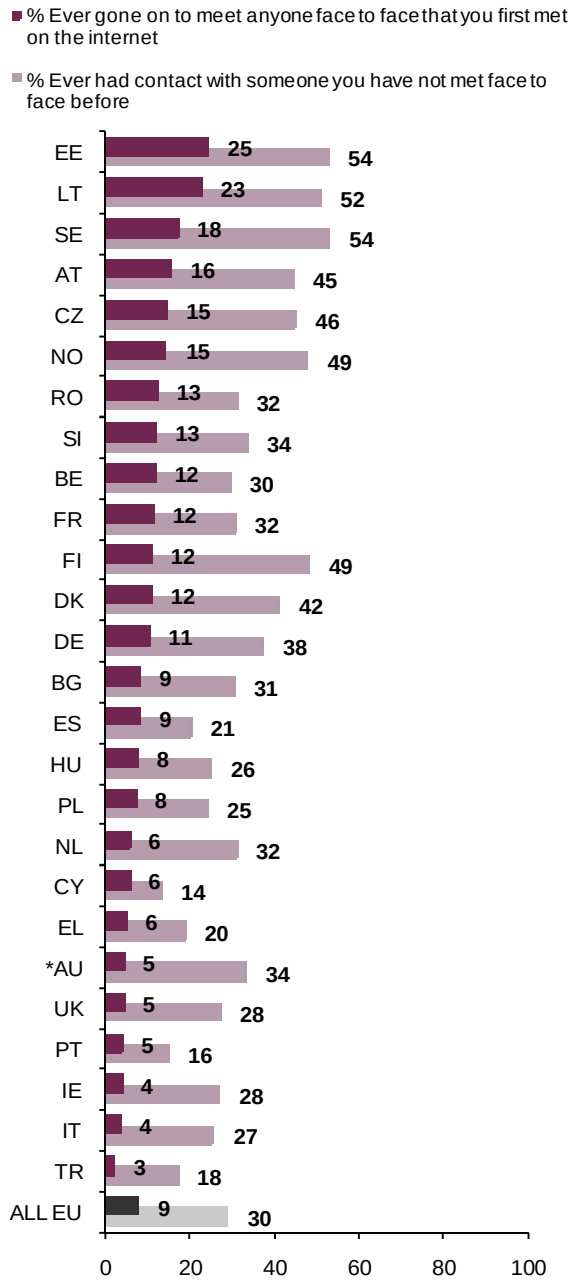


QC167: In the past 12 months have you seen or received sexual messages of any kind on the internet? This could be words, pictures or videos. QC179: In the past 12 months, have you sent or posted a sexual message (words, pictures or video) of any kind on the internet? This could be about you or someone else.

Base: All children aged 11-16 who use the internet.

Similarly, Australian children are less likely than most European children to have communicated online with someone they had not met previously in a face to face context, and also comparatively unlikely to go on to meet a stranger offline that they first met online (Figure 40).

Figure 40: Child has communicated online with, or gone to an offline meeting with, someone not met face to face before, by country



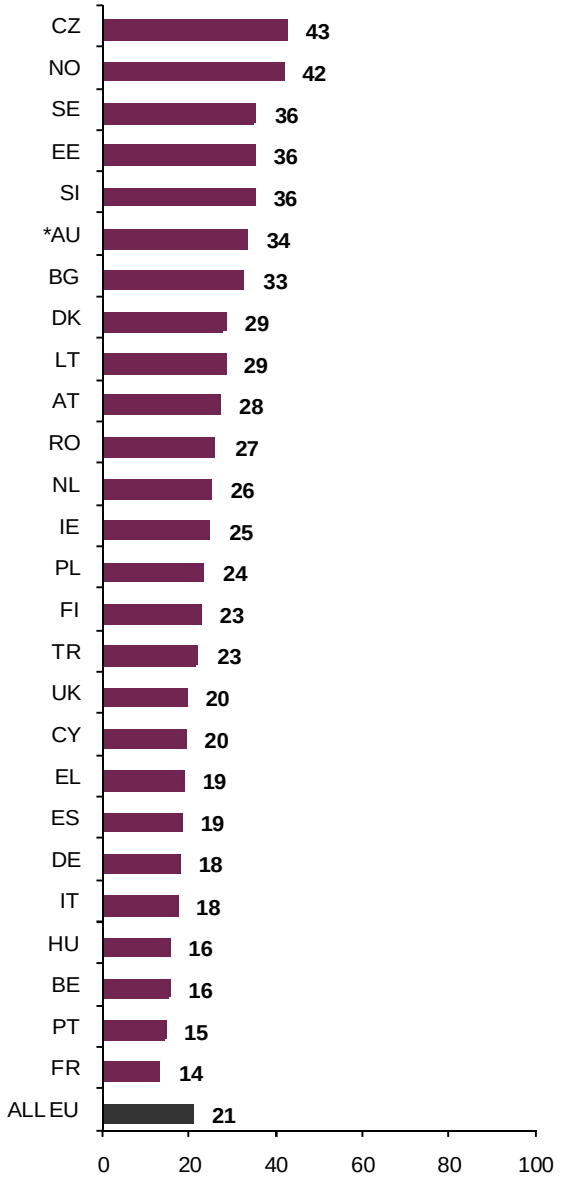
QC147: Can I just check, have you ever had contact on the internet with someone you have not met face to face before? QC148: Have you ever gone on to meet anyone face to face that you first met on the internet in this way?

Base: All children who use the internet.

The small numbers of Australian children who go on to meet face to face strangers who have previously only been met online means that this is unlikely to explain any significant part of the comparative rates of Australian children feeling bothered by their internet experiences.

On the other hand, the data around the new and emerging risk factors related to potentially harmful user-generated content again places Australian children towards the top of a cross-national comparison of risk-exposure (Figure 41).

Figure 41: Child has seen potentially harmful user-generated content on websites in past 12 months (age 11+), by country

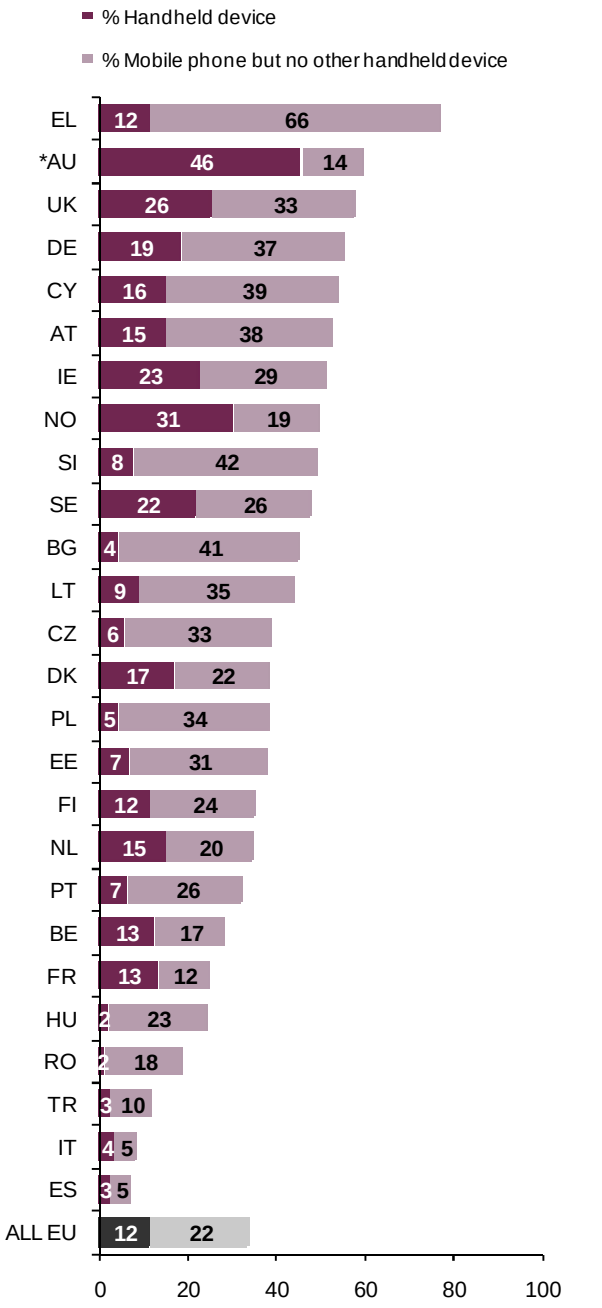


QC142: In the past 12 months, have you seen websites where people discuss...? Bars show percentage of children who have seen any such material at all on websites (i.e. bottom row of **Error! Reference source not found.**).

Base: All children aged 11-16 who use the internet.

The figures for potentially harmful user-generated material include hate sites, anorexia, bulimia, self-harm and suicide promotion. The sixth place ranking of Australian children's exposure to these risks indicate that potentially harmful user-generated content may line up alongside exposure to bullying and seeing sexual images as a probable contributing factor to Australian children's overall levels of risk. One or more of these three risk behaviours is likely to underpin the finding that Australian children are more likely to say that they are bothered than is the case with children in the 25 country European study. There is a further factor, however, which relates to where children go online and the possible role of peers in influencing what they choose to access.

Figure 42: Child accesses the internet using a mobile phone or handheld device, by country



QC300h, e: Which of these devices do you use for the internet these days?

Base: All children who use the internet.

In attempting to context the risks that may have contributed to Australian children reporting higher degrees of feeling bothered by experiences online, it is relevant to consider a particularly Australian aspect of the experience of going online which both highlights the challenge for policy makers and indicates possible future directions for a strong research focus in Australia, Europe and elsewhere. Australian children are disproportionately likely to go online using a smart handheld device and it may be that access using such devices is less likely to be effectively mediated by parents and others (Figure 42). Children might also be more experimental with new technology, and might be more likely to take risks as part of shared peer group experience.

Australian researchers from the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, together with colleagues from Edith Cowan University, Queensland University of Technology and the University of New South Wales, will be working with the *EU Kids Online* network until at least 2014 with the aim of exploring more of these comparisons, and as a way of providing support for the development of evidence-based policy in this area. In our future research, we will explore country-level factors that may explain some of these cross-national differences. To stay in touch with future research arising from the *EU Kids Online* network, including Australia as an international partner, please sign up for email updates at www.eukidsonline.net.

ANNEX 1: *EU KIDS ONLINE*

Overview

EU Kids Online II: Enhancing Knowledge Regarding European Children's Use, Risk and Safety Online is funded from 2009-2011 by the EC Safer Internet Programme.

The project aims to enhance knowledge of European children's and parents' experiences and practices regarding risky and safer use of the internet and new online technologies, in order to inform the promotion of a safer online environment for children among national and international stakeholders.

Adopting an approach which is child-centred, comparative, critical and contextual, *EU Kids Online* has conducted a major quantitative survey of children's experiences (and their parents' perceptions) of online risk in 25 European countries. The findings will be disseminated through a series of reports and presentations during 2010-2.

Objectives

- To design a robust survey instrument appropriate for identifying the nature of children's online access, use, risk, coping and safety awareness.
- To design a robust survey instrument appropriate for identifying parental experiences, practices and concerns regarding their child's internet use.
- To administer the survey in a reliable and ethically-sensitive manner to national samples of internet users aged 9-16 and their parents in Europe.
- To analyse the results systematically to identify core findings and more complex patterns among findings on a national and comparative basis.
- To disseminate the findings in a timely manner to a wide range of relevant stakeholders nationally, across Europe, and internationally.
- To identify and disseminate key recommendations relevant to the development of safety awareness initiatives in Europe.
- To identify remaining knowledge gaps and methodological guidance to inform future projects on the safer use of online technologies.

Work packages

WP1: Project Management and Evaluation: ensure effective conduct and evaluation of work packages.

WP2: Project Design: design a robust survey instrument and sampling frame for children and parents.

WP3: Data Collection: tender, select and work with the subcontractor appointed to conduct the fieldwork.

WP4: Data Reporting: cross-tabulation, presentation and report of core findings.

WP5: Statistical Analysis of Hypotheses: analysis and hypothesis testing of relations among variables.

WP6: Cross-National Comparisons: interpretation of similarities and differences across countries.

WP7: Recommendations: guide awareness and safety initiatives and future projects in this field.

WP8: Dissemination of Project Results: dissemination to diverse stakeholders and the wider public.

International Advisory Panel

- María José Cantarino, Corporate Responsibility Manager, Telefonica, Spain.
- Dieter Carstensen, Save the Children Denmark, European NGO Alliance on Child Safety Online.
- David Finkelhor and Janis Wolak, Crimes against Children Center, University of New Hampshire, USA.
- Will Gardner, CEO of Childnet International, UK.
- Ellen Helsper, Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics, UK.
- Amanda Lenhart, Senior Researchert, Pew Internet & American Life Project, Washington DC USA
- Eileen Munro, Deptartment of Social Policy, London School of Economics, UK.
- Annie Mullins, Global Head of Content Standards, Vodafone, UK.
- Kjartan Ólafsson, University of Akureyri, Iceland.
- Janice Richardson, project manager at European Schoolnet, coordinator of Insafe, Brussels, Belgium.
- Agnieszka Wrzesień, Project Coordinator, Nobody's Children Foundation, Poland.

ANNEX 2: *SURVEY DETAILS*

The methods followed those used in the EUKids Online project as closely as possible to facilitate comparisons. Full details of procedures used in each country in the EUKids Online project can be found in the EUKids Online Full Technical Report (see **www.eukidsonline.net**). The following details refer to the AUKids Online project.

Sampling

- Samples were stratified by state and by metro/rest of state for the larger states, with probability of selection proportionate to population.
- The primary sampling units were drawn from all census collection districts in Australia.
- Addresses were selected randomly from each sample point by using a Random Walk procedure.
- At each address which agreed to interview we randomly selected one child from all eligible children in the household (i.e. all those aged 9-16 who use the internet) on the basis of whichever eligible child had the most recent birthday. If a household contained more than one parent/carer, we selected the one who knew most about the child and their internet use.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork was carried out in Australia from 13 November 2010 to the 9th February 2011, although 78% of interviews were completed before the end of 2010. A parent interview was conducted for every child interviewed.

Questionnaires were administered face to face using computer assisted interviewing. Answers to sensitive questions to children were entered by the child directly into the computer.

The original questionnaires were developed by *EU Kids Online* with guidance from Ipsos MORI. They were tested and refined by a two-phase process of cognitive interviewing and pilot testing.

- Phase one cognitive testing involved 20 cognitive interviews (14 with children and six with parents) in England using English language questionnaires. Several refinements were then made to the questionnaires.
- The amended master questionnaires were then translated and cognitively tested via four interviews in each of 16 other countries, to ensure testing in all main languages. A small number of parent interviews were also conducted in some cases. Again, amendments to the questionnaires were made for the final versions.
- Before the main fieldwork, a pilot survey was conducted in five countries to test all aspects of the survey including sampling, recruitment and the interview process.
- In Australia, nine cognitive tests (six with children and three with parents) were carried out in September, 2010 generally confirmed the questionnaire design. Only minor changes were made to the questionnaire to maximise comparability with the UK and other country results (for example substitution of the Australian term “wagging” school instead of the UK term “bunking”).

Data processing

- The source questionnaires from the original EUKids project, with all response options and full interviewer instructions, are online at www.eukidsonline.net.
- Weighting: three forms of weighting have been applied to the EUKids Online data and these were used when making country comparisons with the Australian data – (i) design weights which adjust for unequal probabilities of selection; (ii) non-response weights which correct for bias caused by differing levels of response across different groups of the population; (iii) a country level weight which adjusts for country level contribution to the overall results according to population size.
- Socio-economic status (SES): information relating to the head of household’s (designated as the chief income earner) level of education and occupation was collected during the screening process. Responses to level of education and employment were then grouped and cross-referenced with each other to calculate one of three levels of SES: low, middle and high.

Research materials

Materials and resources associated with the research process for the original EUKids Online project are available at www.eukidsonline.net.

- Full Technical Report on the fieldwork process
- Original questionnaires (for children, for parents)
- Letters to parents and safety leaflets for children
- Research ethics procedures

These are freely available to interested researchers and research users, provided the following credit is included:

> This [article/chapter/report/presentation/project] draws on the work of the 'EU Kids Online' network funded by the EC (DG Information Society) Safer Internet plus Programme (project code SIP-KEP-321803); see www.eukidsonline.net.

If outputs result from the use of these resources, the project management team requests that an email is sent to inform them of this use, to Eukidsonline@lse.ac.uk. The dataset itself will be made public in late 2011.

ENDNOTES

[1] For example, Albury, K. and Crawford, K. (forthcoming, 2012). Sexting, consent and young people's ethics: Beyond Megan's story, *Continuum: journal of media and cultural studies*.

[2] Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K., (2011). *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full findings.* Available at www.eukidsonline.net

[3] Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A. and Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risks and safety for children on the internet: the UK report.* EU Kids Online, London School of Economics & Political Science, London, UK. (p. 10)

[4] Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K., (2011). *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full findings* Available at www.eukidsonline.net (p. 15)

[5] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011). *Australian social trends June 2011: Children of the digital revolution*. www.abs.gov.au/socialtrends

[6] For all tables and figures, the exact question number on the questionnaire is reported. Where younger and older children's questionnaires use different numbers, the one for the older children is reported. Full questionnaires may be found at www.eukidsonline.net.

[7] In Figure 2, the percentage for 'mobile phone' may overlap with handheld device as multiple responses were allowed. In Figure 3, these are recalculated as mutually exclusive.

[8] Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K., (2011). *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full findings.* Available at www.eukidsonline.net

[9] Hasebrink, U., Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., and Ólafsson, K. (2009). *Comparing children's online opportunities and risks across Europe: cross-national comparisons for EU Kids Online* (2nd edition). At http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/24368/

[10] Livingstone, S. and Helsper, E.J. (2010). Balancing opportunities and risks in teenagers' use of the internet: The role of online skills and internet self-efficacy. *New Media & Society*, 12(2): 309-329

[11] Widyanto, L. and Griffiths, M. (2007). Internet addiction: Does it really exist? (revisited), *Psychology and the internet: Intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal implications*, J. Gackenbach (ed) (2nd ed), Amsterdam: Elsevier/Academic Press, pp. 127–149

[12] Nordicom (2004). *Playing with fire: How do computer games influence the player?*, Gothenburg University, Sweden: Nordicom, The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media (p. 34)

[13] Smahel, D. and Blinka, L. (forthcoming, 2012). Excessive internet use among European children, *Children, risk and safety online: Research and policy challenges in comparative perspective*, Livingstone, S., Haddon, L. and Görzig, A. (eds), Bristol, UK: Policy Press

[14] To be sure children understood these questions, most options included national examples. For instance, in the Australian questionnaire, option 15 was phrased: "Used file sharing sites (peer-to-peer) (e.g. Limewire, Kazaa, torrents)."

[15] Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K., (2011). *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full findings* Available at www.eukidsonline.net (p. 36)

[16] Finkelhor, D. (1980). Risk factors in the sexual victimization of children, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 4(4): 265-273

[17] See: Livingstone, S., and Helsper, E. J. (2007). Taking risks when communicating on the internet: The role of offline social-psychological factors in young people's vulnerability to online risks. *Information, Communication and Society*, 10(5): 619-643.

[18] This gender difference is partly explained by boys more often choosing the option 'don't know' or 'prefer not to say'.

[19] Information on whether child has seen sexual images online at all are available for all age groups, but the 9-10 year olds were not asked about the types of sexual images seen online. The total figures here are included for comparative purposes

[20] Livingstone, S. and Haddon, L. (forthcoming, 2012). Theoretical framework for children's internet use, *Children, risk and safety online: Research and policy challenges in comparative perspective*, Livingstone, S., Haddon, L. and Görzig, A. (eds), Bristol, UK: Policy Press

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[23] Görzig, A. (2011). *Who bullies and who is bullied online? A study of 9-16 year old internet users in 25 European countries.* Available at (http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EUKidsII%20(2009-11)/BullyingShort.pdf) (p. 1)

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[30] In practical terms, it was not possible also to ask teachers or friends matched questions; nor was it appropriate to ask children about restrictive, monitoring or technical forms of mediation for teachers or friends.

[31] Livingstone, S., and Bober, M. (2006). Regulating the internet at home: Contrasting the perspectives of children and parents, *Digital Generations,* D. Buckingham and R. Willett (eds.) (93-113). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/9013/

[32] Livingstone, S., and Bober, M. (2006). Regulating the internet at home: Contrasting the perspectives of children and parents, *Digital Generations,* D. Buckingham and R. Willett (eds.) (93-113). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/9013/

[33] Note that, to be consistent with the following items on active mediation of internet safety, these two summary questions were asked in the form, *have your teachers ever …* They are, therefore, not exactly equivalent to the earlier questions to parents, which took the form, *do your parents …*

[34] Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A. and Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risks and safety for children on the internet: the UK report.* EU Kids Online, London School of Economics & Political Science, London, UK. (p. 58)

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SEPTEMBER 2011

KIDS ONLINE

Sonia Livingstone, Leslie Haddon, Anke Görzig
and Kjartan Ólafsson, with members of the
EU Kids Online Network

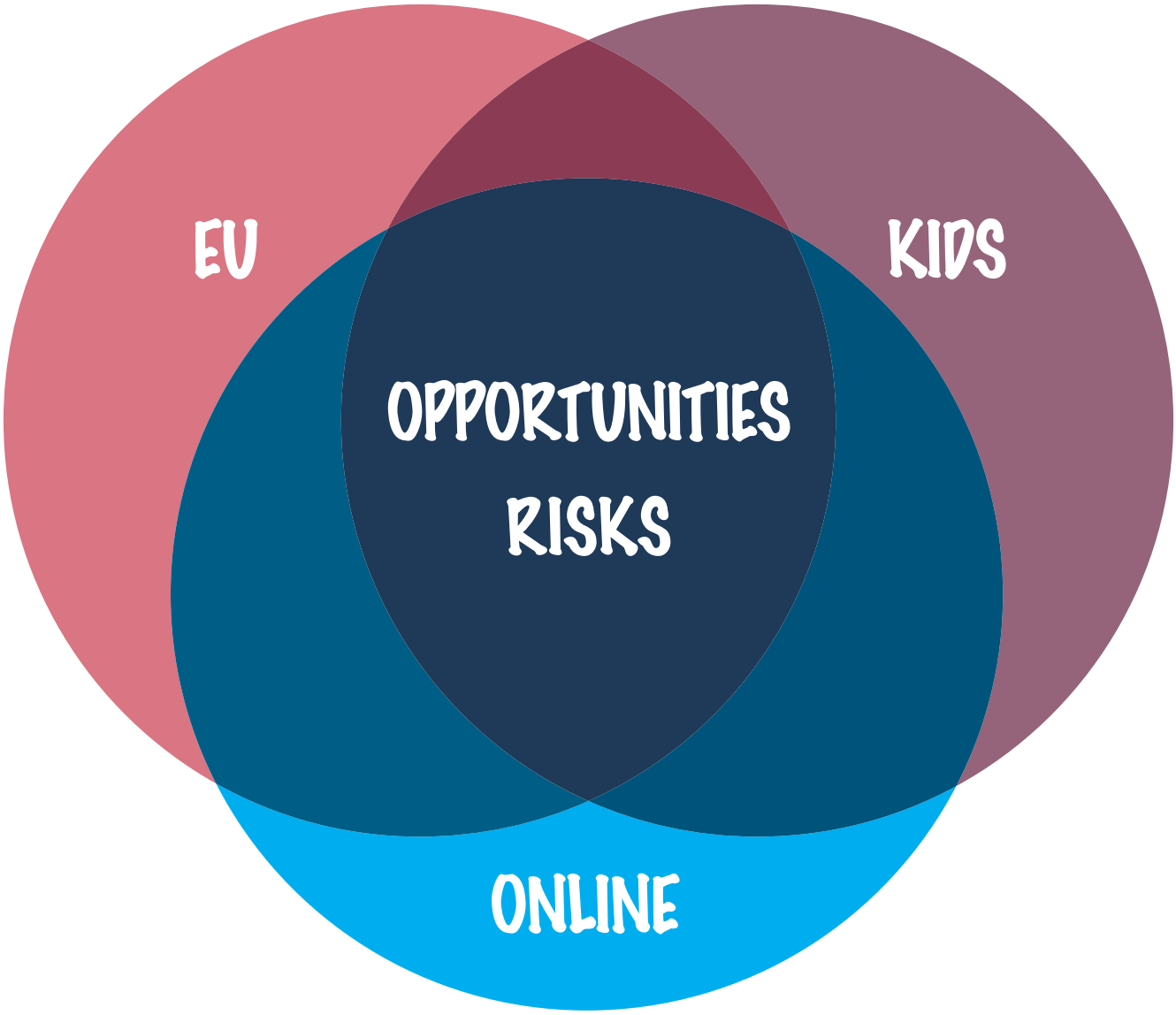
EU Kids Online aims to enhance knowledge of the experiences and practices of European children and parents regarding risky and safer use of the internet and new online technologies, in order to inform the promotion of a safer online environment for children.

CONTENTS

KNOWLEDGE ENHANCEMENT

From 2009-11 we designed a detailed survey to interview 25,000 European children and their parents in 25 countries.

Building on our 2006-09 review of existing methods and findings, this past year has brought a focus on survey analysis and dissemination. From 2011-14, we will extend our work with researchers and stakeholders to maximise the value of and insights from the available evidence.



RIGOROUS METHODS UNDERPIN OUR RESEARCH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The EU Kids Online survey

- The EU Kids Online network has conducted a unique, detailed, face-to-face survey in homes with 9-16 year old internet users from 25 countries; 25,142 children and their parents were interviewed during 2010.
- The purpose was to provide a rigorous evidence base to support stakeholders in their efforts to maximise online opportunities while minimising the risk of harm associated with internet use.

Going online is thoroughly embedded in children's lives

- Internet use is increasingly individualised, privatised and mobile: 9-16 year old internet users spend 88 minutes per day online, on average.
- 49 per cent go online in their bedroom, 33 per cent go online via a mobile phone or handheld device, and most use the internet at home (87 per cent) and school (63 per cent).

Opportunities and risks online go hand in hand

- Efforts to increase opportunities may also increase risks, while efforts to reduce risks may restrict children's opportunities. A careful balancing act, which recognises children's online experiences "in the round", is vital.
- Risky opportunities allow children to experiment online with relationships, intimacy and identity. This is vital for growing up if children are to learn to cope with the adult world.
- But risky opportunities are linked to vulnerability as well as resilience, depending on both the design of the online environment, and on the child and their circumstances.
- Social networking sites (SNSs) enable children to communicate and have fun with their friends, but not everyone has the digital skills to manage privacy and personal disclosure and many 9-12 year olds use SNSs underage, including 20 per cent on Facebook and 38 per cent using SNSs overall.

Not all gain all the benefits

- Children vary in which activities they take up earliest and they vary in the combination of activities they practise, resulting in a ladder of opportunities in which only a quarter, and few younger children, reach the most advanced and creative step.
- 44 per cent of 9-16 year olds say it is 'very true' that 'there are lots of things on the internet that are good for children of my age', though younger children are less satisfied with online provision: only 34 per cent of 9-10 year olds say this.
- Inequalities in digital skills persist in terms of SES, age and, to a lesser degree, gender, so efforts to overcome these are needed; part of the solution lies in the improved design of end-user tools and interfaces.

Parental mediation can help

- Parents recognise that it is valuable for them to engage with their child's internet use, and they employ a wide range of strategies, depending partly on the age of the child. But some parents do not do very much, even for young children, and there are some children who do not want their parents to take more interest.
- Children are generally positive about their parents' actions, although a third says they sometimes ignore what their parents say about using the internet. Parents who practise more restrictive regulation have children who encounter fewer risks and less harm – but also fewer online opportunities.

Children encounter a range of online risks

- 12 per cent of European 9-16 year olds say that they have been bothered or upset by something on the internet – but most children do not report being bothered or upset by going online.
- Exposure to sexual images occurs offline as well as online, but for some children and in some countries it is spreading online; more children who go online via a personal device have seen sexual images or received sexual messages.
- Half of online bullies say they have also bullied people face-to-face, and half of online bullying victims have been bullied face-to-face; also, among those who have bullied others online, nearly half have themselves been bullied online.
- 50 per cent of 11-16 year olds "find it easier to be myself on the internet", helping to explain why 30 per cent have contact online with someone they haven't met face-to-face. But only 9 per cent have met an online contact offline, and very few found this a problematic experience.
- Public anxiety often focuses on pornography, "sexting", bullying and meeting strangers, especially for young children. But there are other risks that worry children, including many teenagers, especially those associated with user-generated content.

Countries can be grouped into four categories

- "Lower use, lower risk" countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Hungary).
- "Lower use, some risk" countries (Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Turkey).
- "Higher use, some risk" countries (Cyprus, Finland, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, the UK).
- "Higher use, higher risk" countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Norway, Romania, Sweden), where the Eastern European countries are better called, "New use, new risk".
- A country's socio-economic stratification, regulatory framework, technological infrastructure and educational system all shape children's online risks.
- High internet use in a country is rarely associated with low risk; and high risk is rarely associated with low use; rather, across countries, the more use, the more risk.

Risk must be distinguished from harm

- Children who are older, higher in self-efficacy and sensation seeking, who do more online activities (ie, are higher on the ladder of opportunities) and who have more psychological problems encounter more risks of all kinds online.
- But children who are younger, lower in self-efficacy and sensation seeking, who do fewer online activities, have fewer skills, and who have more psychological problems find online risks more harmful and upsetting.
- It is important to support children's capacity to cope themselves, thereby building resilience for digital citizens. Children often tell a friend, followed by a parent, when something online upsets them, and they try a range of pro-active strategies online, though these don't always work and some children are more fatalistic in their responses to online harm.

Conclusions

- The report concludes by debunking the top 10 myths of children and online risk.
- It then offers a series of evidence-based recommendations to governments, industry, parents, educators, awareness-raisers, civil society bodies, child welfare organisations and children themselves.

More information

EU Kids Online reports, all questionnaires and technical survey information, and the dataset (cross-tabulations, raw data files) are available from **www.eukidsonline.net**

PROJECT DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

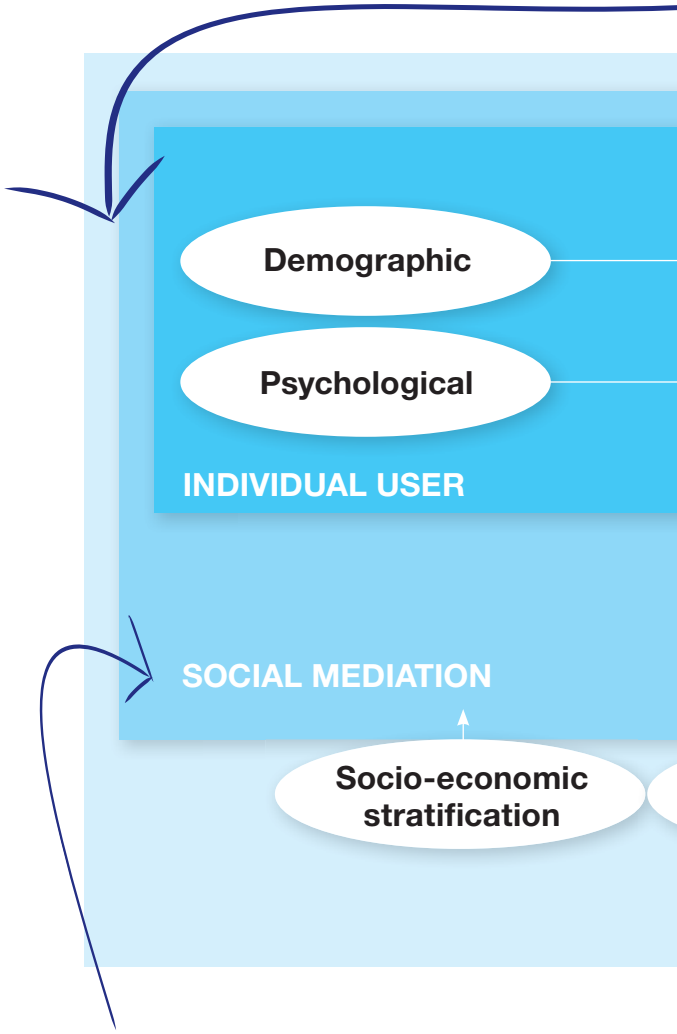
Families live complex and diverse lives. The EU Kids Online model includes multiple factors that, together, shape children's experience of the internet.

Context

- The rapidity with which children and young people are gaining access to online, convergent, mobile and networked media is unprecedented in the history of technological innovation.
- Parents, teachers and children are acquiring, learning to use and finding a purpose for the internet in their daily lives.
- Stakeholders – governments, schools, industry, child welfare, civil society and families – aim to maximise online opportunities while minimising the risk of harm associated with internet use.
- To inform this effort, a rigorous evidence base is vital.

The EU Kids Online model

- Our approach is comparative, child-centred and contextualised.
- It recognises that, since not all children encounter risk, and since not all risks result in harm, research must identify the protective factors (eg, coping) which reduce the probability of harm and the risk factors which increase it.
- Our research traces the path of children's online experiences from internet use (amount, devices, location) through online activities (opportunities, skills, risky practices) to the risks encountered online and then the outcomes experienced (whether harmful or not, how children cope).



At the social level, parents, school and peers all play a role in mediating children's internet risk and safety

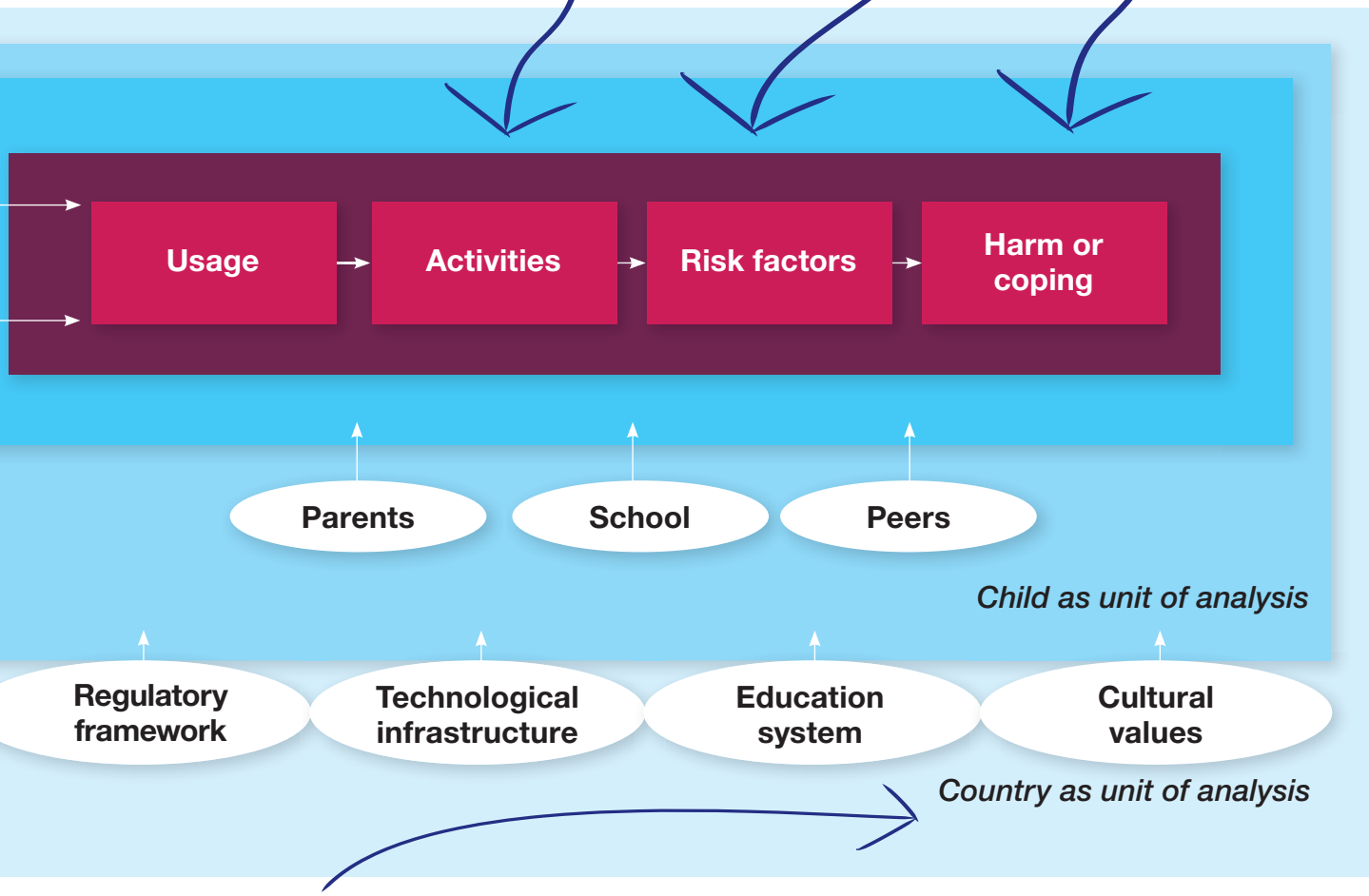
We recognise the many opportunities the internet affords children even when examining the risks

As individuals, children vary in age, gender, socio-economic status and according to their psychological strengths and vulnerabilities

We focus on four main risks: seeing sexual images, receiving sexual messages, being bullied, meeting online contacts offline

Harm is assessed by the child's self-report of how bothered or upset they felt, and coping is assessed by asking the child what they did, on encountering a particular risk

Some activites are beneficial and some are harmful but often it depends on the child and his/her context



At the country level, children's online experiences are shaped by a range of factors, and each contributes to interpreting the comparison of findings across 25 countries

Professor Sonia Livingstone
The London School of Economics and Political Science

BUILDING AN EVIDENCE BASE FOR POLICY

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S SAFER INTERNET PROGRAMME

"The European Commission is strongly committed to making the Internet a place where children of all ages can exploit all the opportunities the technologies offer – safely. Through the Safer Internet Programme, for example, we fund Safer Internet Centres in 30 countries, support the annual Safer Internet Day and Safer Internet Forum and bring together stakeholders like NGOs, industry and law enforcement.

We also recognise that actions to support the empowerment of children and develop a safe online environment depend on robust knowledge about children and how they use online services. EU Kids Online has over the past years provided the European Commission and the Safer Internet Programme with information that gives essential insights into new trends in the use of online technologies and their consequences for children's lives. The knowledge we gain from the research carried out by EU Kids Online and other projects is critical for discussions on upcoming challenges and new initiatives."

Pat Manson
Head of Unit, EC Safer Internet Programme

The EC Safer Internet Programme was the core funder for the project. Additionally, Finnish participation was funded by the Finnish Ministries of Education and Culture and of Transport and Communications, and several national teams received additional funding from a range of sources.

The European Commission is strongly committed to making the Internet a place where children of all ages can exploit all the opportunities the technologies offer – safely

EU Kids Online has been delighted to work with many other partners, colleagues and stakeholders around Europe and beyond. We thank the several hundred stakeholders who responded to our consultations during the EU Kids Online project, guiding its design and the use of its findings.

"Awareness-raising is a complex process, dependent on the quality of research data available. For this reason, the Insafe network of safer internet awareness raising centres works closely with the EU Kids Online project. Their survey findings have refined our knowledge of what young people are doing online, their parents' perception of this, and the skills they lack in dealing with the risks they encounter. Through the project we have gained insight into the cultural differences between the countries we are dealing with, and how these impact on online risk-handling.

Without a project such as EU Kids Online, the awareness raisers in the Insafe network could not target their audience as accurately or measure the potential impact of their campaigns. EU Kids Online has proven an invaluable partner over the past years, a partnership we hope will continue for the years to come."

Janice Richardson
Insafe and European Schoolnet

EU KIDS ONLINE NEWS

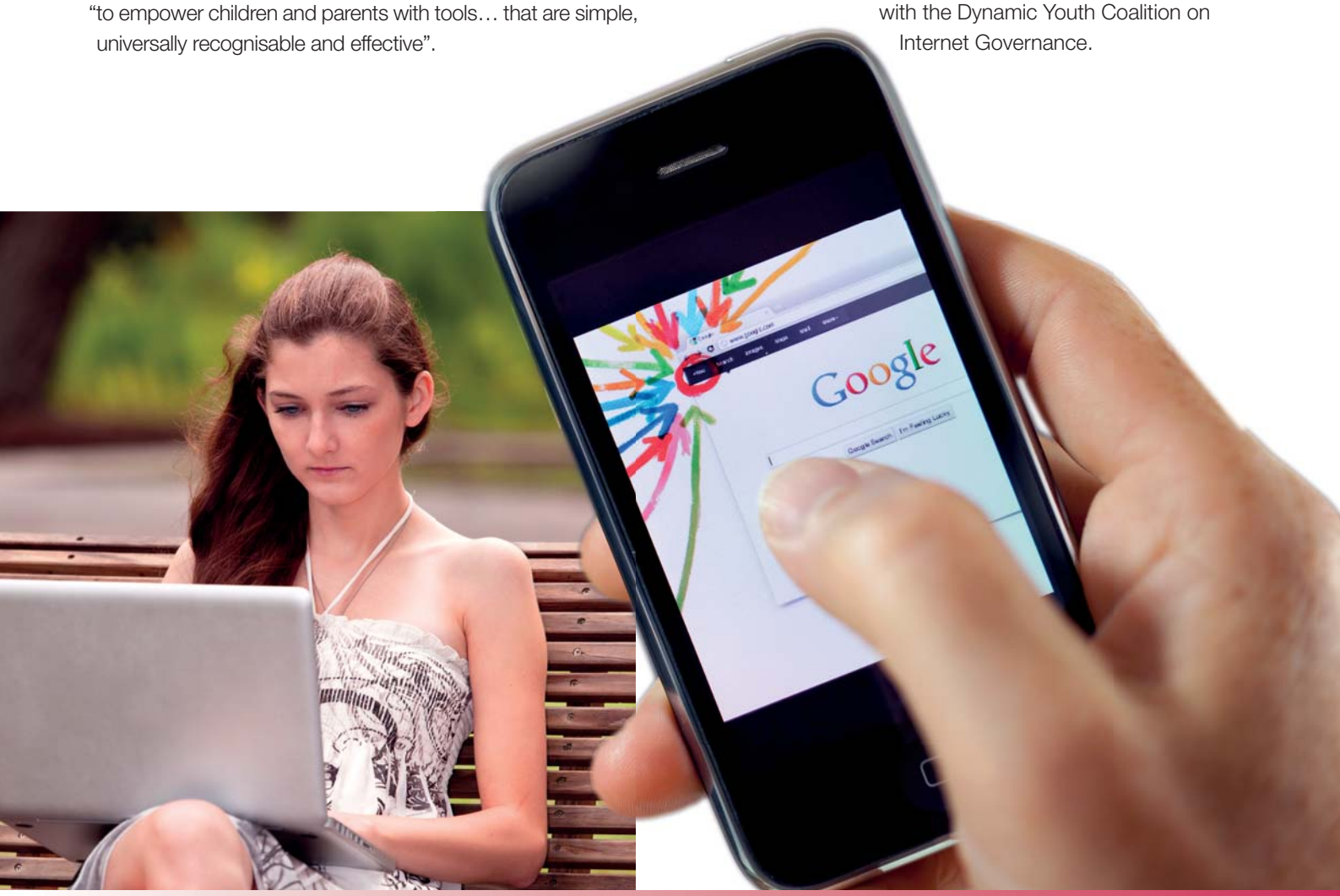
Before we take a closer look at our project findings, here's some recent highlights from the network.

01 Our research cited by the EC Vice President

"Research shows that children are going online younger and younger, and that age restrictions on social networking sites are often ignored. Younger children may not be aware of the risks they face, nor of how they can change their privacy settings," said Neelie Kroes, Vice President of the European Commission and European Digital Agenda Commissioner, in her keynote to the 2011 Digital Agenda Assembly. Given this, she argued for industry self-regulation as part of a comprehensive framework "to empower children and parents with tools… that are simple, universally recognisable and effective".

02 Internet Governance Forum

In "A grand coalition on child internet safety", a pre-meeting organised by the European NGO Alliance for Child Safety Online, eNACSO, at the IGF 2010 Forum in Vilnius, Sonia Livingstone chaired a lively discussion about the evidence base to support international efforts to further child internet safety. At the 2011 Forum in Nairobi, Brian O'Neill and Gitte Stald from EU Kids Online will present in the panel, "Challenging myths about young people and the internet", with the Dynamic Youth Coalition on Internet Governance.



All our reports, materials and data are online at **www.eukidsonline.net**

03 European Award for Best Children's Online Content

Increasing online opportunities is a great way to minimise encounters with risk, EU Kids Online has argued, especially in countries where there is little dedicated positive content for children. Thus we were delighted when Sonia Livingstone was invited to chair the European Jury for this award. She announced the prizes at the 2011 Digital Agenda Assembly in Brussels, which were presented by Commissioner Neelie Kroes on 17 June.

04 Contacts, presentations and media coverage

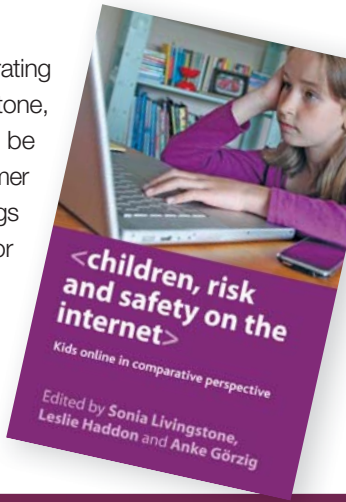
In the past two years, the EU Kids Online network has made 142 public/stakeholder presentations, 218 research presentations and has published 138 articles and chapters. Our mailing list includes some 1,545 people from many countries worldwide. We've had 42,688 unique website visitors in the past year. And our research has been mentioned in 740 media reports so far.

05 International conference

Over 40 papers will be presented by researchers from 20+ countries at the September 2011 EU Kids Online conference held at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Entitled "Children, risk and safety online: Research and policy challenges in comparative perspective", the conference materials are posted at **www.eukidsonline.net**

06 New book: *Children, risk and safety online*

The EU Kids Online network is collaborating on a new book, edited by Sonia Livingstone, Leslie Haddon and Anke Görzig, to be published by Policy Press (Bristol) in summer 2012. With a discussion of all the findings and lots of new analysis, it is intended for researchers and policy makers.



INFORMING, NETWORKING, ENGAGING

EUROPE AND BEYOND

The "Europe" of EU Kids Online is not the EU27. The map shows our 25 participating countries, encompassing Europe's diversity. In the next phase of work we will include Croatia, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Russia, Slovakia and Switzerland.

To gain a wider perspective, and to see Europe from the outside as well as from within, we collaborate with researchers from:

USA

We work with The Pew Research Center's *Internet and American Life Project* and *The Crimes Against Children Research Center*, University of New Hampshire to keep in touch with their parallel projects.

"The Pew Research Center has looked to the EU Kids Online safety work for rigorously tested questions for us to repeat in our surveys to assess the American experience. We look forward to comparing the trends in the US and European contexts in online safety experiences and behaviors. EU Kids Online is an enormously valuable resource, to its European constituents and to those of us concerned with rigorously researching kids safety in other countries as well."

Amanda Lenhart
Senior Research Specialist, Pew

"The EU Kids Online study is an impressive example of cross-national comparative research, conducted in a very collaborative but methodologically sound and sophisticated way. It will serve as a model for future social science. The fruits of this effort are only just beginning to be harvested, and there will be much more coming out of it in the future."

Professor David Finkelhor
Crimes against Children Research Center,
University of New Hampshire

Russia

The EU Kids Online survey has been applied by colleagues from the Moscow State University; see page 48 for findings.

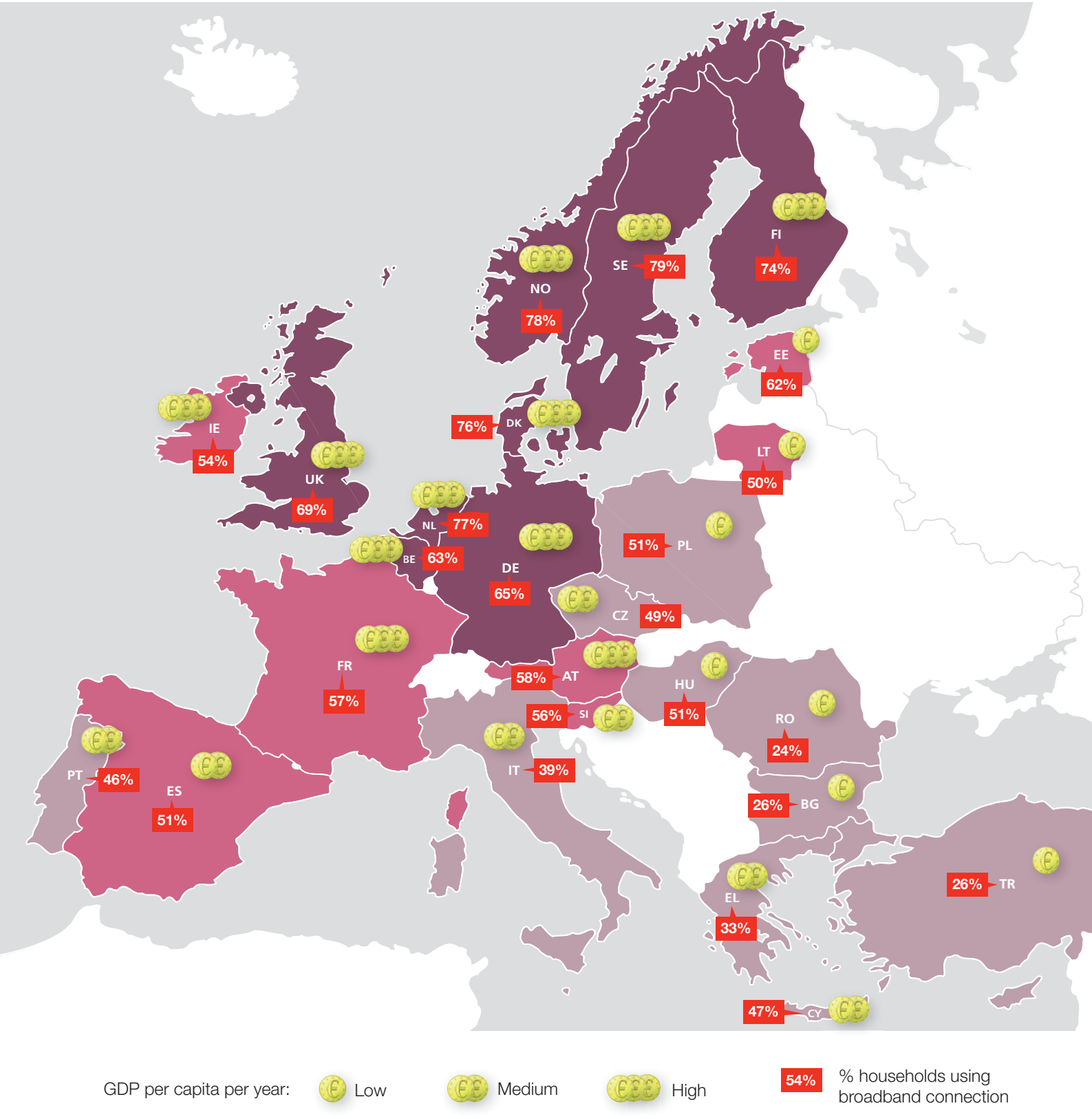
Australia

The EU Kids Online survey has been applied by colleagues from the Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation; see page 48 for findings.

Brazil

We are working with the Brazilian Network Information Center to pilot the possibility of conducting the EU Kids Online survey.

In comparative research, it is important to recognise similarities across countries as well as differences within countries



COMMONALITY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN EUROPE

HOW CHILDREN GO ONLINE

Going online is now thoroughly embedded in children's daily lives.

88 **the average minutes online per day for 9-16 year olds.**

15-16 year olds spend 118 minutes online per day, twice as long as 9-10 year olds (58 minutes).

7 **the average age of first internet use in Denmark and Sweden, rising to eight in other Northern European countries and nine for Europe overall.**

49 **the percentage who go online in their bedroom.**

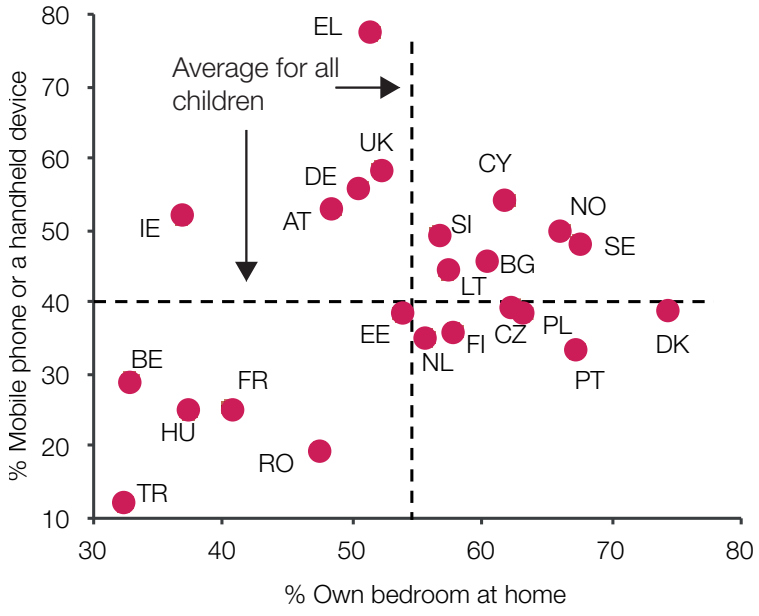
33 per cent go online via a mobile phone or handheld device, and most use the internet at home (87 per cent) then at school (63 per cent).

Going online is increasingly privatised. The graph below shows the percentage of children who access the internet either via a mobile or handheld device or via access in the child's bedroom. Depending on country circumstances, different contexts for privatised use are found across Europe.

Almost as many parents as children in a country use the internet daily (see graph opposite), suggesting they are gaining online experience along with their children; the more this happens, the more effectively parents can mediate their children's internet use.

- 60 per cent of 9-16 year old internet users in Europe go online daily, and a further 33 per cent go online at least weekly.
- Fewer parents use the internet daily – 49 per cent – and 24 per cent don't use it at all.
- In countries where parents are more likely to use the internet daily, children are also more likely to do so – and vice versa.
- Usage is highest in the Nordic countries, and lowest in Southern Europe.
- The more a parent uses the internet, the more likely is their child to use it often, thus gaining the digital skills and benefits associated with going online.

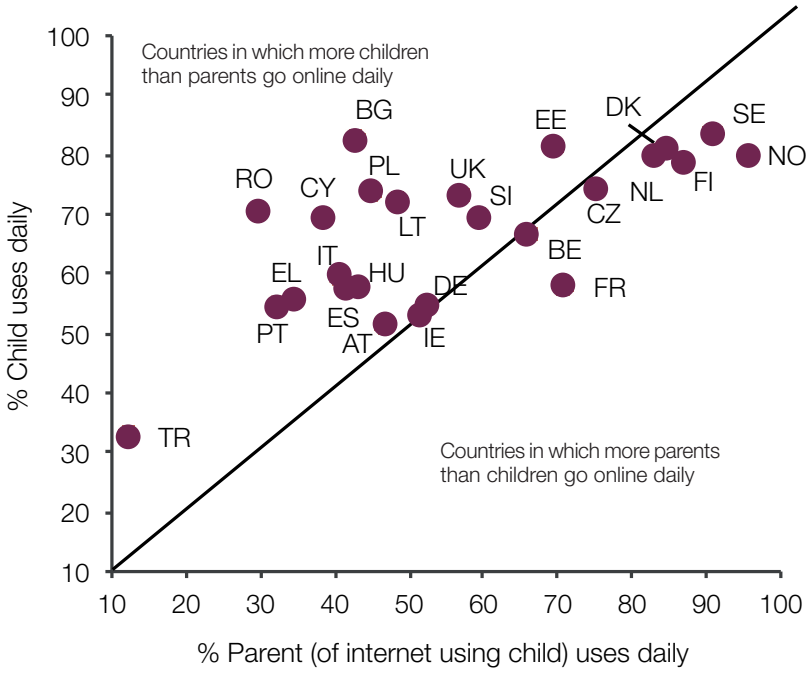
The rise of private/mobile internet use

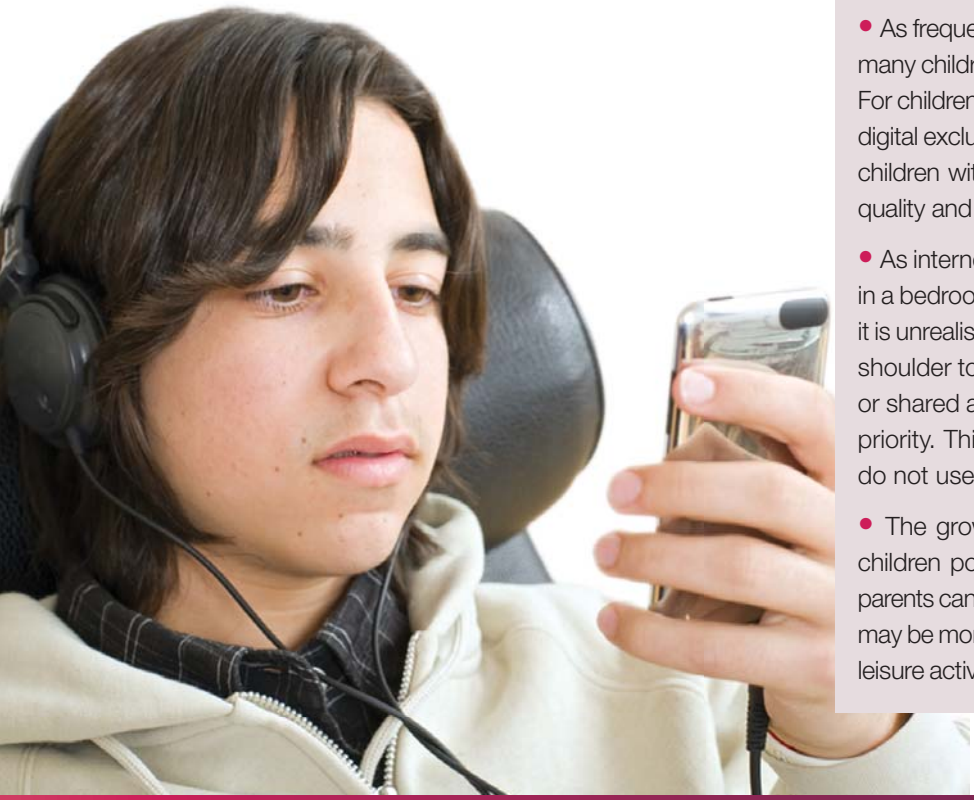


Parents are (almost) keeping pace with their children. The more they go online, the more effectively parents can mediate their children's internet use

30 per cent of 11-16 year olds – especially those with some psychological problems – report one or more experiences linked to excessive internet use "fairly" or "very often" (eg, neglecting friends, schoolwork or sleep to go online)

The relation between children's and parent's daily internet use





Policy implications

- As frequent internet use has become commonplace for many children in Europe, the policy priorities are changed. For children who still lack access, efforts are vital to ensure digital exclusion does not compound social exclusion. For children with access, efforts are required to ensure their quality and breadth of use is sufficient and fair.
- As internet use becomes increasingly privatised – used in a bedroom, other private rooms or via a mobile device, it is unrealistic to expect parents to watch over their child's shoulder to keep them safe. Instead, conversation and/or shared activities between child and parent must take priority. This will be aided if the remaining parents who do not use the internet are encouraged to go online.
- The growth in excessive internet use among some children poses a new challenge to stakeholders. While parents can seek to restrict the time children spend online, it may be more effective to support the diversity of alternative leisure activities available to children at home and outside.

WHAT CHILDREN DO ONLINE

The EU Kids Online survey asked children which online activities they engage in, to understand the opportunities they enjoy and to contextualise online risks

While this ladder of opportunities is schematic – since children vary in which activities they take up earliest and they vary in the combination of activities they practise – it captures the general trend across all children. How can children be enabled to climb further up the ladder of opportunities? One way is to provide more own-language, age-appropriate positive content – whether creative, educational, expressive, participatory or just fun!

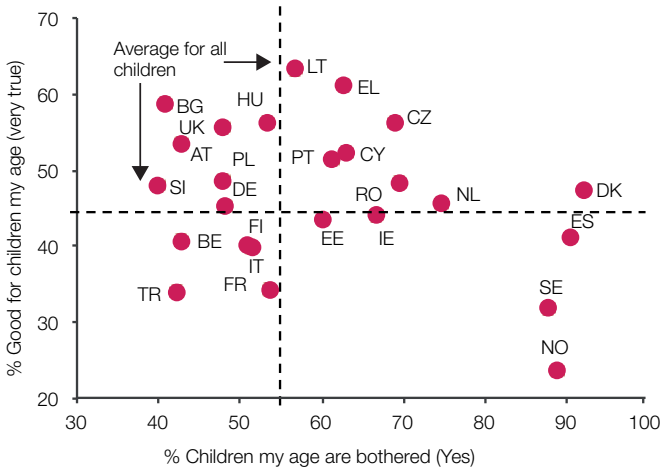
Enabling a "ladder of opportunities"

Identifying what's good about the internet can be tricky, so we asked children what they think. 44 per cent of 9-16 year olds said it is "very true" that "there are lots of things on the internet that are good for children of my age".

- Younger children are much less satisfied than older children. Only 34 per cent of 9-10 year olds say there are lots of good things for children of their age to do online, while 55 per cent of teenagers say this – probably because they more easily share in wider public provision.
- In some countries there is more for children to do online that they enjoy – often because of differential investment and/or because national markets vary in size, wealth and investment in or prioritisation of the internet.
- Opportunities and risks go hand in hand, as shown by the statistically significant country correlation between children's perceptions of opportunities and risks.
- However, country variation means that four groups can be discerned:

1. In some countries, children report lots of good things and relatively few problems (eg, Bulgaria, the UK and Austria).
2. In other countries, children report lots of good things to do online but also quite a few problems (eg, Greece and the Czech Republic).
3. Then there are countries where children think there are a fair few problems and not so many benefits (eg, Norway, Sweden, Ireland and Estonia).
4. Last are the countries where children perceive relatively fewer benefits or risks of internet use (eg, Turkey, Belgium, France).

Balance between "good" and "bad" things online



Policy implications

- In countries where children do not "progress" very far up the ladder of opportunities, educational and digital literacy initiatives should be prioritised.
- Provision for younger children online should be a priority, especially in small language communities. The "European Award for Best Children's Online Content" is a valuable step in this direction, but such provision could also be supported by high profile national initiatives.
- Since opportunities and risks online go hand in hand, efforts to increase opportunities may also increase risks, while efforts to reduce risks may restrict children's opportunities. A careful balancing act, which recognises children's online experiences "in the round", is vital.

Online risks are also hard to investigate. We asked, "do you think there are things on the internet that people about your age will be bothered by in any way?". This time 55 per cent said "yes"

RISKY OPPORTUNITIES

Most activities children do online can be beneficial or harmful, depending on the circumstances. Some are ambiguous – "risky opportunities" allow children to experiment online with relationships, intimacy and identity. This is vital for growing up if children are to learn to cope with the adult world. But risky opportunities are linked to vulnerability as well as resilience.

Among 9-16 year old internet users in Europe, in the past year:

40% have "looked for new friends on the internet"

34% have "added people to my friends list or address book that I have never met face-to-face"

16% have "pretended to be a different kind of person on the internet from what I really am"

15% have "sent personal information to someone that I have never met face-to-face"

14% have "sent a photo or video of myself to someone that I have never met face-to-face"

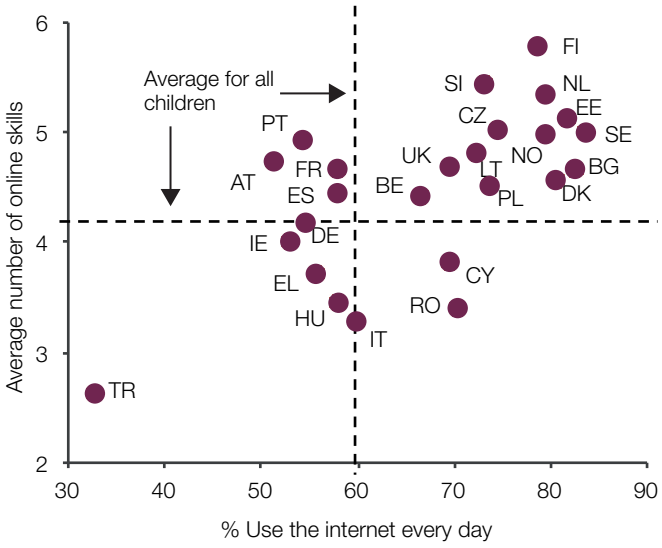
Which children do these risky online activities?

- Older children, boys, and children higher in self-efficacy and sensation seeking.
- Those who use the internet in more places, for longer, and for more activities, as predicted by the *usage hypothesis*.
- Children who encounter more offline risks (eg, say "yes" to: "Had so much alcohol that I got really drunk", "Missed school lessons without my parents knowing", "Had sexual intercourse", "Been in trouble with my teachers for bad behaviour", "Been in trouble with the police"), as predicted by the *risk migration hypothesis*.
- Children with more psychological difficulties, as predicted by the *vulnerability hypothesis*.
- Children who say it is "very true" that "I find it easier to be myself on the internet", as predicted by the *social compensation hypothesis*.
- Children with more digital literacy and safety skills, suggesting that online experimentation can enhance skills, though greater skill is also linked to more (not fewer) online risky activities.

The survey examined digital literacy and safety skills among the 11-16 year olds in more detail, finding that children have on average about half the skills asked about.

% who say they can…	11-13 year old		14-16 year old		
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	All
Instrumental/safety skills					
Bookmark a website	56	52	73	72	64
Block messages from someone you don't want to hear from	51	53	75	74	64
Change privacy settings on a social networking profile	41	44	69	69	56
Delete the record of which sites you have visited	42	37	67	61	52
Block unwanted adverts or junk mail/spam	41	39	65	57	51
Change filter preferences	19	16	46	31	28
Informational skills					
Find information on how to use the internet safely	54	51	74	70	63
Compare different websites to decide if information is true	47	44	67	63	56
Average number of skills	**3.4**	**3.2**	**5.2**	**4.8**	**4.2**

Relation between frequency and skills in internet use



- **Most 11-16 year olds can bookmark a website (64 per cent)**, block messages from someone they do not wish to be in contact with (64 per cent) or find safety information online (63 per cent).

- **Half can change privacy settings on a social networking profile (56 per cent)**, compare websites to judge the quality of information (56 per cent), delete their history (52 per cent) or block junk mail and spam (51 per cent).

- **Those who use the internet more have more skills** – this holds for individuals and also at the country level, as shown in the graph.

- **These various skills go hand in hand** – the eight skills are intercorrelated, meaning that, for example, those who can judge the veracity of websites are also those who can find safety information, those who can bookmark a site can also block unwanted messages, and so on. It also means that those who struggle with one skill are likely to struggle with others.

- **Younger children lack significant skills**, boys claim to be slightly more skilled than girls, and children from higher socioeconomic status (SES) homes say they can do more than those from lower ones.

Policy implications

- Encouraging children to do more online will improve their digital skill set.

- Teaching safety skills is likely to improve other skills, while teaching instrumental and informational skills will also improve safety skills.

- Inequalities in digital skills persist – in terms of SES, age and, to a lesser degree, gender. So efforts to overcome these are needed.

- Low skills among younger children are a priority for teachers and parents, as ever younger children go online.

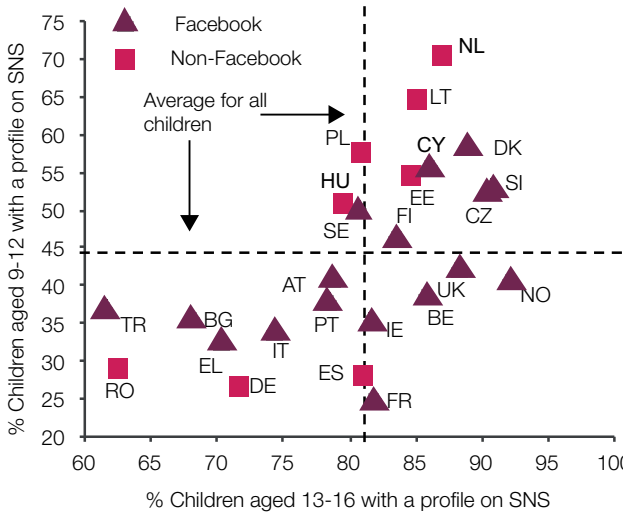
SOCIAL NETWORKING

Social networking sites (SNSs) enable children to communicate and have fun with their friends, but not everyone has the digital skills to manage privacy and personal disclosure.

Many sites set lower age restrictions around 13 years but clearly these are not working

- 38 per cent 9-12 year olds and 77 per cent 13-16 year olds have a profile on a social networking site.
- 20 per cent 9-12 year olds and 46 per cent 13-16 year olds use Facebook as their main SNS.
- In countries where the dominant SNS has no age restrictions, younger children seem more likely to use SNSs.
- 27 per cent of 9-12 year olds display an incorrect age on their SNS profile.

Balance between younger and older children using SNSs

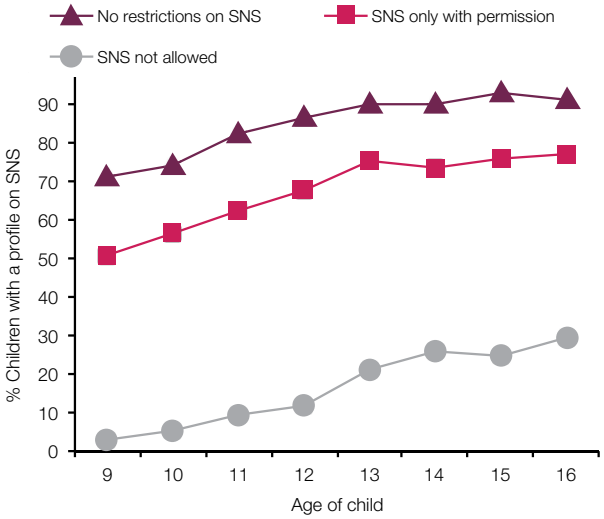


Note: "Facebook countries" – those where Facebook is the main SNS.
Base: All children who use the internet.

Parental mediation is fairly effective, despite the belief that children ignore parental rules

- Among children whose parents impose no restrictions or who let them use SNSs with permission, most children have an SNS profile, even among the youngest.
- Among the one in three children whose parents ban their use of SNSs, younger children appear to respect parental regulation. Although from 13 years old they take less notice of their parents, still, a majority comply.

Relation between child's SNS use and parental rules by age



Base: children who use the internet.

Does it matter if young children use SNSs?

Children surely have the right to use services where many social activities – for governmental, artistic, citizen groups, news, educational offerings and more – take place. But to enable these opportunities, some risks should be further mitigated.

- 29 per cent of 9-12 year olds and 27 per cent of 13-16 year olds have their profile "public", though this varies according to the country and the SNS used.
- A quarter of SNS users communicate online with people unconnected to their daily lives, including one fifth of 9-12 year olds.
- One fifth of children whose profile is public display their address and/or phone number, twice as many as for those with private profiles.
- One in six 9-12 year olds and one in three 13-16 year olds have more than 100 contacts on their SNS profile.
- Compared with those who do not use SNSs, SNS users are significantly more likely to report seeing sexual images, receiving sexual or bullying messages or meeting online contacts offline – though for each risk, the overall incidence is fairly low.

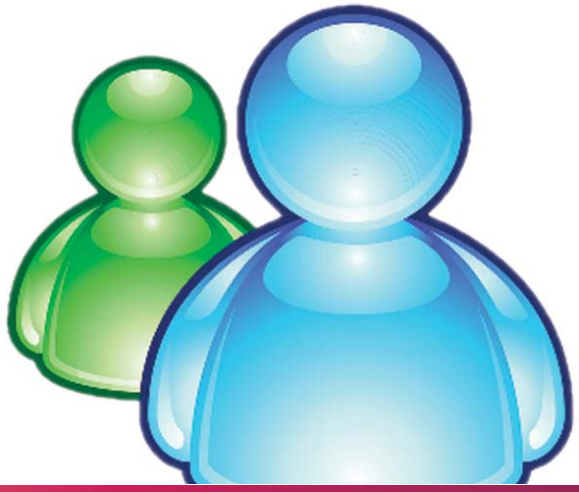
Aren't children internet-savvy enough to manage their SNS settings?

- Features designed to protect children from other users if needed are not easily understood by everyone, especially by younger children.
- A large minority don't know how to manage their privacy settings, and four in ten younger children don't know how to block someone sending them unwelcome messages.
- Most children, however, are confident SNS users who are gaining the skills to use these services safely and greatly enjoy doing so.

Which of these things do you know how to do on the internet?

	Change privacy settings			Block another user		
SNS	**% 11-12**	**% 13-14**	**% 15-16**	**% 11-12**	**% 13-14**	**% 15-16**
Facebook	55	70	78	61	76	80
Nasza-Klasa	64	80	85	56	71	83
schülerVZ	61	73	81	62	72	78
Tuenti	53	72	82	67	84	91
Hyves	68	77	89	79	88	94
Hi5	42	63	56	51	65	73
All SNSs	56	71	78	61	75	81

Base: All children aged 11-16 with a profile on the named SNS.



Policy implications

- If SNS age restrictions cannot be made effective, the de facto use of SNS by young children should be addressed so as to ensure age-appropriate protection.
- Privacy/safety settings and reporting mechanisms should be far more user-friendly. If they remain difficult to use, privacy/safety settings should be enabled by default.
- Digital skills to protect privacy and personal data should be strongly supported among children of all ages.
- It should also be recognised that one in three parents (51 per cent of parents of 9-12 year olds, 15 per cent of parents of 13-16 year olds) do not want their child to use SNSs.

WHAT UPSETS CHILDREN ONLINE

We asked children to tell us in their own words, "what things on the internet would bother people about your age?".

A note on method

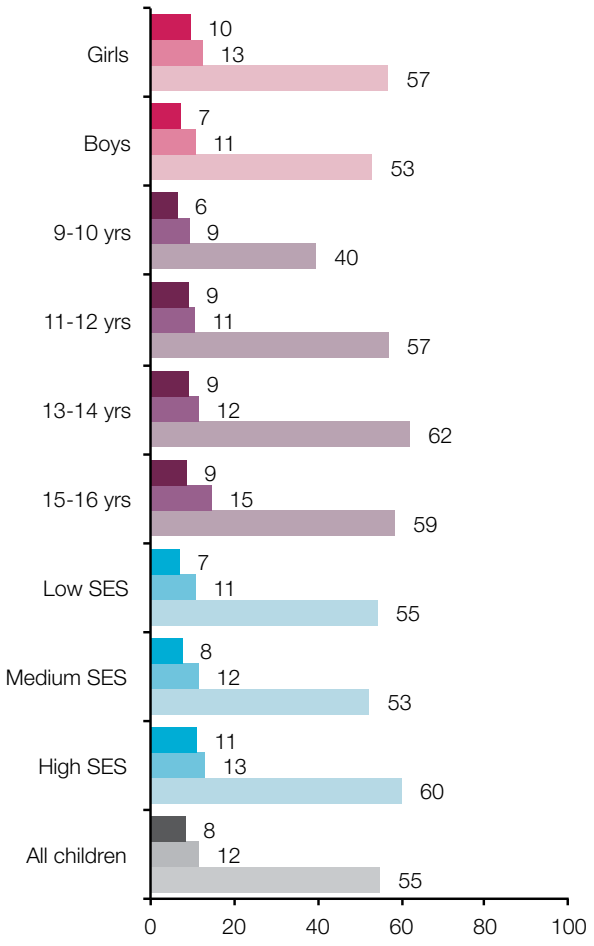
It is not easy to ask children about sensitive issues associated with online risks. Our approach was to interview children at home, face-to-face, so the child would be relaxed and the interviewer could check the child's understanding of questions asked. For the sensitive questions, children completed the survey in privacy – either answering on a computer screen turned to face them, or by pen and paper before putting their answers in a sealed envelope. We defined terms carefully and neutrally, avoiding emotive or value-laden terms (eg, "bully", "stranger"). The focus was on children's reports of what had actually happened to them within a set time period rather than on general opinions. Cognitive testing ensured children understood the questionnaire, and we took great care in translating this into 26 languages. For example, to ask children about the possible harms associated with specific risks (and instead of assuming that harm was inevitable), we asked children if a particular experience had "bothered" them, defining this as something that "made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen it." We asked this first, before mentioning any kinds of risk at all, to see children's own views. A leaflet of helpful advice and sources of further support and guidance was provided for every child who participated in the survey, and we thank Insafe for compiling this – in 25 country versions!

- 55 per cent of all children consider that there are things on the internet that will bother children about their own age.
- 12 per cent of European 9-16 year olds say that they have been bothered or upset by something on the internet.

However, most children do not report being bothered or upset by going online.

- 8 per cent of parents think their child has been bothered by something online – parents of girls, and parents from higher SES homes, are a little more likely to think this.
- This means both that parents are a little more likely to underestimate harmful children's experiences overall, and also that in over half of the cases (59 per cent) where children have been bothered, their parents are unaware that something has happened.

What upsets children online



"When I am playing games with my older sister on the internet, naked people pop up and it is very bad" (girl, 15, Turkey)

"Lies that are being spread. Cyberpesting, it happens more and more" (girl, 14, Belgium)

"If someone says that someone will do something on the internet like ruin your character that you have in a game" (boy, 10, Sweden)

"Hacker; spying; cheating; strangers who contact you online and you do not really know what they want from you" (boy, 11, Austria)

"When human beings are killed; when human beings are hurt while other people are watching" (girl, 10, Germany)

"If people put your secrets on the internet. If people take pictures or videos of you and put them on the internet when you don't want them to" (girl, 9, Ireland)

"To tell something nasty about a girl friend and then tell it to everyone" (girl, 12, France)

"All kinds of bullies, who can hurt person with words" (girl, 14, Estonia)

"Obscene scenes with naked people, men with men or men with women, saying rude words, hitting, whipping" (boy, 12, France)

"Kids bullying each other and being cruel and nasty. Sending nasty rumours about them to other people" (girl, 16, UK)

Policy implications

- Children are concerned about a wide range of online risks. Efforts to manage these risks, and to support children in coping with them, should maintain a broad and updated view of these risks.
- As 9 per cent of 9-10 year olds have been bothered or upset by something on the internet in the past year. it is important to promote awareness-raising and other safety practices for ever younger children.
- Awareness-raising among teenagers (and their parents and teachers) remains a priority since upsetting experiences rise with age and the array of risks keeps changing.

UNWELCOME OR UPSETTING EXPERIENCES

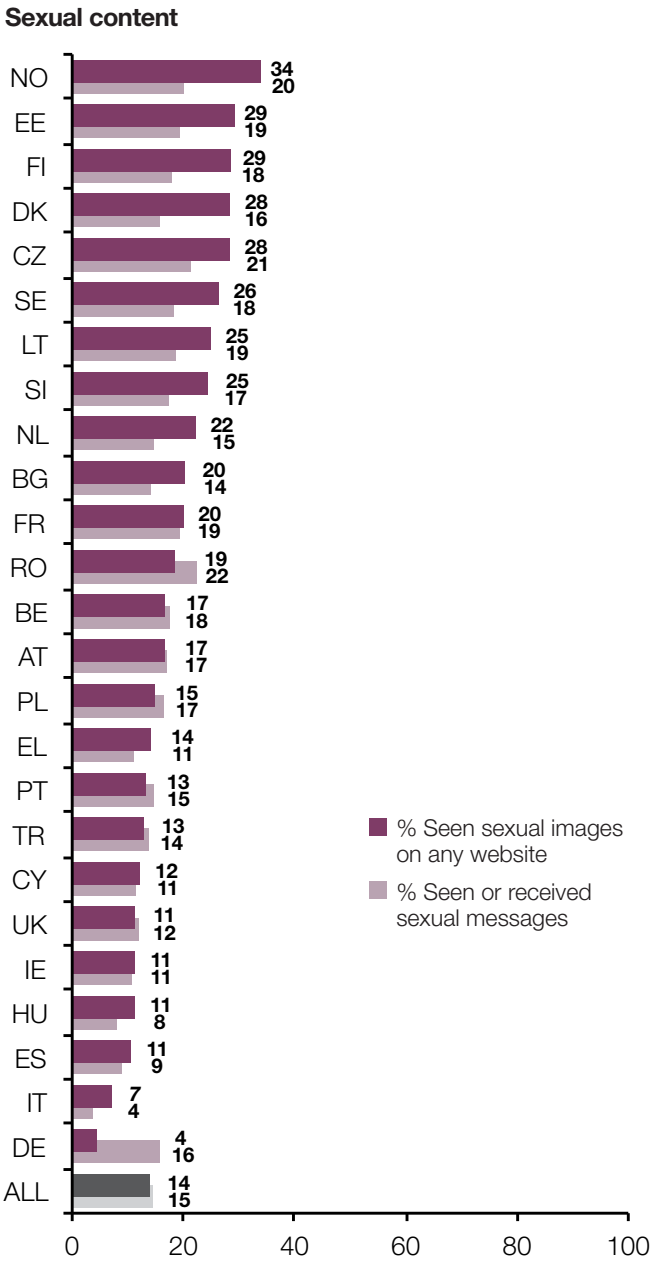
SEXUAL CONTENT

Society has long worried about children's exposure to sexual content of one kind or another. The survey shows that exposure still occurs offline as well as online, with online pornography spreading for some children and in some countries.

Key findings

- Children encounter pornography online and offline – 14 per cent of 9-16 year olds have seen sexual images online, and 4 per cent (about 25 per cent of those who had seen sexual images online) were upset by this; 23 per cent have seen sexual images altogether (including on websites but also television or videos/DVDs – 12 per cent, in magazines or books – 7 per cent).
- A minority of online content is sexually explicit – among 11-16 year olds, 11 per cent have seen nudity, 8 per cent have seen someone having sex, 8 per cent of seen genitals, and 2 per cent have seen violent sex. Also, 2 per cent have been asked to talk about sexual acts with someone online and 2 per cent have been asked for an image of their genitals.
- Sexual content is not just found on websites but is now also circulated via electronic devices among peers – 15 per cent of 11-16 year olds in Europe have received sexual messages, and 4 per cent (about 25 per cent of those who had received a message) said they had been upset by this. Also, 3 per cent say they have sent sexual messages to someone.
- Age and gender make a difference – more older than younger children report exposure to sexual content, and more boys than girls have seen sexual images; a third of teenage boys say they have seen these, a quarter online.
- Risks migrate – those who have encountered a range of risks offline are more likely to encounter sexual content online.

Children's exposure to sexual content online appears to be highest in Nordic countries and some Eastern European countries; children report lesser exposure in Southern Europe and predominantly Catholic countries



- Vulnerability matters – those who report more psychological difficulties are also more likely to have seen sexual images or received sexual messages online, and they are more often upset by the experience.
- Risk and harm are not the same – older children and boys encounter more sexual content, but younger children and girls are more upset when they do encounter this. Also, "sensation seekers" encounter more content and yet are less upset about it – possibly the very act of seeking and finding new content builds resilience for some.
- Parents are insufficiently aware – among children who have seen sexual images online, 40 per cent of their parents are unaware of this, rising to half of parents of girls and younger children; the groups more upset by what they see. Among those who have received sexual messages, 52 per cent of their parents are unaware of this and again this is more common among parents of girls and younger children.

Policy implications

- Although public concern over online sexual content is justified, the extent of children's exposure should not be exaggerated, and nor should it be assumed that all children are upset or harmed by such exposure – the present findings do not support some of the moral panics surrounding this issue.
- Although the internet makes sexual content more readily available to all, with many children reporting exposure via accidental pop-ups, the regulation of more established media (television, video, magazines, etc) remains important.
- Private access also matters – children who go online via their own laptop, mobile phone or, especially, a handheld device are more likely to have seen sexual images and/or received sexual messages. Similarly, those who go online in their bedroom, at a friend's house or "out and about" are more likely to see sexual content online. The early advice that parents should put the computer in a public room must be revised, and new safety tools are needed.
- It seems that popular discourses centred on teenage boys' deliberate exposure to sexual content makes it harder for parents and others to recognise the distress that inadvertent exposure may cause girls, younger children and those facing psychological difficulties in their lives.

MOST NOT BOTHERED BY SEXUAL CONTENT ONLINE BUT...

ONLINE BULLYING

We asked children if they had been treated, or had treated other people, in a hurtful or nasty way on the internet, whether as a single, repeated or persistent occurrence.

- Across Europe, 6 per cent of 9 to 16-year-old internet users report having been bullied online, and 3 per cent confess to having bullied others.
- Far more have been bullied offline, however, with 19 per cent saying they have been bullied at all – and 12 per cent have bullied someone else. In some countries, bullying is much more common than in others.

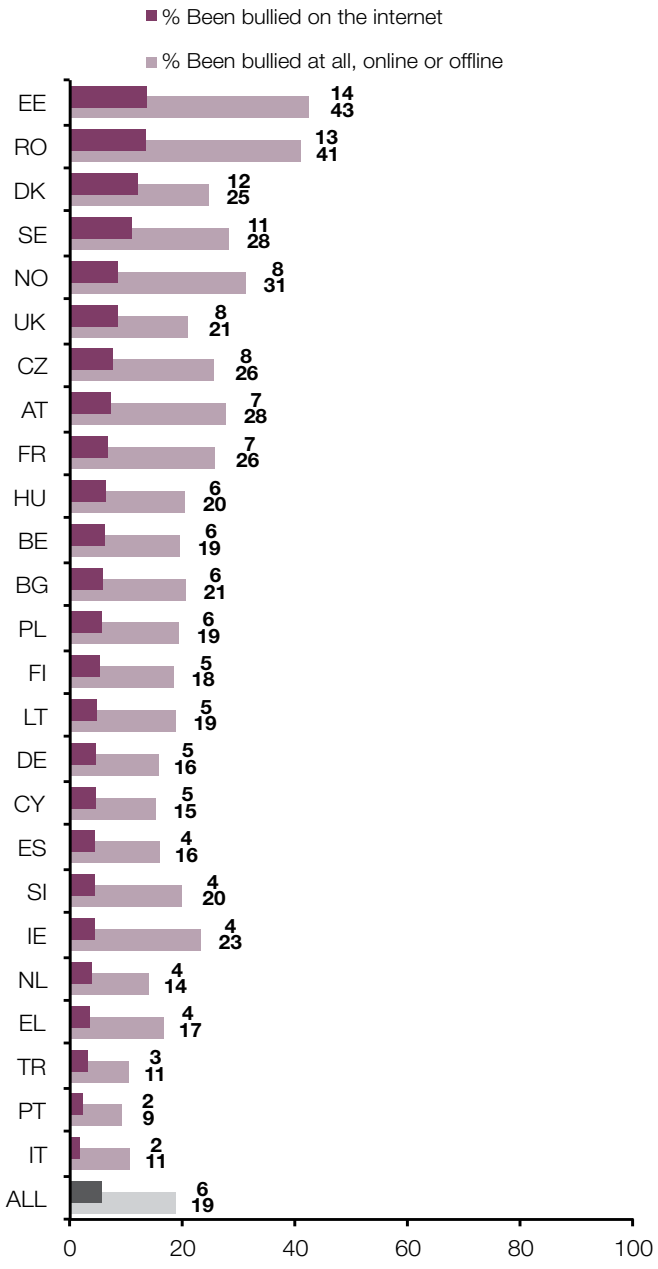
Online bullying has rightly attracted a lot of policy attention. But it is not a wholly new problem. And nor are the children who do it simply "bad". What does the EU Kids Online survey tell us?

- How does online bullying relate to offline bullying? Half (56 per cent) of online bullies said they had also bullied people face-to-face, and half (55 per cent) of online victims said they have also been bullied face-to-face. So it is not that bullying takes place either online or offline but that instead bullying migrates from one to the other, making it hard for the victim to escape.
- What is the link between children who bully and children who are bullied? It seems that bullying and being bullied tend to go together. Among those who do not bully others, being bullied is relatively rare – 8 per cent offline only, and 4 per cent online. But, among those who have bullied others offline, nearly half (47 per cent) have also been bullied offline (and fewer online). On the other hand, among those who have bullied others online, nearly half (40 per cent) have been bullied online (and fewer offline).

Whether a child is victim of bullying , by whether the child bullies others

Although relatively few children report being bullied, this is the risk that upsets them most, more than sexual images, sexual messages, or meeting online contacts offline

Whether child has been bullied online or at all



- Which children bully or are bullied? Children who bully and who are bullied online report rather more psychological difficulties than children with no experience of bullying online. Also, those who bully tend to be higher in sensation seeking, while those who are bullied are more often ostracised by their peers.
- Are children who are bullied harmed by this? The 6 per cent of children who have been bullied online divide fairly evenly into those who were very upset (31 per cent), fairly upset (24 per cent), a bit upset (30 per cent) and, the smallest category, not at all upset (15 per cent). Girls are more upset than boys (37 per cent vs. 23 per cent "very upset").
- How do children who are bullied online cope with this? Children cope fairly well with being bullied online – a third (36 per cent) try to fix the problem, most tell someone (77 per cent, usually a friend but often a parent), and nearly half (46 per cent) block the person sending the hurtful messages.

Policy implications

- In countries where there is more bullying, there tends to be more bullying online. This suggests that as internet use increases, so will bullying online. Thus anti-bullying initiatives should accompany efforts to promote internet use.
- Online and offline bullying should be seen as connected, part of a vicious cycle in which perpetrators reach their victims through diverse means and victims find it hard to escape.
- Yet, those who bully may also be vulnerable, and they are often victims themselves, so sensitive treatment is required.
- Although children have a range of coping responses, this risk does upset them, and more support is needed – fewer than half tell a parent or other adult, and fewer than half know how to block the person or delete their messages, so further awareness-raising is vital.

BULLIES MAY ALSO BE BULLIED

MEETING NEW CONTACTS ONLINE

50 per cent of children 11-16 say "I find it easier to be myself on the internet than when I am with people face-to-face".

Communicating, making new friends, developing intimacy – all this is fraught with difficulties and embarrassment for young people. The internet, it seems, offers a space for privacy, control over communication and experimentation. It also lets children easily get to know many new people, whether they are like them or quite different.

Traditionally, it has been clear who children are in touch with because, first, the child can see who they are talking to, also the parent can oversee who the child is talking to and, last, because the child's own identity is not in doubt. But on the internet, none of this can be assumed. Online, no-one knows, famously, if you yourself are a dog – or a child. It is not clear if you are talking to a child or an adult, including an adult pretending to be a child. Nor can parents oversee their children's friends – they are no longer present in the house or street, only on the computer, often inaccessible even to curious or concerned parents.

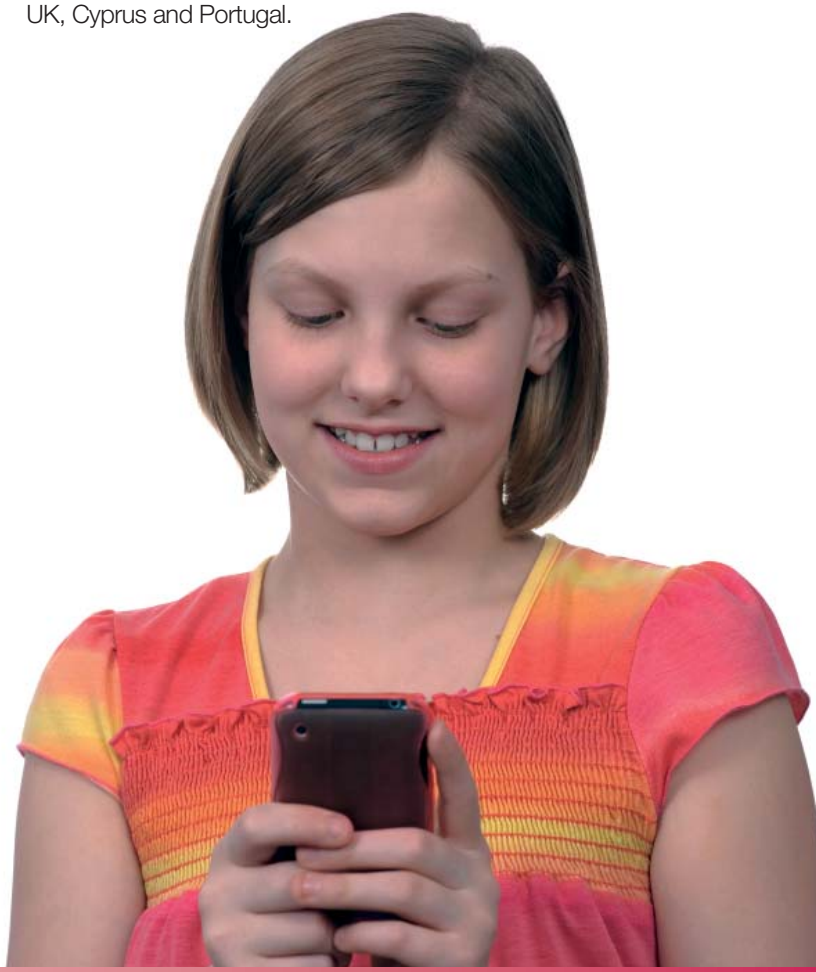
Nowhere has the public anxiety been greater than over the tension between "meeting strangers" (as many adults see it) and "making new friends" (as children may see it). Meeting strangers is a risk. Making new friends is an opportunity. Distinguishing between the two may depend on the child and the circumstances. Avoiding the emotive terms "stranger" and "friend", we asked children in the survey about the people they are in touch with online and whether they also know them offline.

- 87 per cent of 11-16 year olds say that online they are in touch with people they first met face-to-face. But 39 per cent are in touch with people they met on the internet who are friends or family of people they know. And 25 per cent are in touch with people they met online who have no connection with their existing social circle.

- 30 per cent of European 9-16 year olds have had contact online with someone they haven't met face to face, but only 9 per cent have gone to an offline meeting with such a person. On a country level, there is no obvious relation between making contacts online and meeting them offline.

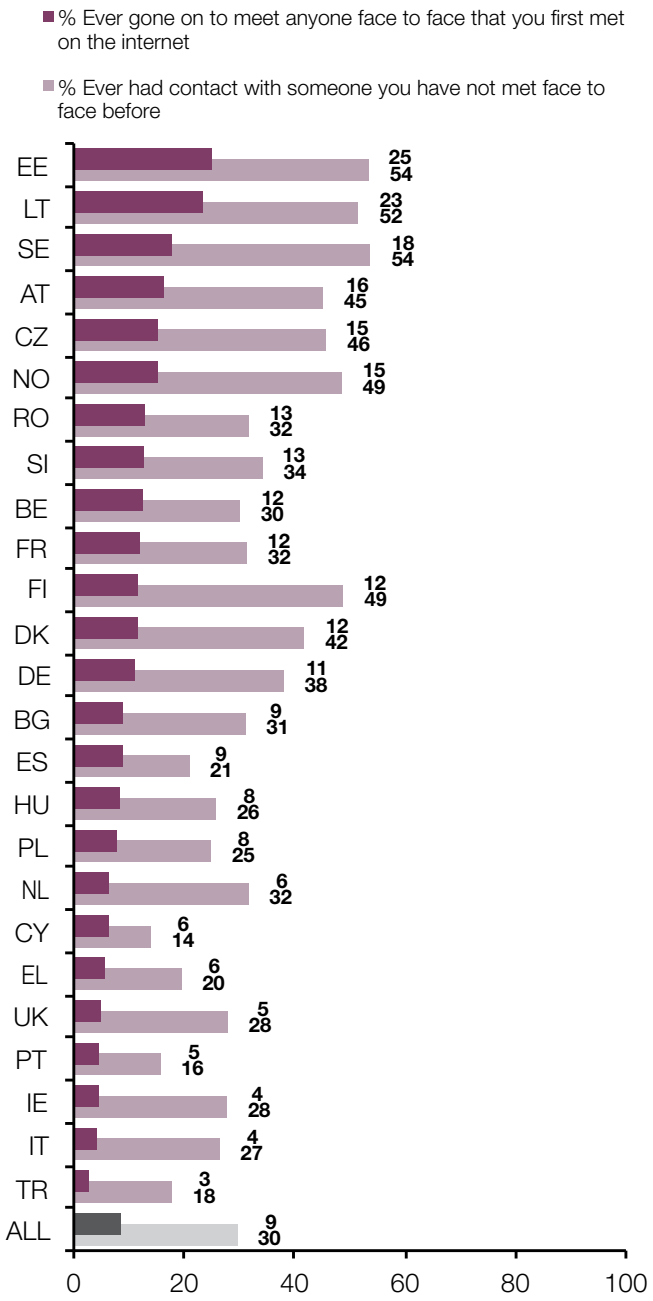
- Among those who have met online contacts offline, half have met one or two people in the past year, half have met more. Also, 57 per cent met a friend of a friend (someone in their social circle) while 48 per cent met someone unconnected with their life before meeting them online.

- Among those children who did meet an online contact offline, 61 per cent of their parents were not aware of this, rising to 68 per cent among the younger children. Parents were least aware of such meetings in Ireland, the UK, Cyprus and Portugal.



Meeting new people online is commonplace for European children. Only in a small minority of cases is there cause for serious concern

Whether child has met new people online and then met them offline



What else do we know about who makes new contacts online?

- Those who make contacts online tend to be higher in self-efficacy and/or sensation seekers who use the internet more, who engage in risky online and offline activities and whose parents place fewer restrictions on their internet use.
- Interestingly, those who go to meet new contacts offline show a similar pattern except they are also more likely to have psychological difficulties; so children's vulnerability is part of what makes some go to face-to-face meetings with 'new friends'.
- 11 per cent of those who went to such meetings (ie, 1 per cent of all children surveyed) were bothered or upset by what happened. Since the vast majority were not upset by such meetings, what makes the difference? We didn't ask much about what happened, though we know that two thirds of those upset met someone about their own age, and that a fifth said something hurtful was said and a few said something sexual happened.
- But we do know that those who were upset were more likely to be younger, low in self-efficacy and higher in psychological difficulties – in short, they tend to be the more vulnerable children.

Policy implications

- It is important to distinguish making new contacts online – a common occurrence – from going to meet new online contacts offline. It is equally important to recognise that for the most part, meeting online contacts offline is harmless, probably even fun.
- But for a minority of children, meeting online contacts offline are harmful, and these children tend already to be the more vulnerable.
- Since their parents are often unaware of what has happened, awareness raising efforts should be increased so that parents of younger and/or more vulnerable children recognise the risk, but without this undermining the chance for most children to have fun making new friends.

NEWER RISKS

Public anxiety often focuses on pornography, "sexting", bullying and meeting strangers, especially for young children. But there are other risks that worry children, including many teenagers.

Survey findings showed that negative user-generated content is not uncommon:

- **Hate sites** – 12 per cent of European 11-16 year olds have seen these in the past year, rising to one in five 15-16 year olds.
- **Pro-anorexic sites** – 10 per cent have seen these, rising to one in five teenage girls (14-16 years old).
- **Self-harm sites** – 7 per cent have seen these, again more older than younger children.
- **Drug forums** – 7 per cent have seen these too, rising to 12 per cent of 15-16 year olds.
- **Suicide sites** – 5 per cent have seen these.
- **Overall** – 21 per cent of 11-16 year olds have seen at least one of these types of user-generated content; this varies by country, as shown in the graph.

Varieties of personal data misuse also occur:

- **Identity theft** – 7 per cent of 11-16 year olds say that in the past year somebody used their password to access their information or pretend to be them.
- **Personal information abuse** – 4 per cent say that somebody used their personal information in a way they didn't like.
- **Financial cheating** – just 1 per cent say that they lost money by being cheated on the internet.
- **Overall** – 9 per cent say that they have experienced at least one of these three forms of personal data misuse, and this too varies by country.

"Be made a ridicule by having personal stuff written about you and then made public" (boy, 11, Greece)

"Somebody that would 'crack' my password, I mean to access my account, to impersonate me and to make people in my contact list believe that I'm lying to them etc" (girl, 12, Romania)

"Pictures of naked people and of people who want to lose weight very quickly" (girl, 10, Portugal)

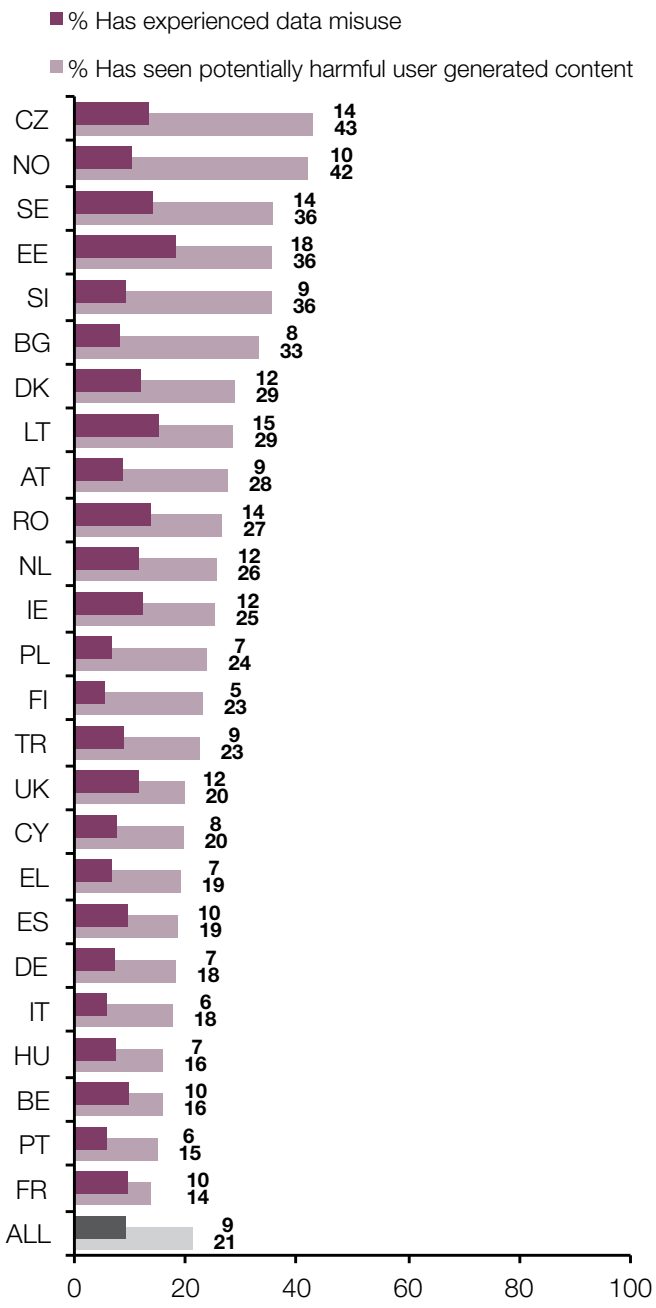
"Violence (scenes), shocking news" (girl, 14, Slovenia)

"Being hacked by other children online (like: they find out what for instance your password is on an online community)" (girl, 9, Norway)

"Bloodthirsty websites that show how someone is beating himself bloody or how someone is scratching himself" (girl, 15, Austria)

"Lack of sleep, you don't do your homework if you are too much on the computer and can't concentrate on study" (boy, 14, Finland)

Child (11-16) has encountered negative user-generated content or data misuse



Policy implications

- As well as conducting surveys, qualitative work based on listening to children is vital to learn what new risks they are experiencing.
- Addressing risks associated with peer-to-peer conduct (user-generated content and personal data misuse) poses a critical challenge to policy makers.
- While younger children have fewer resources to cope with online risk, they are also more willing to turn to parents for help; meanwhile, teenagers face particular risks that worry them and that they may struggle with alone, so they need particular coping strategies and support.

"Torturing ourselves, attempts to suicide, using drugs" (boy, 15, Hungary)

"Violent video filmed at school or when somebody is harmed" (girl, 10, Lithuania)

"Showing sexual practices, offering drugs and weapons, religious groups" (boy, 15, Czech Republic)

"When somebody says that he/she is going to commit suicide" (boy, 15, Germany)

"To do with being skinny, talking about weight loss and what you can do to lose weight" (girl, 15, UK)

"Girlfriends who I thought my friends have been awful. They took my identity to have my boyfriend" (girl, 15, France)

"The influence of bad websites such as things like diet to lose weight so you could be known as the pretty one. Like vomiting things" (girl, 15, Ireland)

"The internet hackers are bothering, also the abusive use of personal accounts or the untrue information tht somebody is spreading for someone else" (boy, 12, Bulgaria)

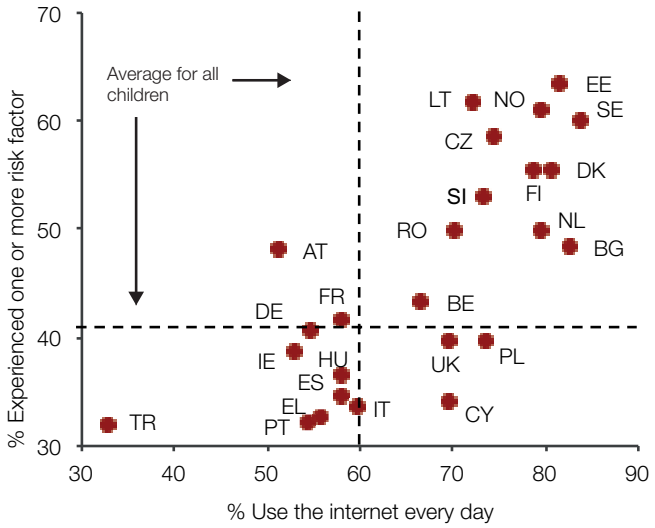
THE RISKS THAT CONCERN CHILDREN KEEP CHANGING

COMPARING RISK AND HARM

4 in 10 children encountered one or more forms of online risk in the past year

- 14 per cent of European 9-16 year olds have seen sexual images online.
- 6 per cent of 9-16 year olds have been sent nasty or hurtful messages/been bullied online.
- 30 per cent of 9-16 year olds have had contact online with someone they have not met face to face.
- 9 per cent of 9-16 year olds have been to an offline meeting with a contact first met online.
- 15 per cent of 11-16 year olds have seen or received sexual messages online.
- 21 per cent of 11-16 year olds have come across one or more types of potentially harmful user-generated content.
- 9 per cent have experienced one or more types of personal data misuse.
- As use of the internet increases – at the level of individuals and countries – so too does risk.

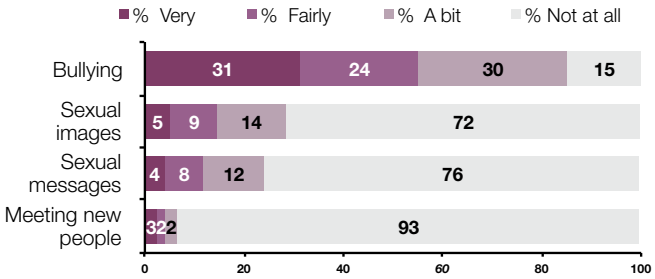
Encountering online risks by frequency of internet use



Fewer children report being harmed by online risks

- Being bullied online is the risk that upsets children the most, even though it is among the least common.
- Meeting new people offline – the risk that the public worries about the most – very rarely upsets children, although when it does upset them the consequences can be very serious.
- While society may judge, on moral grounds, that children should not be exposed to sexual content, children are only upset by such exposure in a few circumstances, while in others such exposure may be pleasurable.
- Among the minority upset by sexual content, children are most upset by being asked to talk about sexual acts with someone or being asked for an image of their genitals (by comparison, for example, with sexual messages or images of intercourse).

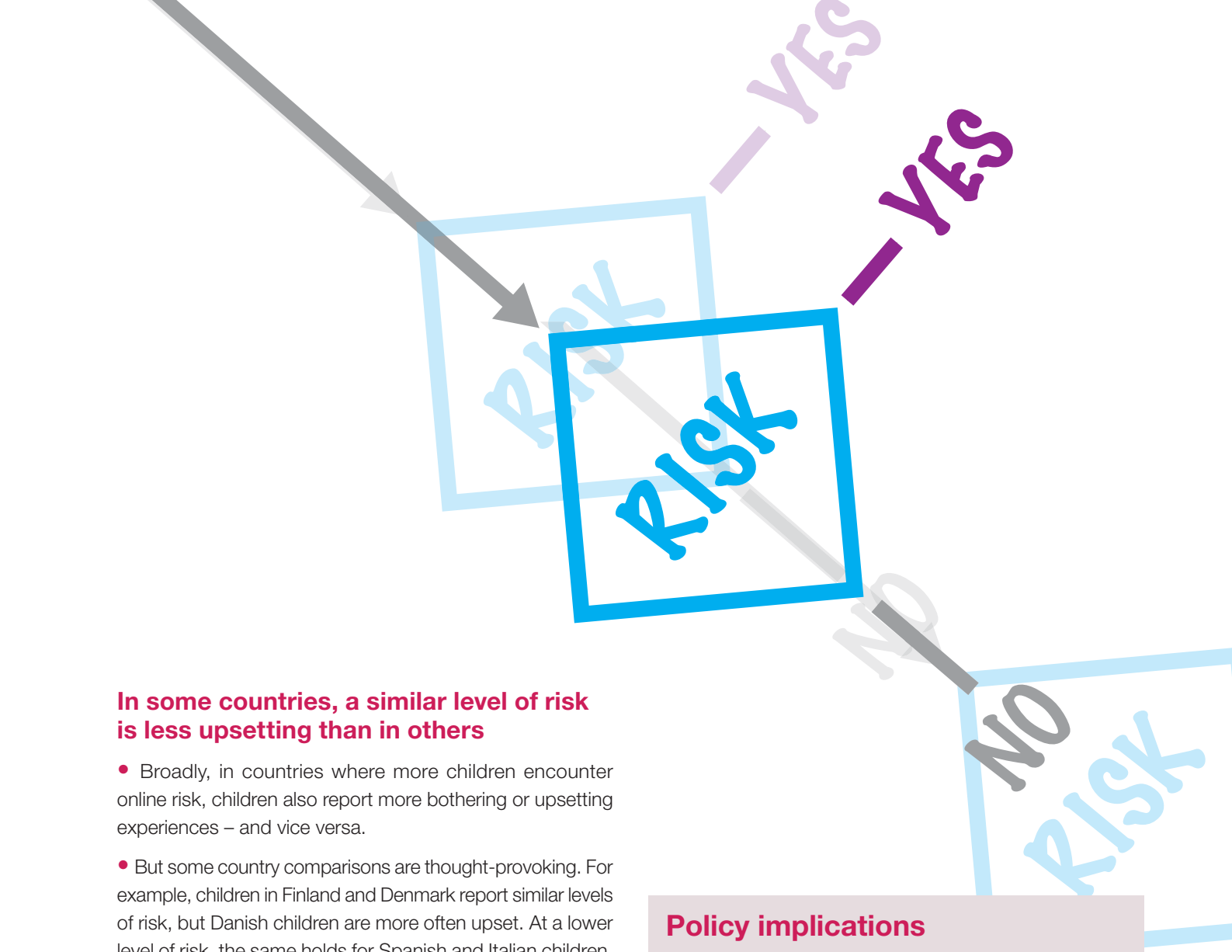
How upset the child felt after encountering the risk online



Risk refers to the probabillity not the inevitability of harm

Generally, children who are older, higher in self-efficacy and sensation seeking, who do more online activities (ie, are higher on the ladder of opportunities) and who have more psychological problems encounter more risks of all kinds online.

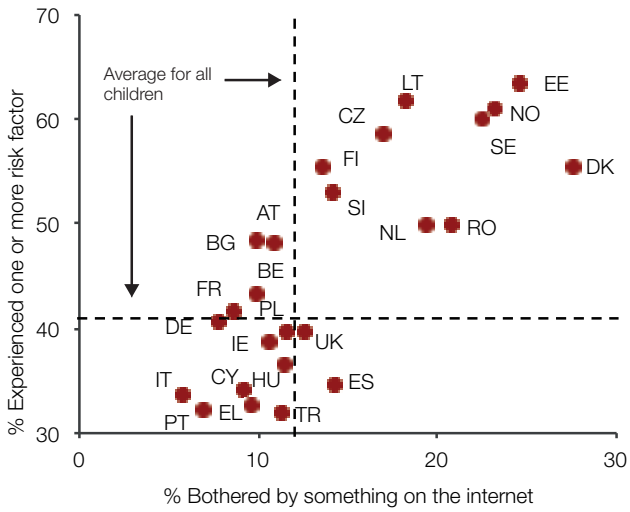
In contrast, children who are younger, lower in self-efficacy and sensation seeking, who do fewer online activities, have fewer skills, and who have more psychological problems find online risks more harmful and upsetting.



In some countries, a similar level of risk is less upsetting than in others

- Broadly, in countries where more children encounter online risk, children also report more bothering or upsetting experiences – and vice versa.
- But some country comparisons are thought-provoking. For example, children in Finland and Denmark report similar levels of risk, but Danish children are more often upset. At a lower level of risk, the same holds for Spanish and Italian children.

Encountering online risks by whether bothered or upset by internet use



Policy implications

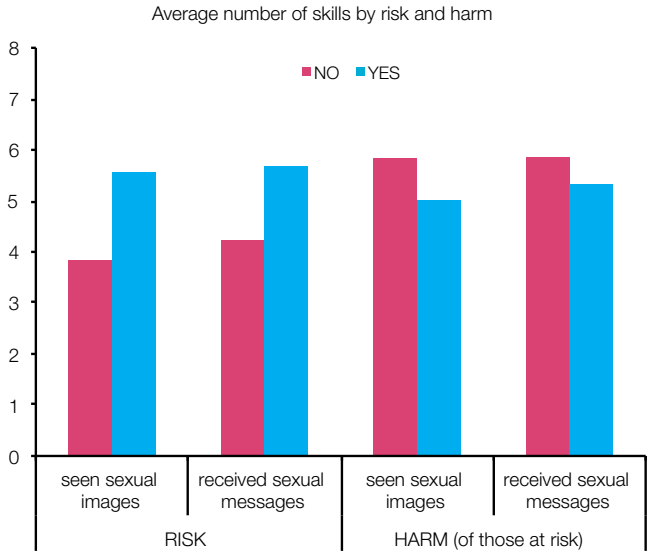
- Since risk increases as use increases, it might seem simple to call for restrictions on children's use of the internet. But online opportunities and digital literacy also increase with use, so there is no simple solution. Rather, ways must be found to manage risk without unduly restricting opportunities.
- As with riding a bike or crossing the road, everyday activities online carry a risk of harm, but this harm is far from inevitable – indeed, it is fairly rare. The EU Kids Online survey provides clear empirical support for policy efforts both to manage children's encounters online so as to reduce harm (though not necessarily to reduce risk). This should be achieved both by designing the online environment to build in safety considerations and to increase children's digital skills, coping and resilience.
- In some countries, the need for such efforts is already pressing. In others, it may be anticipated that as use rises, so to will the need for greater policy efforts regarding children's safety, empowerment and well-being.

HOW CHILDREN COPE WITH HARM

Society has a responsibility to provide guidance and support for children facing online risks. But it is also important to support children's capacity to cope themselves, thereby building resilience for digital citizens.

- It might be thought that increasing children's digital skills would reduce their encounters with online risk. But as EU Kids Online findings show, increased skills are associated with a wider and deeper use of the internet, bringing both more opportunities and more risks.
- This may not be problematic: developmental psychologists argue that children must encounter some degree of risk – though not risk which exceeds their capacity to cope – for them to become resilient. The kind of risk that a child can cope with varies with individual circumstances – some children experience risks as harmful while others do not.
- Some online experiences are so extreme or upsetting that children should not be exposed to them in the first place – for these, self- or state-regulation of the online environment is required. But for many everyday encounters, 'end-user' solutions are preferable. These may be provided by parents, teachers or even peers – see the next section. However, children themselves are part of the solution, and empowering them to cope with harm is vital.
- As the graph shows, children with more skills are more likely to have seen sexual images or received sexual messages. But those who are upset (ie, self-reported harm) have fewer skills than those not harmed.

More skilled children encounter more risk but experience less harm



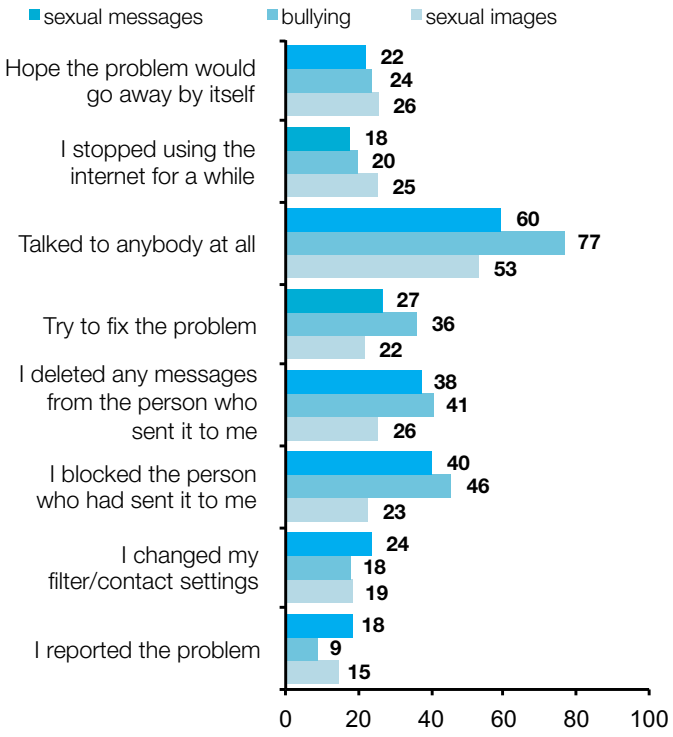
What can children do, when faced with an online risk that upsets them?

In the EU Kids Online survey, we asked children if they did any of the following:

- Fatalistic responses – hope the problem will go away, stop using the internet for a while.
- Communicative responses – talk to someone about what happened.
- Pro-active strategies – try to fix the problem, delete a problematic message, block an unwelcome person.

Communicative coping relies on having people around you that you trust, while pro-active strategies require available, user-friendly technical tools and the digital skills to employ them and a fatalistic response suggests the approach of someone lacking social, technical or skilful forms of support.

What children do when upset by online risks



We found that, among those upset by a particular risk, 11-16 year olds cope in different ways: (see graph)

- Younger children are more likely to make fatalistic responses, and they are also less likely than older children to tell someone if they are upset by sexual images. Older teens are more likely to block unwelcome people.
- Boys, compared with girls, are more likely to hope upsetting sexual messages will go away. Girls are more likely to talk to somebody about online harms. Interestingly, girls are also more likely to adopt proactive strategies to online harm.
- Children lower in self-efficacy favour fatalistic responses, while children higher in self-efficacy try to fix the problem. Self-efficacy makes no difference to either communicative or technical responses, however.
- Children lower on the ladder of opportunities (who do fewer online activities) adopt more fatalistic responses while those higher on the ladder are more proactive.
- Children with more psychological difficulties tend to adopt fatalistic responses, especially stopping using the internet, and they are less likely to talk to someone if they are upset when bullied though some do block the bully.

Efforts to promote children's digital citizenship – in terms of online safety and good practice – are bearing some fruit, and should be extended

Policy implications

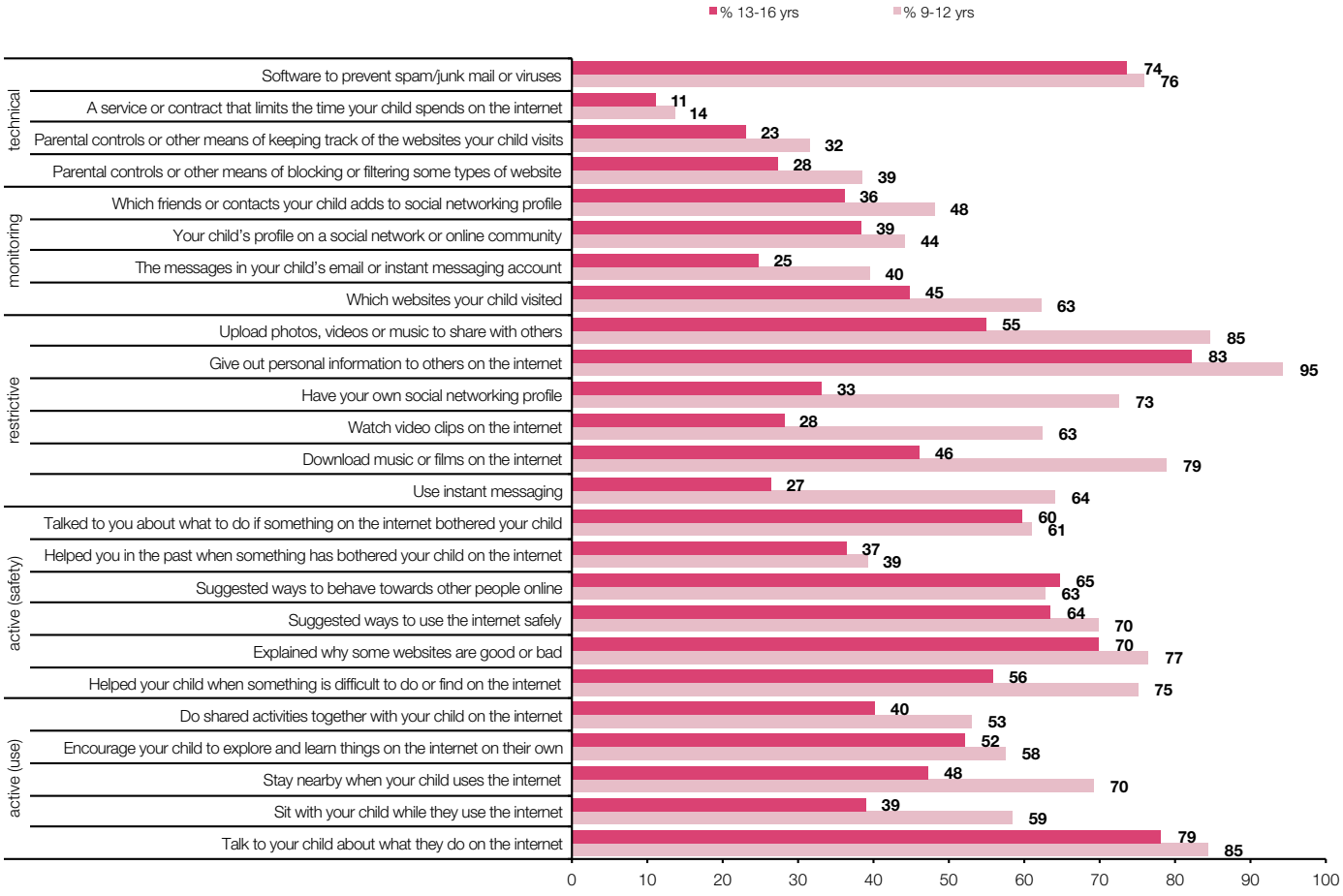
- Policy makers have long advised children to tell someone if they've been upset online, and it seems such messages have been heard.
- Children try some proactive strategies more than others and few are fatalistic: this suggests a desire to cope as best they can and a readiness to adopt new technical tools if these are accessible.
- When asked which strategies really helped the problem, children told us that reporting the problem to an ISP was effective with sexual images but less so for sexual or bullying messages: this suggests that better solutions are needed for peer-to-peer risks.
- Mostly, children said the approach they chose helped in up to two thirds of cases, but this leaves room for provision of better support and/or tools.
- There may be many reasons why the solutions children try, when upset, do not help the situation, but one possibility is that the technical tools are flawed or difficult to use, and another is that adults – professional or personal – are unprepared or unable to help children.
- The "knowledge gap" phenomenon – in which the information-rich learn from available advice and guidance more rapidly than the information-poor – means that efforts to promote digital citizenship will disproportionately benefit the already-advantaged. Targeting less privileged or more vulnerable children is a priority.
- Overwhelmingly, children tell a friend, followed by a parent, when something online upsets them. Rarely do they tell a teacher or any other adult in a position of responsibility. Their apparent lack of trust in those who may have more expert solutions is a concern.

WHAT PARENTS DO WHEN CHILDREN GO ONLINE

Parents play a vital role in keeping children safe on the internet and they can also empower their child to gain digital skills.

Yet parents face some dilemmas. Should they be more restrictive or more enabling? Do they understand the internet well enough to guide their child? Should they treat the internet like television or other media, or is it different? What are the technical options available to them? The EU Kids Online survey asked about five parental strategies – and we asked both parents and children what really happened at home.

What parents say they do when their child goes online



- 88 per cent parents impose rules about whether their child can give out personal information online
- 81 per cent talk to their children – especially their daughters – about what they do on the internet
- 58 per cent stay nearby when their child is online
- Monitoring what the child does online later is less popular, since it may imply less trust
- While three quarters use software to prevent spam/viruses, less than a third uses a filter for safety reasons

Most parents have got the message that it is worthwhile engaging with their child's internet use – but a few could do more

- Around one in ten parents does few or none of the forms of mediation we asked about.
- Parents reduce their amount of mediation – especially restrictions – as children get older, though interestingly they are equally likely to advise on safety whatever the child's age.
- Parents from higher vs. lower SES homes do more active/safety mediation though no more restrictive or technical mediation.
- Parents who are internet users do more of all forms of mediation than parents who are not.
- Interestingly, only 15 per cent of parents say they have changed their approach to internet safety because of something that upset their child online, although one in five parents say this in Estonia, Bulgaria and Romania where, possibly, they are undergoing a process of rapid adjustment to widespread internet access.
- Overall, four fifths of parents (especially those with younger children) are confident that they can help their child deal with anything online that bothers them, and they are also fairly confident in their child's ability to cope.
- Still, one quarter of parents think it is "fairly" (23 per cent) or "very" (5 per cent) likely that their child will experience problems online in the next six months, and half think they should take more interest in their child's online activities.

- Parents who practise more restrictive regulation have children who encounter fewer risks and also less harm – but also fewer online opportunities (these children do fewer online activities, and have fewer digital skills).
- Parents who practise more active safety mediation or monitoring have children who encounter more risks (especially younger children) and more harm (especially teenagers) – probably, parental mediation is a response to, rather than a condition for, problematic online experiences (and these children do more online activities and have more skills).

What do children say about this?

- Children report similar levels of parental activity to parents, though they underestimate parental levels of monitoring and filtering.
- They are generally positive about their parents' actions – over two thirds say it is helpful (27 per cent "very", 43 per cent "a bit") – teens largely agree with younger children about this.
- Contrary to the view that parents know little of what their children do online, two thirds of children say their parents know a lot (32 per cent) or quite a lot (36 per cent) about what they do.
- However, nearly half think what their parents do limits their online activities (11 per cent "a lot", 33 per cent "a little"), and 9-10 year olds feel the most restricted.
- And, as often suspected, a third of children say they sometimes ignore what their parents say about using the internet (7 per cent "a lot", 29 per cent "a little").
- Some would like their parents to take "a lot" (5 per cent) or "a little" (10 per cent) more interest in what they do online, especially among the 9-12 year olds; most would not, though.

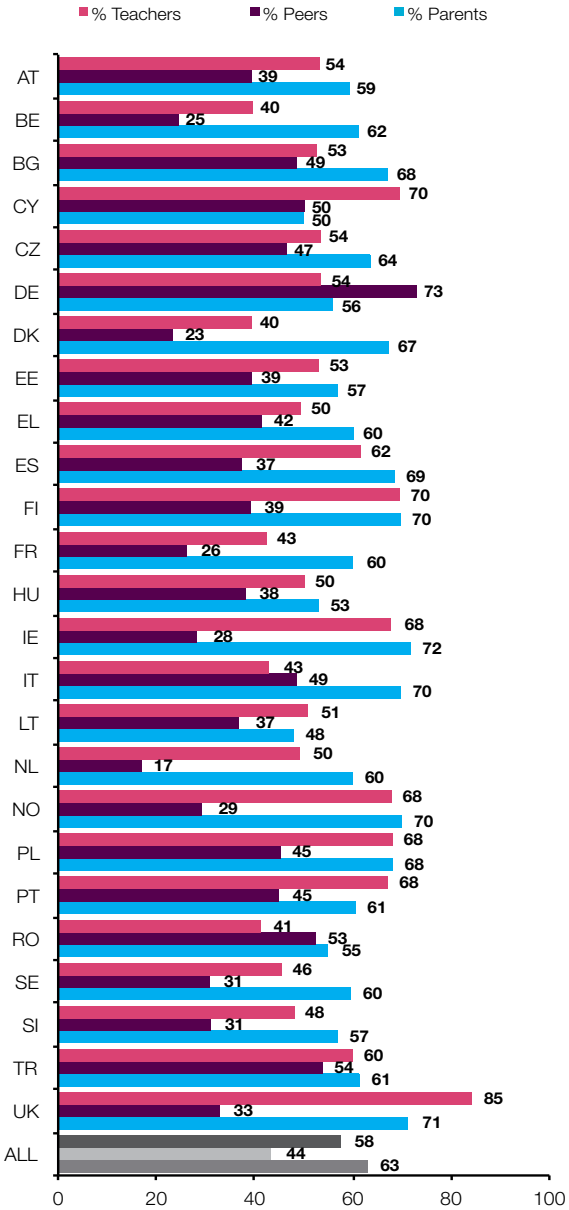
Policy implications

- Parents employ a wide range of strategies, depending partly on the age of the child. But there are some parents who do not do very much, even for young children, and there are some children would like their parents to take more interest. Targeting these parents with awareness raising messages and resources is thus a priority.
- Cynicism that what parents do is not valued, or that children will evade parental guidance, is ungrounded: the evidence reveals a more positive picture in which children welcome parental interest and mediating activities while parents express confidence in their children's abilities. It is important to maintain this situation as the internet becomes more complex and more embedded in everyday life.
- Parental restrictions carry a significant cost in terms of children's online opportunities and skills, but they may be appropriate if children are vulnerable to harm. Parental efforts to empower children online seem to enhance their opportunities and skills, though there is little evidence that they reduce risk or harm. There are no easy answers, therefore, so parents should be supported in judging what best suits their child.

WHO SUPPORTS CHILDREN – PARENTS, TEACHERS AND PEERS

Parents are not the only people responsible for children. Teachers also have a vital role to play, and for many children, their peers too are a valuable resource: 63 per cent of European 9-16 year olds have received internet safety advice from parents, 58 per cent from teachers and 44 per cent from peers.

Whether parents, peers or teachers have ever suggested ways to use the internet safely



Beyond advising on using the internet safely, teachers and peers help children with tricky online activities and judgements:

- 58 per cent of 9-16 year olds say their teachers have helped them when something is difficult to do or find on the internet, and the same percentage have explained why some websites are good or bad. Half have talked to them generally about what they do online or have suggested ways to behave towards other people only and 40 per cent have talked to them about what to do if something bothers them online. More, however, have made rules about what children can and can't do on the internet at school (62 per cent).
- 64 per cent of 9-16 year olds say their friends have helped them when something is difficult to do or find on the internet, and over a third have explained why some website are good or bad and have suggested ways to behave towards others online.

When something bothered them online, 36 per cent said a parent helped them, 28 per cent a friend and 24 per cent a teacher. Ideally, every child would have at least one person to turn to

- Three quarters of 15-16 year olds have received safety advice from friends, compared with two thirds of 9-10 year olds. It is also more common among children from lower SES homes.
- Fewer children – especially among the 9-10 year olds – say they have suggested to their friends how to use the internet safely, but still over one third say they have done this.
- The more teachers and friends mediate children's internet use, the greater the children's digital literacy and safety skills – this association is stronger the younger the child. Or, since we cannot determine the direction of causality, it may be that more skilled children are able more effectively to gain the help of teachers and peers (supporting the knowledge gap hypothesis).

Policy implications

- Levels of teacher mediation are high but could be higher, as a large minority of children are not reached by teacher guidance. Since schools have the resources to reach all children, they should take the biggest share of the task of reaching the "hard to reach".
- The youngest children (9-10 years) report the least mediation from teachers: as this age group now uses the internet widely, primary schools should increase critical and safety guidance for pupils.
- The benefits of supporting peer mediation are easily neglected but could be constructively harnessed, especially as children are most likely to tell a friend if something bothers them online. Peer mentioning schemes have a valuable role to play.
- When something has bothered them on the internet, 36 per cent of children said a parent helped them, 28 per cent a friend and 24 per cent a teacher. Ideally, every child would have at least one person to turn to, but, as noted already in relation to coping, a minority of children has no-one to tell when something upsets them.

INEQUALITIES IN RISK AND RESOURCES TO COPE

Some minority groupings, among all internet-using children in Europe, face particular challenges online. Children may be disadvantaged by lack of economic or cultural capital or they may be disadvantaged through social or psychological vulnerability. We used several proxy measures to identify these groups. The differences below are generally small yet indicative.

Economic or cultural capital

27 per cent of children have parents with lower secondary education or less

These children report fewer online risks than the European average, but are more upset when they encounter risk. They also claim fewer digital literacy and safety skills than the average. This relatively inexperienced group in terms of internet risks has parents who feel less confident in supporting their children online, who receive less safety information from a range of sources, and who are less likely to wish for more such information than the average.

25 per cent of children have parents who do not use the internet

These children also report fewer online risks than the European average and they are also more upset when they encounter risk. Their digital skills are even lower than the above group, probably because fewer have the internet at home. Their parents are less confident also that they can support their child online, though they think they should do more. These parents are less likely than most to get safety information from their friends or family, and they especially wish their child's school would provide more such information.

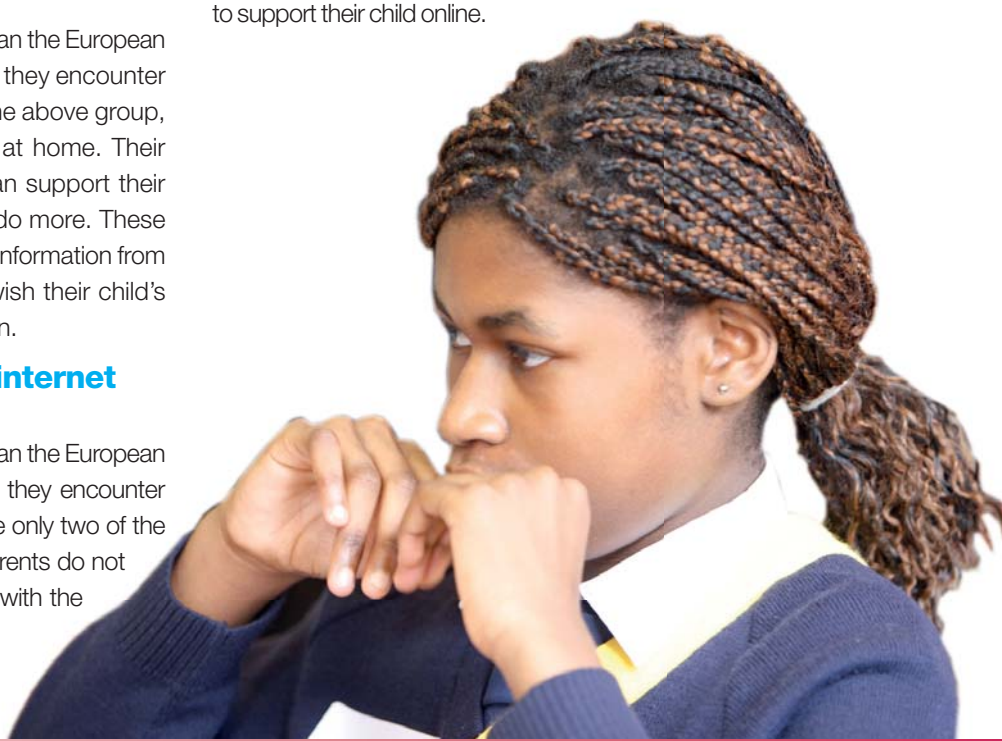
7 per cent of children use the internet less than once per week

These children also report fewer online risks than the European average and they are also more upset when they encounter risk. Their digital skills are very low – they have only two of the eight skills we asked about. Although their parents do not consider their children well prepared to cope with the internet, they do not plan to do more themselves than the average parent, nor do they desire more safety information than others.

Social or psychological vulnerability

41 per cent of children have parents who say they are very worried about their safety online

Interestingly, these children are no more likely than average to have encountered online risks, nor are they more upset by them and their digital skills are average. However, their parents are a little less confident that their child can cope with online risks, and they think they should do more to support their child online.



They are also in receipt of slightly more safety information than the average, and they wish to receive more still, from most sources.

34 per cent of children reported more psychological difficulties than most

These children report more online risks than the average, and they are more upset when they occur. Their digital skills are just below average and their parents lack confidence in their ability to help their child online, though they are more likely to have adjusted their approach after something upset their child online. These parents neither receive nor wish for more safety information than the average parent.

12 per cent of children have experienced something upsetting on the internet

These children report many more risk and harm experiences than the average, as often recognised also by their parents. Their digital skills are above average, suggesting a readiness to learn to manage the internet better after an upsetting experience. Their parents, too, have changed their approach after their child was upset online, and they are fairly confident in both their and their child's ability to cope in future, compared with the average. Among those parents aware of their child's experience, there is a desire for more safety information from all sources.

6 per cent of children have a mental, physical or other disability

These children report raised risk levels, especially in relation to contact risks. They find these more upsetting in relation to meeting new online contacts offline, though not otherwise. Their digital skills are also a little higher than average, though their parents are less confident that their child can cope with what they find online. These parents receive slightly more safety information and, particularly, would like to receive more from ISPs and websites than would most.

4 per cent of children belong to a discriminated-against group

These children report more online risk, though only slightly more harm from these risks. Their digital skills are above average, though their parents tend to lack confidence in their ability to support and their children's ability in terms of coping with online problems, and they are more likely to have adjusted their approach in response to such problems. They are more likely to be aware of safety information from the government, and would like yet more, but get less support from their friends and family.

4 per cent of children speak a minority language at home

Risks encountered by these children are about average though they report being more upset from bullying and 'sexting'. Their digital skills are average, but their parents lack confidence in their children's ability to cope, and they think they should do more to support their child online. They receive less safety information from all sources than the average. Though they mostly prefer to receive such information from the child's school, from TV or friends and family, they wish for less not more than does the average parent.

Policy implications

- For children whose parents lack economic or cultural/educational resources, the challenge is to build digital skills and resilience given a relative lack of experience of the internet at home. It is important to increase the confidence of these parents, and to raise awareness that more safety knowledge would be beneficial. The child's school has a key role here as a trusted source.
- For children with social, familial or psychological vulnerabilities, the challenge is rather different. These children may already be experiencing more risk of harm from internet use, though parental worries are a poor indicator of such experiences. Some vulnerable children have increased digital skills already, so the policy priority is less to raise their skills further than to consider other ways of reducing harm. This could include helping those parents who think they should do more to support their child, providing "just in time" guidance for those coping with an upsetting experience, and ensuring a wider range of sources of safety information (eg, online sources for parents of disabled children, government sources for parents of discriminated-against children.

ONLINE RISK COMPOUNDS OFFLINE DISADVANTAGE

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN ONLINE EXPERIENCES

Comparing children's experiences in 25 countries is like comparing apples and oranges – there are many variables to consider, most of them difficult to measure.

Differences are easily overstated, so our first task was to note how European children's experiences of the internet are similar wherever they live. Our second task was to recognise differences among children depending on their country and, if possible, to explain these differences.

In general, the more children do one kind of activity online, the more they do of another – this applies for opportunities and risks. So we grouped the children in the survey according to how they use the internet, and found six "user types", with different relations to online risk.

Children are not all the same

Low use/learning oriented

This group includes many younger children, and averages 11.4 years old. They use the internet rather little, focusing mainly on schoolwork, watching video clips and reading/watching the news. Few have an SNS profile and they do few risky online activities. Although they encounter few online risks, when they do, they tend to be upset.

Low use/social networking site oriented

Also relatively young (average 11.5 years), this group is less likely to use the internet for schoolwork or news and more likely to use SNSs. They also encounter online risks though they tend not to find these upsetting.

Diverse opportunities and risks

Averaging 13.4 years old, these children spend almost two hours a day online and do the widest range of activities, including some more advanced and creative activities on the ladder of opportunities. They also do more risky online activities. Although not the oldest group, they encounter the most risk online but are the least likely to be upset.

Moderate use

A bit older than the first two groups at 13.1 years on average, these children spend more time online and have a much wider range of activities. They are, too, more likely to encounter online risks.

High use/entertainment oriented

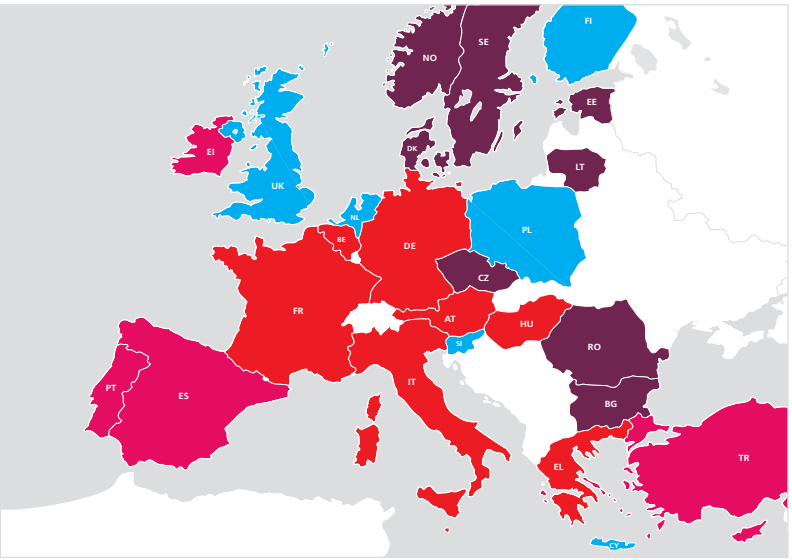
These children are older (average 14 years) and more often boys. They are online for most minutes per day (201 minutes on average) and do a fairly wide range of activities. They like playing games against the computer and watching video clips, and they do relatively little schoolwork, news or creative activities. Their exposure to risk is quite high, and some use the internet excessively.

Focused social web use

This is the oldest group (average 14.2 years), with more girls than boys, and they use the internet for longer, doing more activities, than the average. They are unlikely to play games online, but are the most likely to use SNSs. They also read/watch news, use instant messaging, post photos or music and write blogs. Their online risk encounters are similar to groups four and five but they report slightly higher levels of upset.

Countries can be characterised as "lower use, lower risk", "lower use, some risk", "higher use, some risk" and "higher use, higher risk"

Country classification based on children's online use and risk (from EU Kids Online survey)



Although in reality countries are subtly graded in terms of amounts and types of use and risk, we here group them for ease into four categories. Overall, it is striking that high internet use is rarely associated with low risk; and high risk is rarely associated with low use. Rather, the more use, the more risk though high use is not necessarily associated with high risk.

"Lower use, lower risk" countries – here children make the lowest use of the internet, and they are below average on all risks apart from meeting online contacts – online and offline; still, it may be expected that as levels of use rise in these countries, so too will risk.

"Lower use, some risk" countries have the lowest internet usage, although there is some excessive use of the internet and some problems with user-generated content.

"Higher use, some risk" countries make high use of the internet but are high only on some risks, possibly because of effective awareness-raising campaigns, regulatory strategies or strategies of parental mediation of children's internet use.

"Higher use, higher risk" countries include both wealthy Nordic countries and Eastern European countries (better called, "New use, new risk").

A country's socio-economic stratification, regulatory framework, technological infrastructure and educational system all shape children's online risks.

Policy implications

- Children in wealthier countries (measured by GDP) encounter more online risk but, arguably, these countries are also well placed to provide more accessible and user-friendly safety resources for children and parents. Also, countries with more press freedom, such as Nordic and Baltic countries, are more likely to have children who encounter online risk – this may be because of lower internet regulation and strategies that ensure safety without introducing censorship are thus needed.
- At the country level, there is no systematic relation between level of parental filtering in a country and children's risk experiences, although there is a small relationship at the individual level – children whose parents use a filter are less likely to have encountered sexual content, suggesting filters can play a useful role.
- Degree of broadband penetration, and length of time in which most people have had internet access, are associated with greater online risks, but not greater online activities among children – this suggests that, while children are motivated to use the internet everywhere in Europe, higher quality access is bringing more risks than are adequately dealt with by policymakers (whether industry, state or education).
- In countries with 15+ years of schooling on average, children are more likely to have better digital skills, as are children from countries where more schools use computers in the classroom. Education clearly has a positive role to play in supporting digital skills, literacies and citizenship, and should be supported across all countries.

TOP 10 MYTHS ABOUT CHILDREN'S ONLINE RISKS

1 Digital natives know it all

Children knowing more than their parents has been exaggerated – only 36 per cent of 9-16-year olds say it is very true that "I know more about the internet than my parents" – 31 per cent say "a bit true", and two in three 9-10 year olds say "not true". Talk of digital natives obscures children's need for support in developing digital skills.

2 Everyone is creating their own content now

In the past month, only one in five used a file-sharing site or created a pet/avatar and half that number wrote a blog. Creative activities are rarest among younger children. While social networking makes it easier to upload content, most children use the internet for ready-made, mass produced content.

3 Under 13s can't use social networking sites so no worries

With 38 per cent 9-12 year olds having an SNS profile, it is clear that age limits don't work. Since many "under-age" users registered with a false age, even if the provider did tailor privacy and safety settings to suit young children, they couldn't identify them. Some young social networkers have public profiles which display personal information, and some contact people they haven't met. Should providers strengthen their protections? Or get rid of age limits altogether?

4 Everyone is watching porn online

Estimates for exposure to pornography online are lower than many anticipated – a quarter saw sexual images in the past year online or offline, and one in seven saw them online, rising to a quarter of older teens. Even assuming some under-reporting, it seems that media hype over pornography is based on unrepresentative samples or just supposition.

5 Bullies are baddies

Most (60 per cent) of those who bully – online or offline – have themselves been bullied by others, and 40 per cent of those who bully online have been bullied online. Both those who bully and who are bullied online tend to be more psychologically vulnerable, suggesting a vicious cycle of behaviour that damages both victim and perpetrator.

6 People you meet on the internet are strangers

Most (87 per cent) 11-16 year olds are in touch online with people they know face-to-face. Four in ten have online contacts that they met online but who are connected with their friends or family. A quarter are in touch with people unconnected with their social circle, and 9 per cent met offline someone they first met online. Few went unaccompanied or met someone older and only 1 per cent had a negative experience. The challenge is to protect children from rare but harmful occurrences without limiting the opportunities of the majority.

7 Offline risks migrate online

Well, in part, the evidence supports this and it is important – children who report more offline risks of various kinds are more likely to report more risk encounters online and, significantly, more likely to report harm from online experiences. But, offline risk does not predict all online risk encounters, so it should not be assumed that children not already identified as at risk offline are not at risk online. We still don't know all the factors that account for online harm, and it is important to see both online and offline risks in context.

Myths about internet safety tend to exaggerate or over simplify, and they are often out of date

8 Putting the PC in the living room will help

53 per cent go online at a friends' house, 49 per cent go online in their bedroom and 33 per cent go online via a mobile phone or handheld device. So this advice is out of date. It would be better to advise parents to talk to their child about the internet or share an online activity with them.

9 Teaching digital skills will reduce online risk

More skills are associated with more, not less, risk – because more use leads to more skills, more skills lead to more opportunities, and opportunities are linked to risk. One reason that opportunities and risks are linked is because children must explore and encounter some risk to learn and gain resilience. Another is that exploring for information or fun leads to unexpected risks because the online environment is not designed with children's interests in mind (too many pop-ups, for instance). But more skills could reduce the harm that some children experience from online risk.

10 Children can get around safety software

In fact, only 28 per cent of 11-16 year olds say they can change filter preferences. And most say what their parents do in relation to their internet use is helpful (27 per cent a lot, 43 per cent a little). However, it is true that nearly half think their parents' actions limit their online activities while a third say they ignore their parents (7 per cent a lot, 29 per cent a little).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Government

- For children who lack convenient broadband access, governments should ensure that digital exclusion does not compound social exclusion.
- It is important that while all should benefit from public information resources, special efforts are made to ensure these reach the disadvantaged or information-poor.
- Especially in countries where children do not 'progress' far up the ladder of opportunities, initiatives to support effective access, broad-ranging use and digital literacy are vital.
- If industry self-regulation is to meet the needs of children and families, it requires a firm steer from government to ensure that it is inclusive, effective and accountable.
- If schools, youth and child welfare services are to raise awareness, provide information and guidance and effectively support children and parents, they require strong encouragement, resources and recognition, especially in some countries.
- In many countries, there is already evidence that stakeholder efforts are bearing fruit; the imperative now is to maintain and extend such efforts to address future challenges.

Industry

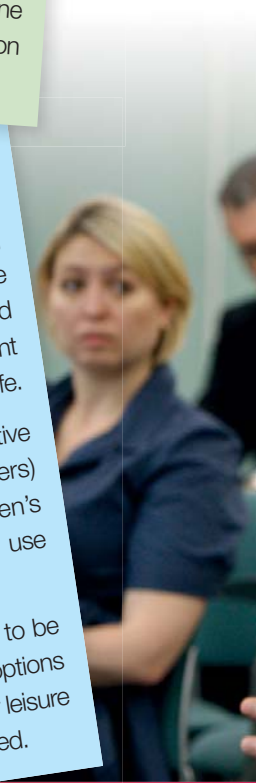
- To reduce user confusion and impractical skill burdens, privacy settings, parental controls, safety tools and reporting mechanisms should be age-appropriate if for children and far more usable (whether for children or parents) than at present and/or enabled by default.
- To increase user trust, the management of safety, identity and privacy underpinning services used by children should be transparent, accountable and independently evaluated; while 'safety (or privacy) by design' may obviate the need for user-friendly tools, it makes the need for transparency and redress even more pressing.
- As children gain internet access (and, it seems, increased access to sexual/inappropriate content) via more diverse and personal platforms, ensuring consistent and easy-to-use safety mechanisms on all devices is vital.
- Especially in "new use, new risk" countries, children are exposed to pornography or other inappropriate content and contact by accident (eg, popups, inadequate online search processes or weak safety measures) – protection for children needs strengthening.

Awareness-raising

- It is vital to keep listening to children to recognise the changing array of risks they face, to address children's own worries and to support children's ability to cope, whether this involves avoiding, resolving or reporting problems.
- Messages should be matched to different groups – teens may worry about pro-anorexia content, young children can be upset by pornography, those who bully may also be bullied. Reaching the 'hard to reach', while difficult, is a priority given that vulnerable children are particularly susceptible to online harm.
- There is little warrant for exaggerated or panicky fears about children's safety online – what's important is to empower all children while addressing the needs of the minority at significant risk of harm

Children

- Children generally grasp the ethical codes of courtesy, consideration and care that guide social interaction offline, but they have more to learn – or to be taught – about the importance of such codes online; becoming empowered and responsible digital citizens will be increasingly important as the internet becomes ever more embedded into daily life.
- Children can be creative, experimental and imaginative online in ways that adults (parents, teachers, others) insufficiently value – wider recognition for children's experiences would support more sophistication in use and build self-efficacy more generally.
- Contrary to popular belief, children do not wish to be always online, but often lack sufficient alternative options – for play, travel, interaction or exploration – in their leisure hours; these too, should be enabled and resourced.



Parents

- As internet use is increasingly private and/or mobile, putting the computer in a public room is no longer inappropriate; rather, parents should get online themselves, talk to their child about the internet and even share an online activity with them.
- Those who encounter risk are not necessarily those who experience more harm, so parents should be encouraged to worry less about the former than the latter, where possible guiding their children so that harms are avoided or managed.
- Without undermining parents' trust in their children, parents should be more aware of and more empowered to respond constructively to children's (including teens') rare but sometimes upsetting experiences of harm.
- Parents should be encouraged to make more use of the array of parental controls, though this will require greater availability of easy-to-use, carefully tailored, affordable tools.

Child welfare

- Now that the internet has entered into the array of long-established sources of risk in childhood (including other media, risks in the home or community), online risk should be included in risk assessment processes, recognising that increasingly online and offline are intertwined in a potentially vicious circle.
- Children who are vulnerable offline are especially vulnerable online, as EU Kids Online evidence shows; for some children, psychological difficulties or social problems may result in the migration of risk from offline to online settings; this should be recognised by child welfare professionals, youth workers, law enforcement, clinicians etc, and these may require specialist training.
- However, offline vulnerabilities do not fully explain online experiences of harm, and thus child welfare professions should be alert to new risks of harm online that cannot be predicted from what is already known of particular children offline.

Educators

- Since schools are uniquely positioned to reach all children, in a calm learning environment, with up to date technology and resources, they should take a major responsibility for supporting children and their parents in gaining digital literacy and safety skills.
- Such efforts should become established as a core dimension of the curriculum, and initiatives developed at secondary school level should now be extended to primary and even nursery schools.
- Encouraging children to a wider diversity of online activities while teaching critical literacy and safety skills enhances online benefits, digital citizenship and resilience to harm, and so should be encouraged; particular efforts are needed for less privileged and younger children.
- Since children tell a friend followed by a parent but rarely a teacher or other responsible adult when something online upsets them, teachers' relations with children should enable more trust, and they could also harness the potential of peer mentoring.

Civil society

- Much more great (diverse, stimulating, high quality) online content of all kinds is needed, especially for young children and in small language communities; while children's books, films and television programmes are publicly celebrated and supported, far less attention is given to online provision for children who are, too often, left to find content for themselves.
- Promoting children's online opportunities, including their right to communicate and their need to take some risks is important to counter simplistic calls for restricting children's internet use. The ambition must be, instead, to maximise benefits (as defined by children as well as adults) while reducing harm (which is not necessarily the same as reducing risk).
- A critical lens should be sustained when examining public anxieties, media reporting, industry accountability or new technological developments to ensure that these do not undermine children's interests. Further, critical analysis of regulatory and technological developments should not assume that all users are adults, that parents can and will always meet the 'special needs' of children, or that children's interests are somehow antithetical to the public interest.

STAKEHOLDERS SHARE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFETY

THE SURVEY

EU Kids Online findings are based on unique and detailed survey conducted in home, face to face, with 9-16 year olds children from 25 countries.

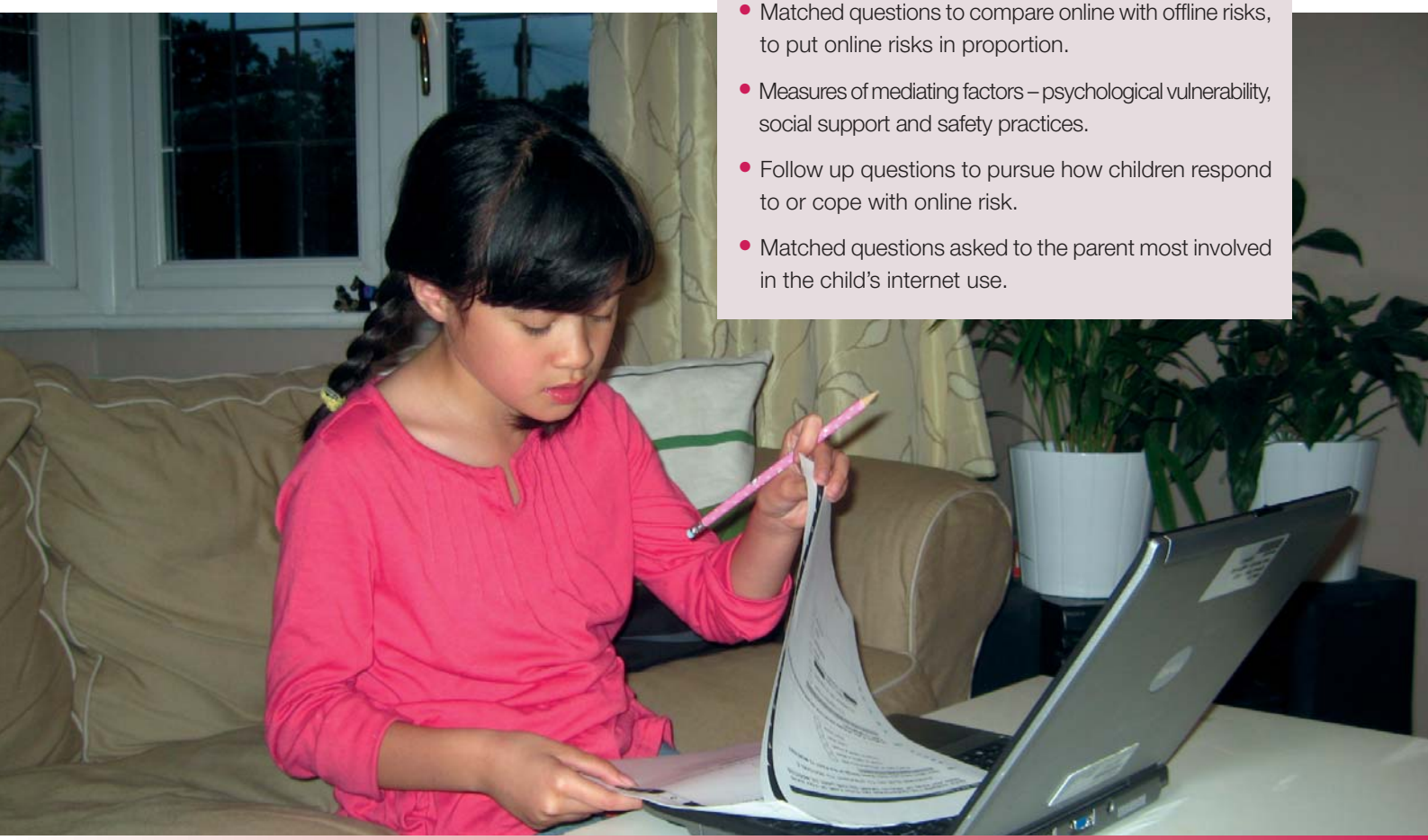
Ipsos MORI

"Ipsos MORI was delighted to work alongside the LSE on this ground-breaking pan-European study. Conducting 25,000 in-home interviews with parents and children on sensitive topics is a methodological challenge and the outcome is very rewarding with a rich and robust evidence base for Europe's policy-makers."

Andrew Johnson, Director, Ipsos Europe

Design features

- High standards applied throughout the design, conduct and analysis of the research process and findings.
- Random stratified survey sampling of 1000 children (9-16 years old) per country who use the internet.
- Survey administration to children at home, face to face, with a self-completion section for sensitive questions.
- Careful consideration given to the ethical issues involved in the research process.
- Equivalent questions asked of each type of risk to compare across risks.
- Matched questions to compare online with offline risks, to put online risks in proportion.
- Measures of mediating factors – psychological vulnerability, social support and safety practices.
- Follow up questions to pursue how children respond to or cope with online risk.
- Matched questions asked to the parent most involved in the child's internet use.



25,142 children interviewed during Spring and Summer 2010

Survey administration

The survey was commissioned through a public tender process. It was conducted by Ipsos MORI, working with national agencies in each country. The EU Kids Online team designed the sample and questionnaire, and worked closely with Ipsos MORI throughout pre-testing (cognitive testing, piloting), translation, interviewer briefings, and the fieldwork process.

Technical report and questionnaires

These can be freely downloaded from the project website. Researchers may use the questionnaires, provided they inform the Coordinator (LSE), and acknowledge the project as follows: "This [article/chapter/report/presentation/project] draws on the work of the 'EU Kids Online' network funded by the EC (DG Information Society) Safer Internet Programme (project code SIP-KEP-321803); see **www.eukidsonline.net**"

The dataset

All coding and analysis of the dataset has been conducted by the EU Kids Online network. Crosstabulations of key findings are available at **www.eukidsonline.net**. The full dataset (SPSS raw file, with data dictionary and all technical materials) is being deposited in the UK Data Archive for public use. **www.data-archive.ac.uk/**

The design allows comparisons of children's online experiences...

- Across locations and devices.
- By child's age, gender and SES.
- Of pornography, bullying, sexual messaging, meeting strangers.
- In terms of children's roles as 'victim' and 'perpetrator'.
- Of encounters with risk versus perceptions of harm.
- Of online and offline risks.
- Of risk and safety as reported by children and by their parents.
- Across 25 countries.

RIGOROUS METHODS UNDERPIN OUR RESEARCH

PARTNERS IN RUSSIA AND AUSTRALIA

Our partner projects followed our methodology, enabling direct comparisons with the 25 country averages for EU Kids Online.

RUSSIA

1025 children aged 9-16, and a parent for each, were surveyed in home interviews across seven federal districts of the Russian Federation.

Going online

- Over four fifths use the internet in private (in their bedroom and/or via a mobile phone). However, one third go online at school, half the European number. Parental use of the internet varies hugely by region (from one fifth to over four fifths).
- Four in five use the internet for education and social networking sites (SNSs), and two thirds for downloading music and films. On SNSs, one third have their profile public and most provide personal information online.

Risk and harm

- Russian children report being bullied (online and offline) at a similar rate to other Europeans – around one in five. But they report being bullied online more often than in Europe – indeed, they receive nasty or hurtful messages as often online as offline. Distinctively too, these messages are especially received on SNSs. Twice as many Russian (one quarter) as European children report bullying others, online or offline.
- Seeing sexual images online is also more common in Russia – a bit more common via television/film/DVD and over twice as common on the internet. Most of this exposure is via accidental pop-ups.
- Meeting online contacts offline is also more common in Russia – around one in five children, compared with half that number in Europe.
- Parents tend to be aware of their child's exposure to sexual images, since they are also affected by pop-ups, but they understimate both bullying and meetings.

As rather few parents use filtering software, check sites visited or discuss internet use with their children, there is much work to be done to promote awareness-raising and other forms of protection and empowerment for Russian children and parents.

Russian School Children: Challenges and Risks of Online Socialisation

Galina Soldatova, PhD, Professor

Moscow State University

Foundation for Internet Development

AUSTRALIA

400 children aged 9-16, and a parent for each, were surveyed in home interviews across Australia.

- Three quarters go online daily.
- Twice as many as in Europe (one in three) say they have been bothered by something online.
- More than four in ten have seen sexual images, online or offline, and twice as many as in Europe have seen these online (nearly a quarter).
- In relation to online bullying, 29 per cent of AU children (19 per cent across Europe) say they have been bullied, and 13 per cent say this occurred on the internet. This is more than the average for the 25 other nations (6 per cent).

It would seem that in spite of considerable efforts put into raising awareness and improving safety online for Australian children in recent years, a comparatively high proportion are bothered by some things they experience online, predominantly related to online bullying and seeing sexual images. Australian children experience a high degree of access and use, but also a high degree of risk. AU parents are very active in pursuing positive mediation strategies, however, as are Australian teachers.

Australian Kids Online

Lelia Green, Catharine Lumby, John Hartley, Danielle Brady

Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI)

EXTENDING TO OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

THE NETWORK

The coordinating team

At the Department of Media and Communications, the London School of Economics and Political Science, **Professor Sonia Livingstone** directs the network, together with **Dr Leslie Haddon**, senior research fellow, and **Dr Anke Görzig**, survey research officer. Daniel Kardefelt-Winther is our research assistant, and **Kjartan Ólafsson** from our International Advisory Panel has visited on several occasions to lend his valuable expertise in survey management.

The coordinating team led on the first four work packages, working with the management group, international advisory panel, and the wider EU Kids Online network – comprising research teams, in contact with national stakeholders, in each of the 25 countries.

The management group

This includes the coordinating team, and **Professor Dr Uwe Hasebrink**, Hans Bredow Institute for Media Research in Hamburg, **Dr Bojana Lobe**, University of Ljubljana, **Dr Brian O'Neill**, Dublin Institute of Technology, and **Professor Cristina Ponte**, New University of Lisbon – who are responsible for work packages 5-8 respectively.

Project management

WP1: Project management and evaluation: ensure effective conduct and evaluation of work packages.

WP2: Project design: design a robust survey instrument and sampling frame for children and parents.

WP3: Data collection: tender, select and work with the subcontractor appointed to conduct the fieldwork.

WP4: Data reporting: cross-tabulation, presentation and report of core findings.

WP5: Statistical analysis of hypotheses: analysis and hypothesis testing of relations among variables.

WP6: Cross-national comparisons: interpretation of similarities and differences across countries.

WP7: Recommendations: guide awareness and safety initiatives and future projects in this field.

WP8: Dissemination of project results: dissemination to diverse stakeholders and the wider public.

The international advisory panel

We have benefited considerably from the generous guidance received from:

- María José Cantarino, Corporate Responsibility Manager, Telefónica
- David Finkelhor and Janis Wolak, Crimes against Children Research Center, University of New Hampshire, USA
- Will Gardner, Chief Executive Officer of Childnet International
- Ellen Helsper, Department of Media and Communications, LSE
- Amanda Lenhart, Pew Internet and American Life Project
- Eileen Munro, Department of Social Policy, LSE
- Annie Mullins, Global Head of Content Standards, Vodafone
- Kjartan Ólafsson, University of Akureyri, Iceland
- Janice Richardson, European Schoolnet and Insafe
- Kuno Sørensen, Save the Children Denmark, European NGO Alliance on Child Safety Online
- Agnieszka Wrzesie, Project Coordinator, Polish Safer Internet Node, Nobody's Children Foundation

A MULTINATIONAL RESEARCH COLLABORATION

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United Kingdom
Sonia Livingstone; Leslie Haddon; Anke Görzig; Daniel Kardefelt-Winther, the London School of Economics and Political Science

For a closer look at our recent findings and reports, see:

- O'Neill, B, Livingstone, S and McLaughlin, S (2011). Final Recommendations. Policy Implications, Methodological Lessons and Further Research Recommendations.
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Convergence Review
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This submission particularly relates to the Emerging Issues paper sections 'Australian and Local Content' (1 question) and 'Community Standards and Public Expectations' (4 questions). It is largely based on recent empirical evidence and research in Australia with 400 randomly selected children aged 9-16 and the parent most involved in their internet use. This research was carried out by market research professionals under the aegis of Ipsos McKay, and Ipsos or its affiliates also conducted parallel research in 25 European countries with 25,142 children. In Europe, this research was funded by the EC (DG Information Society) Safer Internet plus Programme (project code SIP-KEP-321803) (see www.eukidsonline.net) to provide an evidence base for policy. Although the Australian sample was smaller (400 children compared with 1000 children per European country), and carried out about 6 months later than most of the EU research, the shared methodology, questionnaire and overlapping time frame means that dataset provides a good basis for comparison internationally. The other countries involved in the research were Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Cyprus (CY), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (EL), Hungary (HU), Italy (IT), Ireland (IE), Lithuania (LT), Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Poland (PO), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovenia (SI), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE), Turkey (TU), and the United Kingdom (UK).

Are there measures which will encourage development of new forms of Australian, children's and local content such as local apps, online content and new media forms? (p. 23)

Although this issue was not specifically addressed in the *AU Kids Online* research, it is clear that Australian children are generally well placed to participate as digital content creators. The children interviewed in the research were mainly born between 1994-2001 and had first gone online aged a little under eight years old. This means that they were amongst the youngest to go online when compared with children of the same age from the other 25 nations (Green et al 2011, p. 7). Australian children have a comparatively high number of active content-creating skills, and "while 85% have

watched video clips online, almost half the cohort (45%) actively contribute their own media and distribute it to friends and family" (Green et al 2011, p. 8). "Two in three Australian children (66%) are operating beyond a basic level of activity and are involved in active and creative internet uses, viz: 'Playing, downloading and sharing' and 'Advanced and creative [use]'" (Green et al 2011, p. 59). In terms of the EU Kids Online concept of a 'Ladder of opportunities', Australian children ranked sixth out of the 26 countries (Green et al 2011, p. 60).

Digital skills are important for the future creation of content, on both the local and global stage. Wikipedia provides one example of how people with general levels of internet skills, but with significant levels of interest and enthusiasm, can transform engagement with information. It also provides a cautionary tale about the impact of creating bottlenecks of checking, validating and classifying information before allowing it to be posted. Wikipedia works on the basis of responding proactively to reports of inappropriate or inaccurate content, sometimes via the mechanism of technology-driven alerts for 'sub editors' of changes made to specific hot-topic pages. Although the "never wrong for long" tag sums up one way of looking at this user–created content, the opposite approach of checking first has been tried and found wanting. The passage cited here is taken from *The Internet: An Introduction to New Media* (Green 2010, pp. 131-2):

> Wikipedia arose from the ashes of Nupedia, a project which intended to harness the skills of volunteer experts but involved professional, paid checkers of the content. Jimmy Wales, founder of Nupedia in 2000, and the later Wikipedia in 2001, was intrigued by the emerging open source movement and unsure whether the principles would work in areas other than software, so he set up an online encyclopaedia "to see if it could be done" (Pink 2005). This was achieved using a seven-step validation process of article assignment, fact checking, review, copyediting and approval. Two of these processes involved back-up open collaboration: open review and open copyediting; in both cases the review and copyediting was offered to the public only after professionals had taken the lead. "After 18+ months and $250,000," Wales says, "we had 12 articles". (Pink 2005)
>
> Soon afterwards, Wales found out about wikis. These allow "anybody with Web access to go to a site and edit, delete, or add to what's there". Wales started a wiki version of the encyclopaedia. "Within a month, they had 200 articles. In a year, they had 18,000. And on September 20, 2004, when the Hebrew edition added an article on Kazakhstan's flag, Wikipedia had its 1 millionth article." (Pink 2005) Wales had demonstrated that open source principles could work for encyclopedias, if the software and the organising principles were right. There is significant administrative work, but it's almost all done by volunteers. There are duties such as "administering pages, developing software, finding copyright-free photos, moderating conflicts, and patrolling for vandalism. With only five paid staffers, volunteers perform most of it." (Tapscott & Williams 2006, p. 72) Wales has noted, however, that "Wikipedia is not primarily a technological innovation, but a social and design innovation". (Wales cited by Hendler & Golbeck 2008, p. 15)

Although I would support active policy intervention to help support and ensure the continued professional creation of Australian media content, it is also important to evaluate the environment in which Australians go online. We should seek to ensure

the encouragement of children's and young people's active engagement with internet content, and the development of a range of creative digital skills.

Is self-regulation by content services an effective means of protecting community standards? (p. 34)

As indicated above, self-regulation is the preferred vehicle for monitoring and responding to inappropriate or inaccurate content if the aim is also to encourage active engagement with digital media and participatory content creation. A preference for self-regulation, however, also entails a commitment to education around media literacy, personal responsibility and the development of coping skills and resilience. I will illustrate these points using the *AU Kids Online* research.

In terms of the notion of 'community standards', this is a notoriously complex concept. I am addressing here the subset of beliefs and community standards that argue children should be protected from having experiences that might have long-term negative impacts. Such long-term impacts might include an experience that deters a child from engaging with the internet. Whilst it might seem negative that a child might experience on the internet something which calls him/her to question the trustworthiness of other people, it is the case that some people should not be trusted. Thus I would argue that some negative experiences are valuable with a long-term beneficial effect. The internet might be one way that children learn that not all people are trustworthy. They may also learn the same message in the content of many forms of mass media.

The *EU Kids Online* study investigated children's and young people's experiences in terms of the concepts of 'risk' and 'harm'. Participants were asked if they had experienced bullying ("sometimes children or teenagers say or do hurtful or nasty things to someone") or seen sexual images ("In the past year you will have seen lots of different images – pictures, photos, videos. Sometimes, these might be obviously sexual – for example, showing people naked or people having sex. You might never have seen anything like this, or you may have seen something like this on a mobile phone, in a magazine, on the TV, on a DVD or on the internet. Have you seen ANYTHING of this kind in the PAST 12 MONTHS?") The idea here was to place internet exposure to bullying and to sexual images in the context of wider exposure to these potentially risky experiences. If the child had experienced these general risks they were then asked further questions around whether the experiences had ever involved online exposure.

Six online risks were explicitly investigated. These were: online bullying; seeing sexual images online; potentially harmful user-generated content such as hate sites, anorexia and self-harm sites and drug use sites; sexting, and the sending and receiving of sexual messages; meeting strangers online, and going to meet them in person; and personal data misuse. The questions were deliberately framed to be neutral. After the screening question to identify exposure to (for example) sexual images online, there were further prompts to assess the participant's reaction to this: "Seeing sexual images on the internet may be fine or may not be fine. In the PAST 12 MONTHS have you seen any things like this that have bothered you in any way? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen them?"

The notion of 'bothered' serves a particular purpose here and was used to investigate possible harm arising from exposure to the risks investigated. Engagement in risky behaviour had to lead to an experience of feeling 'bothered' for there to be an established potential for harm.

Risk taking need not lead to harm and may, indeed, be seen as a potentially desirable characteristic in some situations, particularly when it comes to creativity and innovation:

> Responsible risk-taking has been associated with the desirable characteristics of innovative behaviour. The UK's National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) has published a research report arguing that "five generic skills […] underpin innovative behaviour and form a set of attributes clearly linked to the innovation process" (Chell 2009, p. 4). These attributes are: creativity, confidence, energy, risk-propensity and leadership. 'Risk-propensity' is defined as being "a combination of risk tolerance and the ability to take calculated risks" (Chell 2009, p. 4). Such awareness of risk, and the capacity to take calculated risk, is developed through progressive exposure to risk and review and reflection upon risk-taking behaviour. Arguably, the structured development of risk-awareness underpins the evolving mediation schemes within the family that ACMA reports Australian parents adopting with their children; varying their supervision and regulation strategies as the child matures (ACMA 2007, 117-120). (Green 2010a, p. 229)

Even so, a risky experience that has the effect of bothering a child might indicate a potential harm. Although the term 'bothered' is not in common use among Australian children, it was specifically investigated prior to the roll out of the *AU Kids Online* research through a period of in-depth cognitive testing. The explanation of something that has bothered someone as making "you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen them" was tested and refined during this cognitive testing process so that the term would equate as nearly as possible to the meaning assigned to the same notion in the 25 comparison countries.

The *EU Kids Online* researchers particularly desired to set a low threshold for a negative response to online content. They wished to avoid the early introduction of a strong emotion such as being 'upset' or 'distressed'. This was so that both the intensity and the duration of the response could be investigated. The threshold had to allow for children to note a response that ranged from "not at all upset" (low intensity) and "I got over it straight away" (short duration), at one end of the spectrum; to, "very upset" (high intensity) and "for a couple of months or more" (long duration). Both intensity and duration were evaluated against four incremental levels, plus a "don't know" option. The intensity dimension - "How upset did you feel about it (if at all)" - was calibrated according to: not at all upset; a bit upset; fairly upset; very upset. The duration dimension ranged from: I got over it straight away; [I felt like that] for a few days; for a few weeks; for a couple of months or more. These dimensions are still being investigated through more detailed analysis of the data. The proportion of children noting that they were bothered was generally so low that the country-level samples are not large enough to provide robust findings. The next phase of analysis will look across county cohorts to the study as a whole.

One of the unexpected findings of the *AU Kids Online* research is that Australian children are more likely than children in any of the other 25 other countries to say that they have encountered material online that has 'bothered' them. 30% of the 400 Australian children interviewed said this, compared with 12% across the 25 European nations. "The next four countries were Denmark (28%), Estonia (25%), Norway and Sweden (both 23%)" (Green et al 2011, pp. 8-9). Interestingly, many of these countries also have children who go online comparatively early. In this respect, and in a number of others, Australian children's internet use aligns more closely with Scandinavian and Baltic nations than it does with the English-speaking countries of the UK and Ireland. The children that feel bothered may not have experienced harm, but insofar as some children may have been harmed by online experiences, these are likely to have indicated that they were bothered by something they experienced on the internet.

Of the six risks investigated, four are particularly responsible for Australian children's high experience of feeling bothered. These four high-scoring risks are: misuse of personal data (where Australia is ranked second out of 26 countries); exposure to online bullying (where Australia is ranked third out of 26 countries); seeing sexual images (where Australia ranks fourth); and accessing potentially-harmful user-generated content (where Australia ranks sixth). Only one of these, 'seeing sexual images', potentially involves professional content services, since the majority of concerns about personal data use (13/17) involved misuse of a password or someone online pretending to be the child. Given that it is other children who seem to be primarily responsible for most of experiences that bother the AU Kids Online respondents, effective self-regulation by content services – or external regulation of content services – will only make an impact on one of the four areas of internet experiences which most bother Australian children. Having said this, exposure to sexual content, particularly as experienced by younger participants, was often by unsolicited 'pop-up' adverts. This might be an appropriate area for self-regulatory attention, and for raising parental awareness around the implications of an adult using a computer to access adult content where that computer might subsequently be used by a child in the family.

How can consumer education and awareness initiatives help? Are there practical improvements relevant to a converged media environment? (p. 34)

In exploring children's and young people's exposure to online risks in Australia, it is important to note that indications of possible harm vary according to gender and age. Thus girls are more likely to say they have been bothered than boys, and younger children are more likely to say they have been bothered than older ones. "Australian girls (37%) are significantly more likely than boys (22%) to say that something on the internet has bothered them. Parents mirror this gender difference, seeing the internet as more problematic for their daughters than their sons." (Green et al 2011, p. 28) Although a comparatively small proportion of 9-10 year old Australian children have seen sexual images online (11%), of those who note this experience, almost all were bothered (10/11; i.e. 91% of those who have experienced the risk). This contrasts with 56% of 15-16 year olds seeing sexual images, and 12% reporting feeling bothered as a result (Green et al 2011, p. 31). Similarly, more boys than girls report seeing sexual images (30% boys vs. 26% girls) yet girls are almost twice as likely to say they were bothered by the experience (13% girls, 7% boys). Teenagers and boys are most likely

to report engaging in risky behaviour online while younger children and girls are more likely to be bothered by what they encountered.

Parents have an important role to play in keeping their children safe online. This is clear from the fact that 87% of Australian children go online at home; 45% go online in their bedroom (or a private room) and 31% go online 'when out and about' (Green et al 2011, p. 14). Australian children access the internet on average from 4.2 locations, and with a range of technologies, many of which have been facilitated by parental involvement. There is every indication, however, that parents are taking their internet mediation responsibilities seriously (Green et al 2011a). Indeed, 95% of Australian parents use one or more internet safety strategies with their children. Out of the 26 countries across the international study, "Australia would be second in a ranking of countries in terms of parents actively mediating their children's safety online." (Green et al 2011, p. 42) Further, 55% of Australian parents say they feel they should do more to keep their children safe online (Green et al 2011, p. 51) indicating that they are willing to learn and do more. Interestingly, parents are least involved with the mediation of their 9-10 year olds' internet activity (67% monitor the internet use of children in this age range: Green et al 2011, p. 45). Maybe parents feel that 9-10 year olds have not yet started being exposed to risks? It might make a difference for them to know that, in the 9-16 cohort, this age group is where children are most likely to feel bothered if they have risky encounters online.

There is an opportunity for provision of more information around keeping younger internet users safe, with age-specific guidance for parents and caregivers. The indications are that children are going online at younger and younger ages and research and safety awareness education needs to keep up with these developments, including with the under-9s. Parents are willing to do more in these younger age groups, and children are willing to have their parents do more. 9-10 year olds are most likely to say that their parents know more about the internet than they do, with only 6% of children in this age group saying that it's "very true" that "I know more about the internet than my parents" (Green et al 2011, p. 18). Policy makers could help support Australian parents to improve their mediation strategies for this age group.

Some safety messages have been clearly received by young people in Australia. For example, only 9% of Australian children (8% of girls, 10% of boys) have their Social Network Site (SNS) profile on a 'public' setting (Green et al 2011, p. 23). This compares with 26% of children in the 25 European countries (Livingstone et al 2011, p. 38). Similarly, only 6% of Australian respondents post their address or phone number on their SNS compared with 14% in Europe (Green et al 2011, p. 23). Although 34% of Australian children have communicated with unknown strangers online, compared with 30% in the 25 European studies, only 5% of Australian participants have gone on to meet these strangers face to face, compared with 9% in Europe (Green et al 2011, p. 36). The numbers of Australian kids who have sent an image of themselves (10%) or personal information (6%) to a stranger they have met online but not face to face (Green et al 2011, p. 26), is lower than is the case in Europe (14% image; 15% personal information) (Livingstone et al 2011, p. 43).

In contrast to these generally positive indications around the success of public information campaigns about safety online, 34% of Australian children say they have shown an incorrect age which is more than the case in Europe, where the figure is

16% (Green et al 2011, p. 23). This is one indication of where Australian children may be choosing to expose themselves to risk, although the figure might partially be explained by the number of 9-10 year olds (29%) and 11-12 year olds (59%) with SNS profiles (Green et al 2011, p. 22). It is likely that many of the under-13s have misrepresented their ages given that Facebook and some other sites require children to say they are over 13 before they may open an account.

The sixth risk investigated in this research relates to the reception of sexual messages online ('Sexting'). Australia recorded the same rate of incidence as European countries, 15%, and is thus 'average' for this risk (Green et al 2011, p. 35). This risk was not explored with 9-10 year olds, so the percentage relates to 11-16s. However, the emphasis on sexting online leaves unaddressed and unexplored the incidence of sexting by mobile phone, because the *AU Kids Online* research concentrated specifically upon children's online safety, rather than upon their safety across a range of digital technologies. It is possible that there is more sexting by phone than by the internet (Albury & Crawford, forthcoming). This indicates the possibilities that a converged media environment will raise more challenges for parents and regulators than keeping kids safe online.

Australia is the top country, out of 26, where children are most likely to say they have been bothered by something they've encountered online. Children are also more likely to have accessed the internet using a smart handheld device: 46% of Australian children say they have done this, compared with 12% in Europe (Green et al 2011, p. 66). This is not to imply that more than two in five Australian children aged 9-16 have iPads, just that this number have been able to access the internet using iPads and other digital devices beyond a basic mobile phone. It might be that this mobile internet access helps explain the increased risks experienced by Australian children online. Children might venture in company to places online where they would not go alone. Further, they are less likely to be under the purview of parents and other caregivers when accessing the internet remotely. An increasingly convergent environment indicates a need for children's developing a sense of personal responsibility and self-protection. Researchers and policy makers also need to explore what builds resilience and helps some children cope with negative online experiences.

The strong indications are that messages around privacy settings are reaching their targets and this demonstrates that consumer education and awareness initiatives are making a difference. A range of other messages need to be crafted, especially targeted at younger children. It might be that parents should be encouraged to be more interventionist and restrictive with the 12s and under, and progressively liberal and consultative with the 13-16 year olds. However, it is clear that parents cannot rely on rules and technological blocks alone because children have to be educated as to their personal responsibilities in this field, particularly as they get older and have more opportunities to go online outside the home and school environments. There are a number of indicators that convergent media might be complicating the picture, rather than leading to practical improvements.

Are consumer complaints a good way to ensure inappropriate content is not shown? (p. 34)

As indicated previously, it appears that the majority of online experiences that bother children are largely created by their peers, rather than by companies or organisations that have customers and consumers. Australian children say they are bothered by personal data misuse (2nd out of 26 countries), online bullying (3/26), negative user generated content (6/26), online sexting (16/26: average) and meeting strangers on and offline as a result of online contact (21/26: below average). This indicates that a high policy and intervention priority should be given to developing social and community expectations and tools around acceptable online behaviour, as well as focusing upon consumer complaints and the adoption of technological tools. These recommended strategies for promoting safe and sociable online activity, and responding to peer-related negative events, should be age-appropriate and should address children's online use from the youngest ages. Parents should not assume that their children are too young to need safety advice and support.

Australian children 9-16 already talk to teachers, parents and peers about things that bother them online, and say they have received safety advice from teachers (83%), parents (75%) and peers (32%). 52% of children say that they have also provided advice to their peers. (Green et al 2011, p. 54) While we need to know more about how children cope with unsettling online experiences, and how they develop resilience, we can be confident that talking about the issue is a positive step forward. There is also a range of beneficial technological responses and responses that children can be taught. For example, "around one third of 11-12 year olds cannot block messages from people they don't wish to hear from" (Green et al 2011, p. 17).

Even given that that the best possible level of consumer complaint resolution will only have a limited impact upon what unsettles children online, it is possible to imagine better standards of support for children's safe internet use from the major online corporations and companies, particularly Social Networking Sites (SNS), such as Facebook. It is clear that 'underage' children use SNSs, and it is probable that they are a positive means for children to develop online skills and competencies. However, the SNS companies know that many children on their sites are under 13 and more safety options should be set as the technological default. The *EU Kids Online* team has considered the evidence provided by the 25,142 interviewees in Europe and issued a series of recommendations around awareness-raising and for government, industry, parents, educators, child welfare, civil society and children. (Livingstone et al 2011a, pp. 44-5) Although these will not be repeated here, it would be worth Australian organisations working alongside those of the European Union to encourage the relevant internet industries to improve their response to children's online safety.

I also note that the *AU Kids Online* study only exists as a result of its being given a high priority by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI). The cost of gathering an equivalent sample to the European countries would have been approximately $475,000, ignoring academic management and analysis which has been provided as part of the research effort of the various authors and their tertiary institutions. Approaches to the Federal government to fund the raw costs of the market research firm's expenses were declined on the grounds that the relevant research budget had already been expended on work with parents and teachers. Although the CCI could only fund a scaled-down study of 400 children, at $204,000 (plus a contribution from Edith Cowan University of $20,000 for the cognitive testing phase), it was decided to commission the research. While it might seem a self-

evidently positive idea to work with other countries to achieve better child-safety online, it may be that such a path needs to be specifically recommended to governments and policy makers.

How can children and young people be protected from unsuitable content in a converged media environment? (p. 34)

The best protection for children is to support them in developing a personal awareness of online risks and a willingness to take responsibility for their actions online, together with ensuring that there is a range of people they can trust and talk to if these strategies fail to keep them safe or 'unbothered'. In addition, more research is required around the successful development of resilience and coping-skills with respect to unsettling internet content. This knowledge can be used to inform new recommendations for parents, teachers and peers.

I have already highlighted that the Australian research reported here was carried out about six months later than desirable, although overlapping with the research in Europe, and that this delay might have influenced the much higher access to smart handheld devices reported by Australian respondents (46% compared with a European average of 12%). Similarly, and not necessarily coincidentally, access to smart handheld devices might have influenced the fact that Australian children were far more likely than the children in 25 other countries to say that they had come across material online that had bothered them (30% compared with an average of 12%). Most of these risks appear to be related to peers, rather than to inaction or lack of concern by internet and technology companies and corporations. Even so, the *EU Kids Online* recommendations around new and emerging online services are that "privacy settings, parental controls, safety tools and reporting mechanisms should be age-appropriate for children and far more usable (whether for children or parents) than at present and/or enabled by default". Similarly, with regards to devices, "ensuring consistent and easy-to-use safety mechanisms on all devices is vital" (Livingstone et al 2011a, p. 44).

Finally, it is worth noting that:

> Increasingly research indicates that children who are at risk online are likely to be the children who are at risk overall. These risk-prone children include those who are in conflict with their parents, or depressed; and children whose lives are affected by drink, drugs, and poor relationship skills. Wolak et al (2008) argue that "particular attention should be paid to higher risk youths, including those with histories of sexual abuse, sexual orientation concerns, and patterns of off- and online risk taking." Those children most at risk online include those most likely to lack parental interest and involvement. A landmark project in Australia funded through the Telstra Foundation, is working with such children with the aim of raising "awareness within the sector and among policy-makers and funding bodies about the benefits of access & equity to technology for vulnerable children & young people" (Oliver 2010, p. 5). (Green 2010a, p. 229)

The Berry Street project, funded by the Telstra Foundation, is notable because it works from the premise that it is inappropriate to curtail the online activities of children in out of home care (OoHC) on the grounds that these are among the children

at greatest risk of negative online experiences. Instead, it is their stated belief that "the positive potential that digital technology offers children and young people today is something that Berry Street is committed to making available to children and young people in OoHC and Alt.Ed." (Oliver 2010, p. 3) The submission to the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety goes on to make 11 recommendations (Oliver 2010, p. 4) around ensuring that disadvantaged children are not further disadvantaged by being denied equitable access to "a world of resources, knowledge, information, experience, connections and communities that enrich and improve their lives" (Oliver 2010, p. 4).

It is the finding of the Berry Street project in Australia, and the *EU Kids Online* project in Europe, and the spin-off *AU Kids Online*, that online "opportunities and risks go hand in hand" (Livingstone & Helsper 2010). The research findings around skills, opportunities and internet use and access align Australia with other wealthy developed, smaller population nations, particularly those in Scandinavia. Australian children may be more likely than the European children to have been bothered by something they have experienced online in the past 12 months, with 30% saying this, but children in Denmark (28%), Estonia (25%), Norway and Sweden (both 23%) react similarly. It is still the case that 70% of Australian children, online for an average of 99 mins per day (Green et al 2011, p. 16), say they have not come across anything online in the past 12 months that bothers them. On the other hand, they have been doing their schoolwork, watching videoclips, playing internet games, using email, visiting SNSs, instant messaging, and posting content to share (Green et al 2011, p. 20). They have also been developing valuable skills and opportunities for the future.

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