



**Dear Subscriber,**

Welcome to the 5th Alert from EU Kids Online



Contents: Report Comparing Children's Online Opportunities and Risks; Best Practice report; EU Kids Online contributions to EC initiatives; Recent publications from EU Kids Online members; EU Kids Online data repository – Update; Forthcoming.

## Two new reports: online risks and methods

### Report Comparing Children's Online Opportunities and Risks

Here is a selection of some of the findings from our latest report in addition to the ones on the prevalence of risks previewed in the last alert. The report compares recent European findings published across a range of countries, to address key research questions and hypotheses, as follows

#### *Online access and use*

The more parents use the internet, the more children do so also. Parents seem to use the internet both in order to encourage their children and because they have been encouraged to do so by their children.

It is teenagers, rather than children in general, who are the digital pioneers in Europe. While children aged 12-17 are more likely to use the internet than are parents (87% vs. 65%) this is not the case for those under 11 years old. Hence, for younger children, it is reasonable to expect that their parents will understand the internet sufficiently to guide their use, but this may not hold for teenagers.

#### *Online opportunities*

It is clear that while children use the internet as an educational resource, for entertainment, games and fun, for searching for global information and for social networking, sharing experiences with distant others other opportunities (e.g. user-generated content creation or concrete forms of civic participation), are less common. However, arguably since children can climb a 'ladder of online opportunities', beginning with information-seeking, games and communication, taking on more interactive forms of communication and culminating in creative and civic activities, then activities such as



communication and games playing may not be 'time-wasting' but, instead constitute a motivational step on the way to more 'approved' activities.

### *Online risks*

In several countries, a degree of distress or feeling uncomfortable or threatened was reported by 15%-20% of online teens, suggesting, perhaps, the proportion for whom risk poses a degree of harm.

Complicating policy interventions regarding online risk, it was suggested that increasing opportunities tends to increase risks, while decreasing risks tends to decrease opportunities.

### *Online attitudes and skills*

Overall, the evidence supports the hypothesis that internet-related skills increase with age. This is likely to include their abilities to protect themselves from online risks although, perhaps surprisingly, this has been little examined.

There is growing evidence of the array of coping strategies children employ when faced with online risk, these are not yet systematically studied and nor is their effectiveness evaluated.

### *Age, gender and socioeconomic status*

While internet use increases with age it often peaks in the early- to mid-teens. In high use countries, children get online younger, and this has implications for risk.

Generally, it seems that older teenagers encounter more online risks than younger children, though the question of how younger children cope with online risk remains little researched.

There are also gender differences in risk: boys appear more likely to seek out offensive or violent content, to access pornographic content or be sent links to pornographic websites, to meet somebody offline that they have met online and to give out personal information; girls appear more likely to be upset by offensive, violent and pornographic material, to chat online with strangers, to receive unwanted sexual comments and to be asked for personal information but to be wary of providing it to strangers; both boys and girls are at risk of online harassment and bullying.

In almost all countries, higher SES households are more likely to provide their children with access to the internet, this resulting in greater or more frequent use among more advantaged children. It also appears that lower class children are more exposed to risk online.

### *Parental mediation of children's online activities*

There are differences cross-nationally in parents preferred strategy for mediating their children's online activities – including imposing time restrictions, sitting with their children as they go online and discussing internet use, tending to prefer these social strategies to technical mediation (filtering, monitoring software).

More consistent across Europe is the tendency for higher SES parents to mediate their children's internet use, and for girls to be more subject to such mediation than boys.

With regard to age, the consistent finding is that of a U-curve: that parental mediation

increases with age until the age of around 10-11 years and then decreases again.

*Classification of countries in terms of children's online risk*

The differences identified across countries were used to construct a classification of countries in terms of children's online use and risk. Specifically:

<i>Online risk</i>	<i>Children's internet use</i>		
	<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Low</i>	Cyprus Italy	France Germany	
<i>Medium</i>	Greece Portugal Spain	Austria Ireland	Belgium Denmark Sweden
<i>High</i>	Bulgaria	Czech Republic Poland Slovenia	Estonia Netherlands Norway UK

This suggests that: (i) high use of the internet is rarely if ever associated with low risk; (ii) low use of the internet may be associated with high risk but not vice versa; (iii) high use, high risk countries are, for the most part, wealthy Northern European countries; (iv) medium use, high risk situations are characteristic of new entrants to the EC; and (v) Southern European countries tend to be relatively lower in risk, though there are differences among them. Putting this another way around, we might conclude that, as a broad generality, (i) Northern European countries tend to be "high use, high risk"; (ii) Southern European countries tend to be "low use, variable risk", and (iii) Eastern European countries can be characterised as "new use, new risk".

There were national differences in parents' relative willingness to mediate their children's television and the internet use. In Austria, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain parents of internet users set rules for television more than they do for the internet. In Denmark, Estonia, Netherlands and Sweden, parents set more rules for the internet than for television. In Belgium, Germany, Greece, Ireland and the UK, parental rules are more or less equivalent. In short, in high use countries, parents mediate the internet more than they do television. In low use countries, by contrast, they are more likely to mediate television.

Next we considered factors that might help to explain the patterns that we found

*Internet diffusion*

Diffusion of the internet not only directly affects children's access and use but also indirectly influences the range of online activities, parental mediation and, as a result, online-related risks and opportunities. One important finding is that gender and SES differences appear to be decreasing in the course of the diffusion process.

*ICT regulation*

Broadly speaking, the more internet users there are in a country, the more legislation there is regulating activities on the internet.

In countries where the internet is less common, more Government efforts are made to promote internet use, while once the internet becomes more common, risk awareness and then literacy initiatives gain priority on the policy agenda.

### *Public discourse*

In all the countries what was common was the newsworthiness of risks compared to opportunities – in all countries over half of all articles reported solely risks, the average of all these countries being nearly two-thirds. In contrast, at most only a quarter of the media articles covered solely opportunities in any country and the average was less than a fifth.

Looking at different types of risk (content, contact, conduct) different national media have very varied levels of coverage of the three types of risk: content, contact and conduct. Hence, media coverage in different countries is sensitising people to different kinds of risk, which may have a bearing on the degree to which people in different countries think the various risks are prevalent.

One example of striking differences in the relative attention to certain risks is the media coverage of issues of sexuality, which is mainly coverage of pornography on the net. In some countries this aspect dominates the risk related media coverage (more than one third of all articles): Belgium, Greece, Spain, and the UK. In contrast, interest in this issue is shown to be very low in Norway, Estonia and Denmark. Apart from the influence of particular national histories (e.g. the paedophile cases in Belgium), this probably reflects different national concerns (at least in the media) about what images of sexuality children should be exposed to.

### *Attitudes and values*

The countries can be classified according to the dimensions of individualism and collectivism: 1) UK, Ireland, Belgium with high/moderate individualism and moderate collectivism; 2) Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Portugal, and Czech Republic with low individualism and moderate collectivism; 3) Austria, Germany, Slovenia, Spain, Iceland, Italy, France and Greece with moderate individualism and low collectivism; 4) Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands with high individualism and low collectivism. There is a high correspondence between cultural values and the overall country classification based on children's internet use and the degree of online risk. Countries of group 4) are high use countries with medium or high risk; countries of group 2) are medium or low use countries with high risk; countries within group 3) are medium or low use countries with medium or low risk; and countries within group 1), somewhat overlapping with group 4) are high (or medium) use countries with high or medium risk.

Another correlation can be found for the parents' rules relating to children's use of the TV and the internet. Almost all countries, in which parents put more emphasis on the mediation of TV use, belong to group 3, which can be called "the Catholic Europe", whereas all countries in group 4, "the protestant Europe" clearly apply more rules for online use.

### *Educational system*

With regard to the general level of education, Southern European countries show considerably higher rates of only pre-primary and primary education than Northern, Central and Eastern European countries. However, among the younger generations these differences are going to disappear. So far, cross country differences in children's online use can be partly explained by different levels of general education: the higher the general education of a country, the higher its children's online use.

### *Background factors*

Urbanisation may shape children's encounters with the internet and risk. Countries with large rural populations (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece) are also low use countries.

In terms of the role of the State, those countries classified as relatively interventionist tended to be low to medium on both use and risk

This report is now available on our website [www-eukidsonline.net](http://www-eukidsonline.net)

Uwe Hasebrink, S. Livingstone and Leslie Haddon, (eds) *Comparing Children's Online Opportunities and Risks across Europe: Cross-national Comparisons for EU Kids Online*, a report for the EC Safer Internet Plus Programme, 2008.

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### **Best Practice report**

The following report is also now available on our website [www-eukidsonline.net](http://www-eukidsonline.net)

Bojana Lobe, Sonia Livingstone, Kjartan Olafsson and José Alberto Simões (eds) *Best Practice Research: How to Research Children and Online Technologies in Comparative Perspective*, a report for the EC Safer Internet Plus Programme, 2008.

Focusing mainly on the challenges of researching children, the report is in the form of frequently asked questions (FAQs) addressing the following areas

- Designing the research
- Sampling and recruitment
- Methods and data collection
- Approaches to data analysis
- Reporting the findings

Each FAQ then has comments in the following sections:

- What's the issue?
- Common practice
- Questions to consider
- Pitfalls to avoid
- Further resources
- Researcher's experience (or instance of good or bad practice)

Apart from the report in PDF format, an electronic version of the report can also be found on the website along with examples of survey material demonstrating good practice.

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## **EU Kids Online contributions to EC initiatives**

An EU Kids Online team is presenting at and participating in this year's Safer Internet Forum. The PowerPoint can be found on our website [www-eukidsonline.net](http://www-eukidsonline.net)

EU Kids Online participated in and has presented at the European Social Networking Taskforce, Brussels, which met on 26th June, 2008. The PowerPoint can be found on our website [www-eukidsonline.net](http://www-eukidsonline.net)

We also contributed to the EC consultation on 'Age Verification, Cross Media Rating and Classification, Online Social Networking'. The document can be found on our website [www-eukidsonline.net](http://www-eukidsonline.net)



## **Recent publications from EU Kids Online members**

Brandtzæg, P. and Heim, J. (2008) "Jeg liker ikke voldsspill" - En studie av norske barns spillinnholdspreferanser og psykososiale faktorer' ("I don't like games with violence" - a study of game content preferences and psychosocial factors among children) *Nordicom Information*, Vol. 30, No.1, pp.77-85.

Brandtzæg, P. and Heim, J. (forthcoming, 2008). Children's Electronic Gaming Content Preferences and Psychosocial Factors – Is there a connection? *Nordicom Review*.

Livingstone, S., and Haddon, L. (2008) 'Risky Experiences for European Children Online: Charting Research Strengths and Research Gaps', *Children and Society*, Vol. 22, pp.314-23.

Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, P., Kalmus, V. and Runnel, P. (2008) Creating content

or creating hype: Practices of online content creation and consumption in

Estonia. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*,

1 (Online). <http://www.cyberpsychology.eu/view.php?cisloclanku=2008060202>

Staksrud, E. (2008). Fairytale parenting. Contextual factors influencing children's online self-representation. In K. Lundby (Ed.), *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories: Self-representations in New Media* (pp. 233-249). New York: Peter Lang.

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### **EU Kids Online data repository - Update**

In our first year we analysed the entries collected in our database of studies (the repository) to examine the distribution of research and identify gaps, as reported in the document 'What do we know about children's use of online technologies'. At the start of October we plan to update that analysis since the number of entries has now doubled. If you know of any more studies of children and the internet that are not yet on this database, could you please let us know before October.

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### **Forthcoming**

The next alert in March 2007 will discuss the findings of our working group looking at the factors shaping research in this field

EU Kids Online will host a Conference on Children and the Internet in June 2007 at the London School of Economics. The date will be announced on our website soon.

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### **Contact details**

Please feel free to forward this message to other who may be interested. Anyone who wishes to be added to the list should email Panayiota Tsatsou at [P.Tsatsou@lse.ac.uk](mailto:P.Tsatsou@lse.ac.uk).

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