

Poland

According to EU Kids Online findings Poland is a ‘high use, some risk’ country, although previously it was in the ‘high use, high risk’ category. With the exception of seeing sexual images online, Polish children are below the European average for encountering online risks. In terms of children’s attitude to the internet, more Polish children believe that the internet is good for them than the numbers who think there are things that may bother them. Polish parents underestimate risks and experiences of harm, however, with above average numbers unaware that their children had been exposed to sexual content online or met online contacts face to face.

These findings demand a wide online safety education initiative for Polish parents, who are not only behind their children in internet use but are below the European average for thinking they should do more for children’s safety online. Hence, the main recommendation is to intensify education of Polish parents on (1) how to use the internet safely and (2) how to monitor and mediate children’s safety online. Such education should be available for all parents of children and teenagers of school going age. Increasing Polish children’s online safety through engaging their parents would seem to be a promising approach as several findings indicate that Polish children are open to parental mediation and advice. Polish children would like more parental interest (while relatively low number of Polish parents think they should do this). Most Polish children take heed of their parents’ advice on safe use of the internet; those who have experienced risks mostly rely on parents’ support. And finally, parents’ support, not teachers’ and peers’ support, seems to help Polish children best to cope with the consequences of negative online experience.

Children in Poland moved from the sector of “high risk, high use” to the medium levels of risk prevalence largely due to better digital skills and online experience, as well as widely used antivirus software on children’s personal computers at their homes. However, some Polish children (more than on average in EU) are exposed to sexual content online. These children might be better protected if their parents used parental controls blocking inappropriate content and monitoring their children’s activity online. Polish parents are very low on technical mediation use and hence it is recommended that they learn how to use technical mediation. It is also recommended that providers of online safety tools increase their efforts to reach parents and increase their interest in use of their products to protect children against online risks.

EU Kids Online has found that in 2010 most Polish children used the Polish SNS “Nasza Klasa”. However, with the increasing popularity of Facebook and Twitter together with mobile internet and increasing use of smart phones and iPads, it might be expected that children may encounter new risks and experience harm more often. Polish children may fall back into the category “new use, new risks”, because they are not sufficiently resilient or lack the safety skills for SNS use. Users of SNS in Poland are above average in setting their SNS profiles to public, showing their address and phone number, and showing more identifying features. Polish children are above the European average in experimenting with their self-presentation online, but they very rarely show a false age on SNS profile. It can be expected that new SNS opportunities will encourage younger children to experiment more, placing them at greater risk. This new situation bringing requires immediate and intensive education on safe SNS use for Polish children, especially on: (1) What SNS communication and profile settings really mean? (2) How to use SNS? (3) How to protect against unwanted online contacts? (4) What are possible consequences of experimenting with self-presentation in SNS.

The next finding important for the policy implications for Poland is related to children's digital skills and number of the internet activities. Polish children are relatively high on digital skills; higher on digital skills than on activities undertaken online. This finding suggests that Polish children probably do not fully use their digital literacy. One reason is the kind of device the Polish children use to connect to the internet. In most cases it is a personal computer in the privacy of their bedrooms. A relatively low number of Polish children use internet via mobiles, smart phones, iPads or other handheld devices, probably because of their high prices in Poland. To better utilise Polish children's digital skills, greater availability of the internet via mobile devices with a cost reduced for school children and teenagers should be promoted.

In Poland, despite wide circulation of the EU Kids Online II reports to teachers and stakeholders, there was very little response and, it was suspected, very little interest. Polish stakeholders seem to delegate the responsibility for safety of children on the internet to NGOs even though the Safer Internet programme has actually put a lot of effort into making children, parents, teachers, and law enforcement more aware of ways how to protect children against internet risks. Stakeholders should increase their own interest in children's online safety as Poland belongs to those countries that are still at risk of falling into the category of "high use, high risk".