

## Access and use, risks and opportunities of the internet for Italian children.

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### The internet as a mobile experience

Italian children access the internet mainly through their smartphones: **84%** of children aged 9-17 (ranging from 51% of 9-to-10-years-old children to 97% of 15-to-17-years-old teenagers) **use their smartphone at least once a day to go online.**

As a consequence, the places and contexts of internet use are diversifying and the internet is more embedded in children's everyday lives: while the home is still the most common location of internet use (88% of children go online everyday at home), **44%** of the respondents **use the internet every day on the move** (rising to 74% of 15-to-17-year-olds). Daily internet access at school is also on the rise (from 8% in 2013 to 26% in 2017).

Daily internet use at home, at school, on the move (comparison 2013-2017)

		% At home	% At school	% When I'm on my way to somewhere
Boys	2013	80	11	29
	2017	88	24	44
Girls	2013	82	6	31
	2017	88	27	44
9-10 yrs	2013	58	0	5
	2017	71	4	5
11-12 yrs	2013	74	6	25
	2017	89	10	26
13-14 yrs	2013	95	11	45
	2017	90	23	48
15-17 yrs	2013	93	14	43
	2017	94	49	74
	<b>2013</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>All</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>44</b>

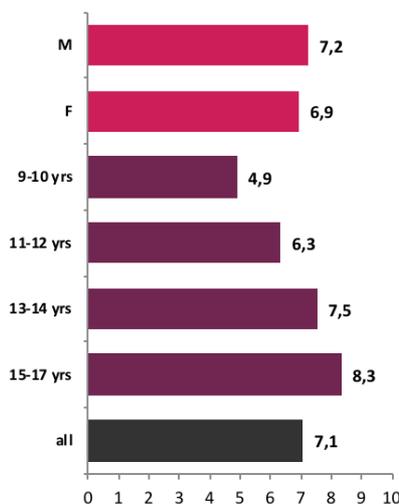
Communication and entertainment top the list of daily online activities, with 77% of respondents who use the internet to keep in touch with family and friends everyday, and 59% who watch videos online. Using the internet for schoolwork is also common (37% do it daily), whereas more creative uses such as creating videos and music to share with others online, or civic and political activities such as participating in online campaigns and in online political discussions are practised less often and are more common among teenage boys.

## Children lack informational and creative skills

**Most Italian children**, and especially teenagers, **possess operational and social skills**, including: being able to save a photo found on the internet (80%) or to change the privacy settings of their profiles (65% overall, but the 82% of over 13 year-olds, who are allowed to use social media; knowing what information they should share online or not (78%); knowing how to delete someone from their online contacts (80%).

By contrast, Italian children lack informational, creative and, partly, mobile skills. **Only 42%** of the respondents (but 20% of 9-to-12-year-olds) **find it easy to check if the information they find online is true**; and 68% find it easy to choose the best keywords for online searches. While 2 in 3 children know how to create and post online video or music, **only 48% know how to edit or make basic changes to online content that others have created**. Finally, while most children (85%) know how to download and install an app on their smartphone, only 56% know how to keep track of the costs of mobile app use and how to make an in-app purchase.

### Internet skills index

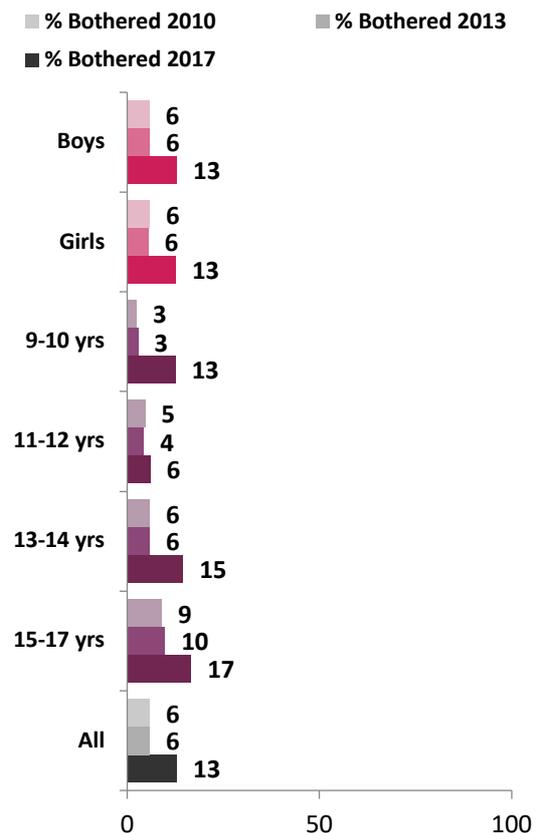


Inequalities in internet skills are related to age and, partly to gender: younger children are the least equipped, scoring on average 4.9 on the internet skills index. By contrast, older teenagers score 8.3.

## More opportunities = more risks

Overall, the number of children who have felt **bothered** (upset, uncomfortable or scared) by something they experienced on the internet has more than doubled, raising **from 3% in 2013 to 13% in 2017**.

### Online experiences that have bothered children (comparison 2010-2013-2017)



**Passive responses** to online risks – including closing the window or app or ignoring the problem – are adopted by 1 in 3 children, while in 4 have blocked an online after a negative experience on the internet. **Only 10%** of Italian children **changed their privacy setting** after a bothering experience,

and only 2% said they reported the problem online through the 'report abuse' button.

Almost half children talked to a friend (47%) or their parents (38%) the last time something on the internet bothered them. **1 in 4**, however, **did not talk to anyone** about what happened.

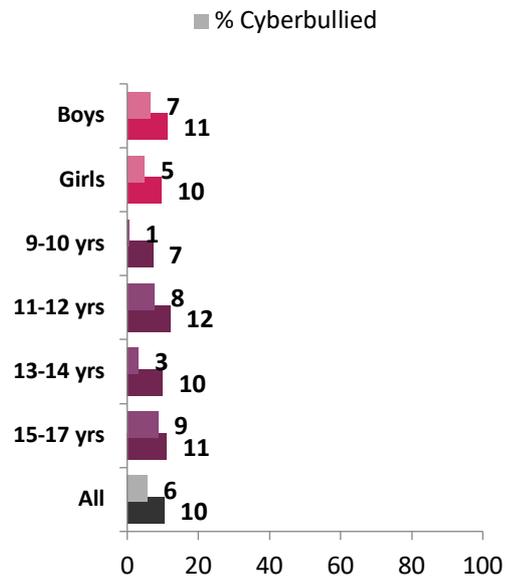
## Hateful and sexual content on the rise

**51% of 11-to-17-year-olds** have been **exposed to at least one form of Negative User Generated Content (NUGC)** in the past year, including violent or gory images of people harming animals or other people (36%), hateful content (33%) and websites where people discuss ways of physically harming themselves (22%).

The number of children who have been **bullied and/or cyberbullied** has remained **stable** (10%) - but bullying is one the most harmful experiences for a child, with 79% of those who have been bullied who felt very or fairly upset.

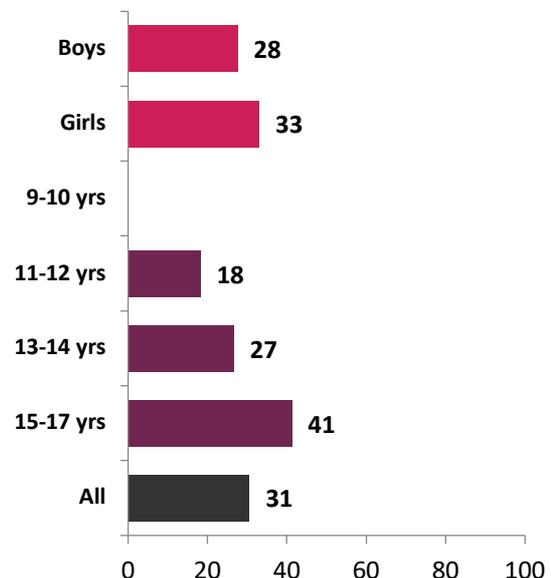
A larger proportion of children (**19%**) have witnessed someone else being bullied on the internet. Half of **cyber by-standers** tried to help the victim, while the rest reportedly did nothing about it.

### Child has been bullied, on- and offline



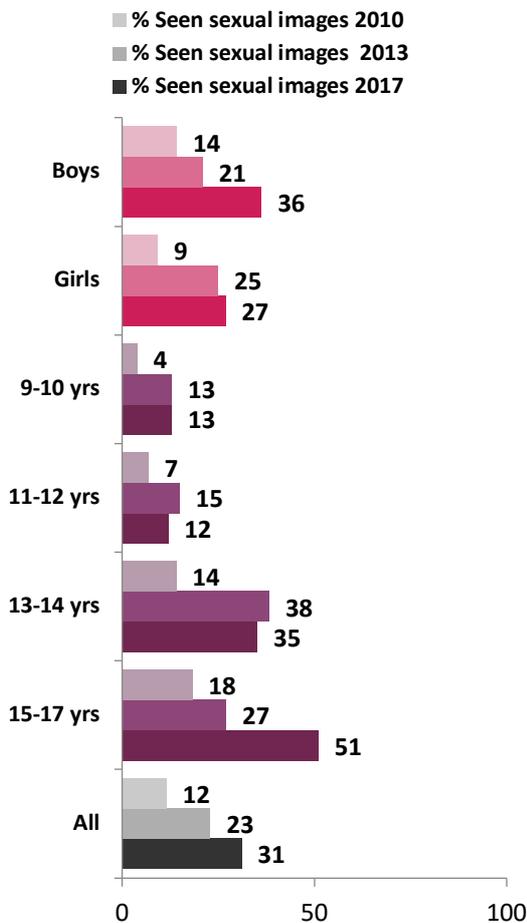
Nearly 1 in 3 11-to-17-year-olds (31%) have **seen hateful or degrading messages** that attack an individual or a group of people based on their nationality, religion, colour of their skin. Most feel sad, angry and full of hatred for what they have seen. However, 58% of those who have seen hate speech in the past year did nothing about it.

### Child has seen hate speech

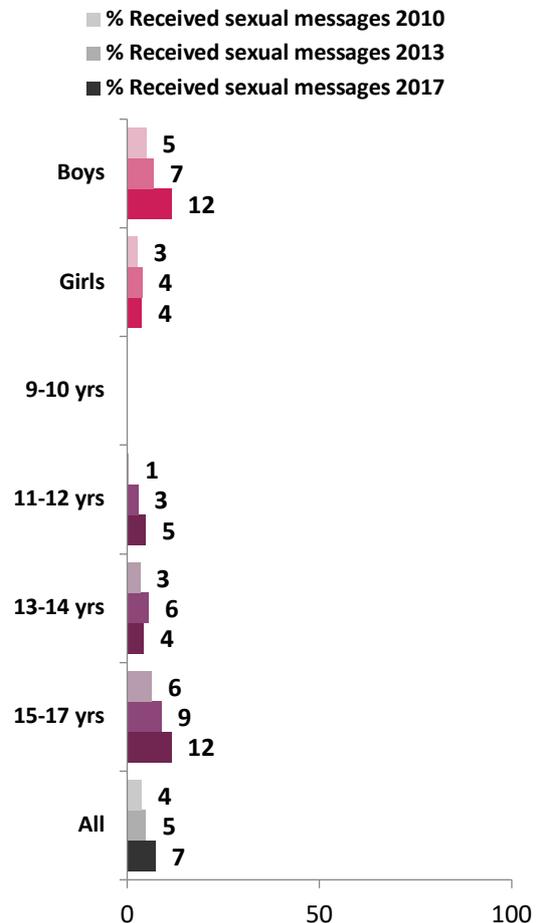


A similar proportion of 9-to-17-year-olds (**31%**) have been exposed to **sexual content** in the past year. This rises to 51% of older teenagers. While most children are not happy nor upset when they see sexual images online, 2 in 3 11-to-12-year-olds said they were very or fairly bothered.

### Child has seen sexual images



### Child has received sexual messages



**Sexting** is also on the rise, with **7%** of Italian 11-to-17-year-olds having received a sexual message in the past 12 months. **Girls (67%) and 11-to-12-year-olds (56%) are more likely to be very upset** by the sexually suggestive messages they have received, compared to boys (14% very upset) and older teenagers (23% very upset). By contrast, 29% of boys and 55% of 13-to-14-year-olds were happy when they received sexual messages.

### Parental mediation

Among enabling mediation practices, parents tend to favour those practices that promote safer uses of the internet: **43% talks to children about what they do on the internet** often or very often; **52% suggests ways to use the internet safely**; **38% help children when something bothers them on the internet**. By contrast, only **21%** of the respondents say that their parents **encourage**

them to explore and learn things on the internet.

Restrictions to limit online practices and content are set especially for younger children and girls: **40% of children aged 9-12 are not allowed to use social networking sites**, and one in three children of the same age are not allowed to use a webcam or the phone camera.

Only one in four parents (25%) use parental controls to block or filter some types of content; while one in five (21%) use parental controls to monitor and keep track of the Internet content the child looked at or apps she/he used. Finally, 9% have used technology (such as GPS) to track the child's location and whereabouts. While younger children are more likely to be restricted through parental controls, teenagers are more likely to be geolocalised by their parents.

## School and peer mediation

Teachers tend to engage more in restrictive mediation rather than enabling mediation: according to children, **39% of teachers made rules about what pupils can do on the internet at school; 26% suggested ways to use the internet safely, 22% helped children when something bothers them on the internet, or encouraged them to explore and learn things on the internet.** Similarly to parental mediation, teachers' mediation decreases as the age of children increases.

The mediation of **smartphone** is stricter: the majority of children (**81%**) say their teachers **set rules** about how mobile phones are used at school; **61% check if students have their smartphones on or off** and **38% take students' phones away for a period.** In contrast with the pattern observed in relation to restrictive and enabling mediation of internet use at school, the mediation of smartphones at school increases with age. The finding is not surprising if we consider that many children are given a smartphone at the end of primary school, as a rite of passage; and that many

primary school children are not allowed to bring their smartphone at school in the first place.

While children talk preferably to their friends when something bothers them on the internet, **peer mediation is generally low. 20%** of respondents say that their friends **encourage them to explore and learn things on the internet**, 17% say that have been suggested was to use the internet safely, and 15% have been helped when something bothered them on the internet.

## Conclusions

The 'more opportunities, more risks' framework is still a valid resource to understand the changes associated with smartphones, that lead to more pervasive internet access and use in children's everyday lives. Fortunately, prior research has shown that online risky experiences do not necessarily result in harm, as reported by children. However, bullying, hate speech and hateful content, and sexual messages can cause harm to children, especially girls and the youngest. More needs to be done to promote safer and more responsible uses of mobile communication.

Reinforcing children's ability to cope with online risks by promoting the adoption of social responses (talking to others) and proactive responses (blocking people, changing privacy settings, reporting the problem online) is definitely a priority on the policy agenda, as shown by our findings.

## This report

In 2017-2018 the EU Kids Online network aims to conduct a follow-up to their 2010 survey which reflects the updated general research framework (Livingstone, Mascheroni, & Staksrud, 2017), and ensures comparability with the EU Kids Online 2010 survey (Livingstone, et al. 2011) and the Net

Children Go Mobile 2013-14 survey (Mascheroni & Ólafsson), while including new thematic modules.

The questionnaire was administered face-to-face at home to 1,006 children aged 9-17, using a stratified random sample and self-completion methods in the case of sensitive questions (the same methodology used in EU Kids Online 2010 and Net Children Go Mobile 2013).

In Italy the survey was funded by the Ministry of Education (Ministero dell'Istruzione dell'Università e della Ricerca – Miur) within the cooperation between OssCom – research Centre of Media and Communications of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (the EU Kids Online Italian partner), Miur and Parole O\_stili, an association aimed at contrasting hate speech and promoting responsible, non-hostile online communication. For these reasons, the 2017 survey included the new modules on cyberhate (asked only to 11-to-17-year-olds) and cyber bystanders.

## References

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