

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

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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)

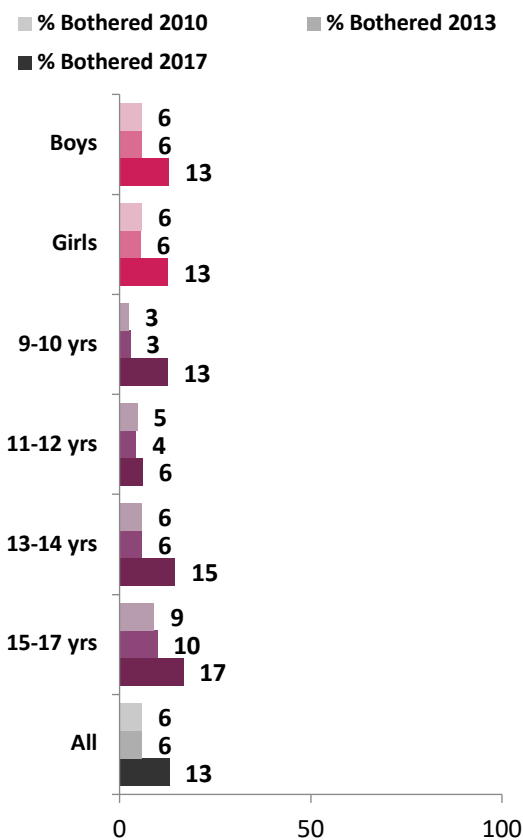
		% At home	% At school	% When I'm on my way to somewhere
Boys	2013	80	11	29
	2017	88	24	44
Girls	2013	82	6	31
	2017	88	27	44
9-10 yrs	2013	58	0	5
	2017	71	4	5
11-12 yrs	2013	74	6	25
	2017	89	10	26
13-14 yrs	2013	95	11	45
	2017	90	23	48
15-17 yrs	2013	93	14	43
	2017	94	49	74
	<b>2013</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>8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

## 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.

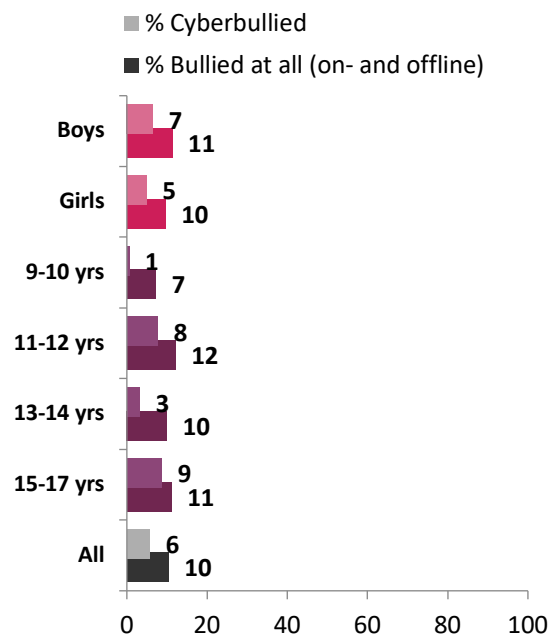
## Hateful and sexual content on the rise

**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.

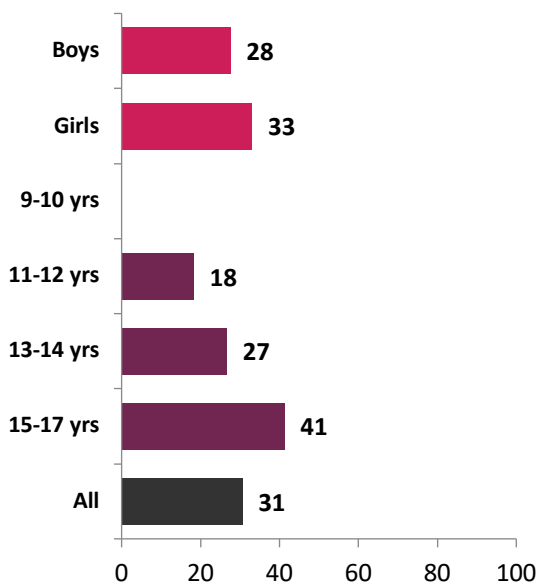
A larger proportion of children (**19%**) have witnessed someone else being bullied on the internet. Half of **cyber by-standers** tried to help the victim, while the rest reportedly did nothing about it.

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



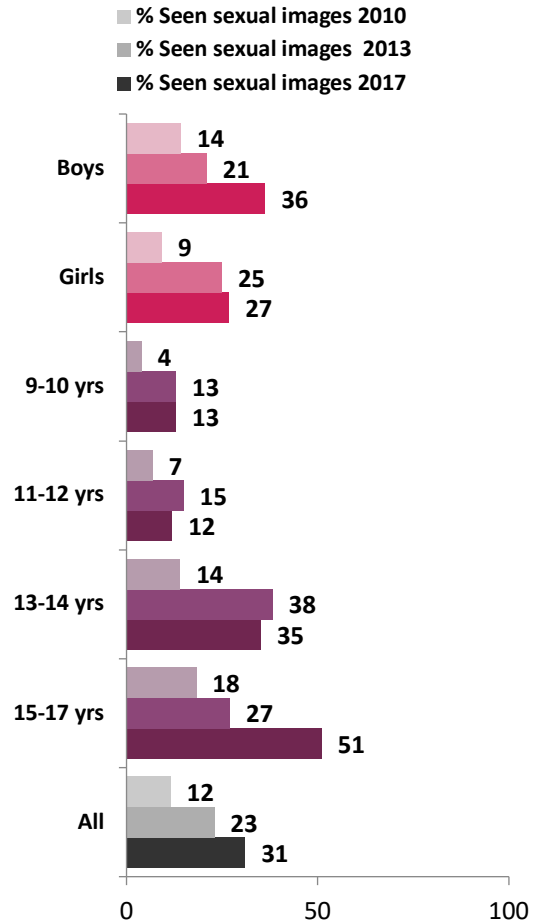
Nearly 1 in 3 11-to-17-year-olds (31%) have **seen hateful or degrading messages** that attack an individual or a group of people based on their nationality, religion, colour of their skin. Most feel sad, angry and full of hatred for what they have seen. However, 58% of those who have seen hate speech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

### Child has seen hate speech



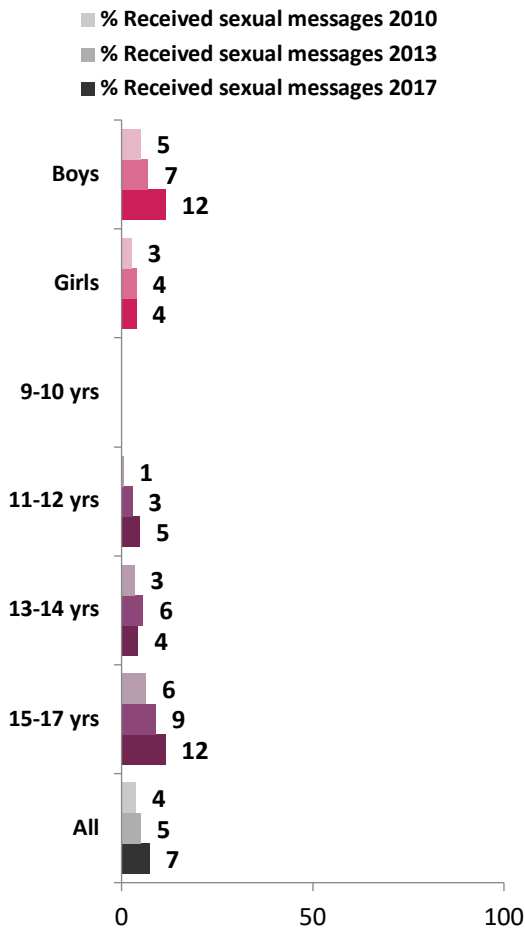
A similar proportion of 9-to-17-year-olds (31%) have been exposed to **sexual content** in the past year. This rises to 51% of older teenagers. While most children are not happy nor upset when they see sexual images online, 2 in 3 11-to-12-year-olds said they were very or fairly bothered.

### Child has seen sexual images



**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.

## Child has received sexual messages



## 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

Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., & Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risks and Safety on the Internet: The Perspective of European Children. Full Findings*. London: LSE, EU Kids Online. Available from: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/33731/>

Livingstone, S., Mascheroni, G. & Staksrud, E. (2017). European research on children's internet use:

assessing the past and anticipating the future. *New Media and Society*. Available from: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/68516/>

Mascheroni, G. & Ólafsson, K. (2014) *Net Children Go Mobile: Risks and opportunities* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn). Milano: Educatt. Available from: [netchildrengomobile.eu/ncgm/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/DEF\\_NCGM\\_SecondEdition\\_Report.pdf](http://netchildrengomobile.eu/ncgm/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/DEF_NCGM_SecondEdition_Report.pdf)