

National report for France

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1. The Internet

1.1 Children's Internet access

The Internet is now widely available in France, with predominantly high speed access (ADSL representing 94% of the domestic Internet access). In 2005, Internet use reached 53% (49% on average)(Eurobarometer 2005).

The main ISPs (Orange, Alice, Free, AOL, cegetel, numéricable, etc.) provide parental control tools, including filters. For some of them, the installation of the parental control tool is a default option (i.e., the parents must say they do not want to install parental control tools, otherwise they will be automatically installed on the computer). They also provide some advice on their respective websites, though these pages are not very widely viewed (i.e. this information is not visible on the homepage). The Association of Internet providers (AFA: Association des Fournisseurs d'Accès et de Services Internet) has a website in which one can report harmful or illegal content; however, this site is not widely known.

1.2 Findings on children's access to the Internet and online technologies

At home:

Up to 70% of the families with children, aged 12 to 18, had a computer at home (Mediapro 2006). Furthermore, the national statistics institute (INSEE) found that in December 2005, 61,7% of all 15 to 19 year olds had Internet access at home, and 48% had a high speed connection. Less detailed but more recent data on home equipment are provided by GfK/Mediametrie (2007, N=22000 households). 82% of 15 to 24 year olds in France have a computer (vs. 66,7% for the whole French population), and 63,4% olds have broadband access (vs. 50,2% for the whole French population). Within the household, the computer can be located in a common area or in the children's bedroom. Martin (2002) outlines the bedroom privatisation of the computer for children as follows:

Age	% with a computer in his/her room
11-13	22%
14-15	23%
16-17	30%
18-20	33%

At school:

According to the Ministry of Education, 50% of primary schools, 98% of secondary schools, and 99% of high schools have Internet access (Mediapro). These figures, however, do not mean that pupils actually use the Internet at school.

Some studies not specifically related to children show the importance of social inequalities in accessing and using the Internet. A 2006 CREDOC study leads us to believe that there is a strong correlation between SES (income, educational level, etc.) and access to the Internet:

Income per month	Internet access at home
Less than 900€	22%
Between 900 and 1500	27%
Between 1500 and 2300	39%
Between 2300 and 3000	60%
More than 3000	74%

Educational level	Internet access at home
No Diploma	12%
Less than High School	39%
High school	59%
College/university	73%

Work status	Internet access at home
Upper executives	82%
Intermediate	72%
Employees	51%
Working class	38%

Population	Internet access at home
Less than 2 000	41%
Between 2 000 and 20 000	44%
Between 20 000 and 100 000	40%
More than 100 000	45%
Paris and Parisian area	59%

Concerning Internet access at home, the GINI coefficient for the SES variables is:

Profession	Educational level	Income	Age	Size of the city
28	26	23	18	9

As we can see, Internet access is more correlated to work status, educational level and income than it is to age or the size of the city. Therefore, we can assume that SES plays a major role in the chances for children to access the Internet, although there is little evidence to support this claim directly. Pasquier (using both qualitative and quantitative approach, questionnaire: N=944, interview, N=65) found that:

- 92% of upper class high school pupils own a computer compared to 83% of working class pupils.
- Internet connexion is correlated to social background (92% of upper class pupils own an Internet connexion compared to 49% of working class pupils)(2001-2002).

However, since inequalities in access related to SES have decreased these last years in regards to the overall population, one could assume that they may have also decreased among high school pupils.

1.3 Findings on children's use of the Internet and online technologies

Frequency:

According to Mediapro (2006), 96% of French teenagers aged 12 to 18 use the Internet, mostly at home. 70% use the Internet every day or several times a week. A study from CREDOC shows that 68% of 15 to 17 year olds use the Internet daily, 21% once or twice a week. According to the INSEE institute, 83% of 15 to 19 year olds used Internet during the last month, in December 2005. The qualitative Eurobarometer study shows that both 9 and 10 and 12 to 14 year old children often connect to the Internet daily.

65% of children aged 12 to 18 say they never use Internet at school (Mediapro, 2006). Martin (2008) reports that 69% of 12 to 14 year olds who have the Internet at home use it almost every day at home, compared to 80% of 15 to 17 year olds. The qualitative Eurobarometer study says that 9 and 10 year old children often connect daily, but experience parental time restriction,s while 12 to 14 year olds are said to connect daily to the Internet.

Gender differences:

According to Pasquier (2001-2002, using both a qualitative and quantitative approach) there is only a small gender gap in home use: computer (boys 90%, girls 87%) and Internet access (boys 66%, girls 61%). Despite the small difference in use, the quantitative study by Metton (2006) presents contrasting results about the amount of time spent on the Internet: there are more boys saying they use the computer more than 2 hours a day (35,9% of boys and 28,2% of girls), however, there are also more boys saying they use it less than 1 hour a day (26,7% of boys and 23,3% of girls).

No evidence could be found regarding gender differences in the levels of skills, with the important exception of *self-perceived skills*. According to Pasquier (2001-2002), for children living in a household equipped with a computer:

- Boys perceive themselves as the most skilled member of the family more frequently than girls (boys: 57%, girls: 25,5%)
- Boys claim that the computer has been bought for them more frequently than girls (boys 31%, girls 18%). Here Pasquier argues that it is more important to boys to say that they master the computer, and that technological devices are under their control.

The quantitative study by Metton (2006) shows that:

- 78.0% of boys can download (music or films), compared to 62% of girls.
- When asked what they do when they encounter a computer problem, ask for some help or cope with it by themselves, 59,7% of girls and 41,5% of boys say they ask of help.

1.4 Internet and Media Content for Children

The major French TV channels (TF1, F2, M6) provide large amounts of content for children. In addition, there is one free digital TV (TNT) channel dedicated to children (GULLI). An "education channel" from the public television services also exists, though it does not especially target young children. A few radios are dedicated to teenagers (Fun Radio, Skyrock, etc.).

1.5 Opportunities experienced by children online

Mediappro (2006) found that the two main areas of opportunity online for 12 to 18 year olds are websites and communicating. 94% say they use search engines, to go back to a known website, and to find information, mostly for schoolwork.

According to Mediappro (2006, N=873, children aged 12 to 18):

Activity	%
Search engines	94%
e-mail	67%
instant messaging	69%
chat rooms	32%
downloading	49%

According to the INSEE institute, for 15 to 19 year olds (2005):

Activity	%
e-mail	67%
Chat or discussion forums	41%
Instant messaging	62%
Getting administrative information	28%
Searching for health information	22%
Buying goods or services	15%
Listening, watching or downloading music or films	60%
Playing or downloading games	34%
Downloading software applications	28%

Note that one of the most important uses of the Internet does not appear in these studies. In 2002, the Skyrock radio station developed a blogging platform that has been appropriated by French (and French speaking) teenagers (according to Mediametrie, 9 out of 10 Internet users from 15 to 24 know skyblogs). The skyblog website is the second most visited French website. More than 10 million skyblogs were created. Other social networking tools (e.g. Myspace, Facebook) are used less in France (though Facebook seems to becoming more popular).

Martin (2008) reports that:

- 70% of 15 to 17 year olds use instant messaging almost every day, compared to 56% of 12 to 14 year olds.
- 60% of 15 to 17 year olds use email several times a week, compared to 40% of 12 to 14 year olds.

The qualitative Eurobarometer study shows that younger children (9 and 10) have a more isolated use of the Internet (mainly gaming, surfing and information seeking), while older children (12 to 14) have a broader usage pattern, allowing relations with others and expressivity (instant messaging, blogs, online forums, photo sharing, etc.). Some ethnographic studies (Metton, 2006; Fluckiger, 2007) show that as they grow up, young teenagers (12 to 16) not only have more access and uses, but their uses also evolve (with an increase of communication applications such as instant messaging or blogging).

Gender Differences:

Downloading media content:

Mediapro found in 2006 that boys download content twice as much as girls, that boys play more online and access more online video (such as clips). According to the qualitative Eurobarometer study, boys are more likely to play online and download content.

Pasquier (2001-2002) shows that 60% of high school boys download music compared to 43% of girls.

Playing video games:

Pasquier argues that playing video games represents for boys an opportunity to create stable and organised sociability and help networks. Girls can find help in their video game activities to a far less extent than boys, and Pasquier argues that this leads to much less playing time. Boys, in contrast, exchange video games and advice. 42% of boys say they are asked questions on video games (versus 15% of girls); 64% of boys borrowed or lent video games (versus 22% of girls). According to Pasquier, these differences reflect differences in the way boys and girls socially organize and assume their hobbies and passions in the process of constructing their gender. The quantitative study by Metton (2006) shows that there is a major difference in the frequency of video game playing and in the opinion teenagers have of games, depending on the gender:

- 59,3% of boys say they love video games, compared to 20,7% of girls (5,5% of boys say they like it, 20,1% of girls; 50% of girls say it depends on the game, while 33% of boys say so).
- 69,1% of girls say they rarely play, compared to 20,5% of boys (44,3% of boys report they play daily, compared to 8,6% of girls).
- There is also a difference in the type of preferred games: "action" games are the preferred type of both (67,6% of boys and 41,9% of girls), but girls like "adventure" games more than boys (it is the preferred type of game for 35,1% of girls and 16,5% of boys).

Chat rooms, forums, MSN:

Pasquier shows that there is no major gender difference in participation in online forums, and only a slight difference in participation in chat rooms (50% of girls participate compared to 44% of boys).

Metton (2006) reports that the amount of time spent in chat rooms and MSN does not show a significant gender difference (e.g. 34,6% of boys and 34,1% of girls use MSN "very often", 24,1% of boys and 23,4% of girls visit chat room "very often").

Email:

According to Metton (2006) there is a significant gender difference in the use of email. There are more boys that never use it (35,8%, compared to 21,6% of girls), and more girls that use it very often (29,3% compared to 16,1% of boys).

No specific quantitative research has been conducted on the inequalities in use or opportunities among children. However, Fluckiger's qualitative research (2004-2006) shows that inequalities in use he observed could be understood as linked to the transmission of a form of the cultural capital from parents with a higher education. Pasquier's qualitative and quantitative approach (2001-2002; questionnaire: N=944, interview, N=65) shows that:

- There are inequalities as regards the possession of a computer or access to Internet as a consequence of inequalities in SES, though, among teenagers that have access to the Internet, there is no significant difference in the frequency of use (daily or almost daily, from time to time, never).
- There is a correlation between SES and use:
 - o 19% of upper class teenagers download music often (compared to 28% of middle class and 27% of working class teenagers). On the other hand, 42% of upper class teenagers never download music (37% of middle class and 29% of working class).
 - o Working class high school pupils exchange more video games with their friends (49%, compared to 34% of upper class pupils).

- Working class pupils are more likely to visit a chat room: 27% (compared to only 8% of upper class pupils) often visit a chat room, only 30% never visit a chat room (51% of upper class teenagers).

In higher SES families, parents are more familiar with computers: therefore, they are able to help their children. In lower SES families, parents are less skilled and peers play a greater role.

Who is the most computer skilled in your family?

Family member	All	Upper class	Middle class	Lower class
Yourself	40	31	42	48
Father	25	33	34	14
Mother	10	13	15	5
Brother	21	21	17	25
Sister	9	6	7	14

In case of a problem with your computer, what do you do?

Family member	All	Upper class	Middle class	Lower class
Solve it yourself	36	33	32	38
Help by a friend	22	15	23	29
Help by a member of family	37	45	36	30

1.6 Risks experienced by children online

Very little evidence could be found on the risk issue. The only quantitative study dealing with risks is the IFOP study (2005, N=482, aged 12 to 17). It shows that 33% of teenagers already saw some shocking, violent or pornographic content (the IFOP points out that since this figure is based on what children claim, one would expect this figure to be underestimated). Also, teenagers have provided information on the Internet such as their hobbies (58%), their name, address, phone number or email (44%), their birth date (40%). 8% have already used a credit card online.

Some studies, though not dealing explicitly with risk issues, describe activities that may be seen as potentially risky. According to Martin (2002), 71% of girls and 63% of 10 to 21 year olds that visit chat rooms chat with people previously unknown to the children.

The Eurobarometer survey of 2005/6 shows that 11% of parents/guardians think that their child has encountered harmful or illegal content on the Internet.

According to Pasquier (2001-2002) as children get older they participate *less* in chat rooms. An explanation is given by the qualitative part of this study: as teenagers get older, they are less interested in extending their social networks.

Level of participation	15-17	18 and higher
Never	38%	52%
Sometimes	30%	22%
Often	20%	16%

This decrease of the participation in chat room may be viewed as reducing the risk of being in unwanted contact with adults seeking teenagers.

According to the qualitative Eurobarometer study, boys are more likely to download content (thus, one could assume they are more likely to download harmful, e.g. violent or pornographic, content).

Martin (2002) shows that girls are more than boys to use “chat” to talk to people not known offline: 71% of girls using chat talk to strangers, while 63% of boys do it. Pasquier (2001-2002) shows that girls are a little more likely to correspond with people they have never met (39% of girls, compared to 35% of boys).

In her qualitative study, Metton (2006) shows that young teenager girls may hide their identity in chat rooms and pretend they are boys or older girls, in order to learn more about sexuality or online flirting. Fluckiger (2007), in an ethnographic study shows that many girls visiting chat rooms say they already had contact with people they call paedophiles, that is older boys or men, explicitly talking about sexuality or proposing to meet, some of them hiding their age and pretending to be teenagers themselves.

Pasquier shows that chatting with unknown people is correlated with SES : 49% of working class high school pupils talk to people they never met before, compared to 41% of middle class and 26% of upper class teenagers. She argues that working class teenagers, more than others, say they are interested in chatting because it is seen as an occasion to demonstrate one's ability to master a specific language in chat rooms, which is particularly prevalent among under privileged teenagers.

No quantitative results are available about risks by location of use. However, some qualitative results (e.g. Fluckiger, 2007) show that at school computers and the Internet are underused. Moreover, uses at school are very restrictive, so that pupils cannot surf the Web freely, chat or visit blogs. Therefore, risks encountered at school appear very limited.

1.7 Internet regulation and promotion

A few laws regulate the telecommunication area, but mostly focus on the access, not on content. However, in 2007, Article 227-22-1 was introduced into the penal code in order to condemn any “sexual proposal to a minor under 15” using any means of electronic communication. Article 222-33-3 of the penal code condemns the recording or diffusion of images related to “happyslapping”. Other laws deal with child pornography (Articles 227-23, 227-24, 321-1, 321-2, 321-5).

No legislation about children's access to harmful content could be found. The police mostly focus on child pornography, rather than on the access to violent or harmful content by children. Several initiatives from the government can be found (e.g. the Délégation aux usages de l'Internet). However, we think these initiatives are not widely known among parents or educators.

The CSA (Conseil Supérieur de l'audiovisuel) is an independent administrative authority created in 1989 to fix obligations to television and radio channels. However, the CSA does not deal with the Internet. The regulation authority for the Internet is the ARCEP (Autorité de régulation des communications électroniques et des postes). The ARCEP was created to regulate competition in the telecommunications sector as a consequence of the liberalisation of this sector. Its main actions concern the development of high-speed Internet access, “the exercise of fair and effective competition”, the “development of employment, innovation and competitiveness in the telecommunication sector,” etc. It does not deal with the protection of children or harmful content.

1.8 Parental mediation

According to the Eurobarometer qualitative study, most 9 to 10 year olds experience parental restrictions on their connexion time in the evening. The IFOP Institute (2005, N=399 parents of 10 to 18 year olds) asked parents of children using the Internet if they talk to them about

their uses. 41% say they talk often, 29% from time to time, 10% rarely, and 20% never (See below for the evolution of parental mediation while children grow into teenagers).

The same study points out that when asked what they do to protect their child, the main parental mediation consists in putting the computer in a room where they can observe what the child does. On the other hand, what parents thought to be useful, but which they rarely do, is to get information about parental mediation: only 11% of parents say they already have an information guide, while 61% have not, although they think it would be useful.

Parental Mediation	Useful and already done	Useful but not done	Not useful	No opinion
Use the services proposed by the ISP	34%	48%	48%	2%
Install a parental control software	32%	49%	49%	0%
Put the computer in a common room	68%	12%	12%	0%
Get an information guide	11%	61%	61%	0%
Limit the access to the computer	44%	23%	23%	0%

Martin (2002, N=468, aged 10 to 21) shows that children's skills understandably increase with age, and that children with higher technical skills are subject to a reduced parental mediation:

	11-13	14-15	16-17	18-20
Ask his/her parents before switching the computer on	33%	21%	10%	6%
Parents are watching what their child does (often or from time to time)	23%	11%	4%	5%
Several uses are prohibited by the parents	32%	32%	17%	7%
Parents know all of the uses	69%	46%	37%	41%

Martin (2008, N=926) shows that there is a decrease of parental control when children grow into teenagers. According to children, 93% of parents of 12 to 14 year olds try to know what the child does on the Internet compared to 76% of 15 to 17 years. 31% of 12 to 14 year olds say there is filter software on their computer versus 25% of 15 to 17 year olds. Metton (2006, N=377) shows that the proportion of teenagers saying their parents let them do what they want on the Internet increases as they grow older: 63,5% of 11 and 12 year olds, 70,4% of 13 and 14 year olds, and 78,5% of 15 and 16 year olds.

Fluckiger's qualitative study (2004-2006) points out how greater skills are needed throughout the process of becoming autonomous and emancipated in order for the children (12 to 16) to build a personal digital territory (e.g. protecting their instant messaging account with passwords, deleting some information such as the visited web pages, etc.).

On the other hand, the IFOP study (2005) shows that parents of older teenagers think their child is exposed to a greater amount of unsuitable online content: 41% of high school pupils' parents think their child has already been exposed to sexual material on the Internet (only 12% in primary school), and 37% think the child has been exposed to violent content (only 8% in primary school).

Pasquier shows that using the Internet for several hours is less frequent among upper class teenagers (upper class 40%, middle class 53,5%, lower class 52%); according to the qualitative part of the study, this is due to explicit parental restrictions and to inculcated self-limitation.

No quantitative results could be found about gender differences in parental mediation. However, some qualitative results suggest that gender differences could be important (for instance, some parents are reluctant to let their daughters talk to boys on the Internet).

1.9 Media literacy

Martin (2002) show that skills increase with the age of the children, and that the more skills children have, the less they are monitored:

Basic IT skills	11-13	14-15	16-17	18-20
Can use a printer	92%	98%	99%	99%
Can install a software	74%	81%	83%	85%
Can surf	73%	88%	99%	97%
Can send e-mails	5%	85%	94%	92%
Can use a scanner	56%	64%	75%	79%
Can delete web sites history	26%	49%	57%	47%
Participates to the computer's maintenance	26%	40%	50%	62%
Manage files and directories	39%	50%	65%	70%

The Eurobarometer survey of 2005/06 demonstrates that 69% parents/guardians think their child knows what to do if uncomfortable online, 27% think they do not.

No other quantitative results are available, however, rich qualitative research has been done on meetings with unknown people (online and offline). Pasquier's interviews give many details on children's precautions: giving out personal information gradually (first e-mail address, second mobile phone number, etc.), encountering strangers in open public spaces, requiring the assistance of friends, etc. Metton's doctoral thesis (2006) is especially informative on the motivations behind these risky behaviours (learning seduction codes, testing one's identity and testing the interest of other people in oneself, discovering the adult world, etc).

1.10 Factors shaping public discourses about the Internet

NGOs are not very active in shaping public discourses. These NGOs are not widely known among parents and educators.

Although a few paedophile cases have contributed to the increase in parental fears, no major event in recent years can be considered to having had a major influence on public or media discourses, nor on the regulation of politics. "Happyslapping" also came onto the scene after some highly media-covered events including the beating of a schoolteacher by her pupils and the diffusion of the images on the Internet.

2. The Educational system

2.1 General education

The official literacy rate is 100% in France and access to higher education has increased dramatically in the last 30 years.

The major change in the experience of schooling between children and their parents (at least some of them) is the dramatically increasing proportion of pupils that reached the baccalaureate level and access higher education. This change occurred during the '70s and '80s (20% in 1970, 36% in 1989, 63% in 1995). Therefore, this change mainly concerns the parents of today's teenager's. This evolution is to be considered along with the creation in 1975 of a unique secondary school curriculum (called college unique).

2.2 Education and the Internet

Quantitative surveys show that almost every secondary and high school is connected to the Internet. However, qualitative researchers point out that in many cases, secondary or high school pupils have very few opportunities to use a computer at school, and that it is almost always in a tightly controlled way. Children therefore ask for increased online opportunities at school.

Computer science used to be an optional discipline in high school during the '90s, but the Internet and IT are no longer scholarly disciplines in secondary and high school French educational system in any way. In secondary school, though, "technological education" (two hours a week for every child) offers instruction in the use of some widely used computer applications, such as word processing, spreadsheet, and search engines. These teachings can represent a few hours (around 10) a year.

In 2000, the Ministry of Education set up a certificate in primary and secondary education, the B2i (Brevet Informatique et Internet). According to the Ministry, this certificate is "centered around an assessment system that allows pupils to develop their own skills", such as "setting up documents for processing using a spreadsheet program", "finding information and documentation using a web browser and a search engine", "communicating by email", and so on. This certificate has been compulsory since 2006.

3. Wider society

3.1 Social change

- a) No major change, apart from IT development itself has affected the Internet diffusion in France.
- b) For many years, the "informational highway", then the "information society" has been a major theme of public discourses (e.g. of presidential candidates in the late '90s).
- c) In these discourses, the main idea is that France should be a leading country, and that no one should be left behind. Though, these discourses may not always lead to concrete actions.

The main inequalities in France should be considered to be related to class/income and education since France is a highly centralised country.

In 1999, 44,2% of the French population was urban, 14,2% rural (INSEE, 2005), and 2,7% was working in the agriculture. The inequalities in the access to the Internet due to the size of the town were not very important (Gini coefficient: 9%, compared to 25% due to the SES). This percentage increased from 2002 to 2004, then decreased dramatically (maybe because of the infrastructures reaching small towns and the countryside). 96% of the French population can now gain access to ADSL.

No figure could be found on manual or non-manual work. However, factory workers represent 23,9% (2005, INSEE), employees 29,1%, and intermediate professions 23,2%.

No obvious link was found between migration and tolerance of the Internet and its content. Some qualitative results, though, suggest that some immigrant parents may have a greater concern about the online communication of girls.

3.2 Role of the state

The state used to be rather interventionist, with very developed public services (e.g. public transports, education, energy, postal services, telecom, hospitals, social security, and even some banks or automobile or petroleum companies, etc.). Over the last 20 years, the role of this public sector in the economy has decreased, through the privatisation of many sectors (e.g. Renault, France Telecom, some banks, some public transport companies, etc.).

As regards ICTs and new media, France Telecom, when it was a state company, played a major role in the development of the telephone, and more recently the Internet. One of the chief concerns of the regulation authorities in recent years has been the rising competition in the Internet sector. Since France Telecom is now privatised, the state no longer plays a major role in the area of telecoms and the Internet.

There is free speech in France.

4. Other factors affecting children's online experiences

English is learned as a second language by almost every child from the age of 11. However, compared to some other countries, many French are not very fluent in English, and only a small part of the population can easily read in English or watch an English program on the television.

The French-speaking community is not limited to France since French is a mother tongue in parts of Switzerland and Belgium, in Quebec, in several north-African countries (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, etc.) and sub-Saharan African countries (Ivory Coast, Senegal, Congo, etc.). French-speaking cultural production is rather important (e.g., music, cinema). Consequently, the French-speaking part of the Internet is large.

It seems to us that the bedroom culture does not exist so much in France.