National report for Iceland[1]

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1. The Internet

1.1 Children's Internet access

In general over 90% of Icelandic homes have a broadband Internet connection. Looking at households including the 6 to 16 age group, over 99% of homes have broadband. It is thus safe to conclude that the Internet is widely available in Iceland. There are numerous cafés with free Internet access in the capital as well as in the bigger towns across Iceland, and all public libraries have Internet access. We believe that the speed of access has been significantly above average compared to other European countries.

The ISPs offer some Internet safety tools and are quite active in providing warnings and advice. Most of the ISPs collaborate with the Icelandic node of the EC Safer Internet Action Plan, SAFT (www.saft.is), producing awareness material, funding media campaigns, etc.

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

Almost all children in Iceland have access to the Internet at home. Only about 3% do not have home access, which is a slight increase in Internet prevalence since 2003 when about 9% did not have an Internet connection at home. Some 33% of children have Internet access through their own personal computer, and about 86% of children have their own mobile phone.

SES is a bit difficult to use as a background variable because Icelandic society does not seem to follow the same patterns of differentiation as most other European countries. The only background variable correlated to level of access is location, with children in remote areas slightly more likely to be without an Internet connection than children in densely populated areas.

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

As previously stated, almost all children in Iceland have access to the Internet at home. The home is also the place where most children (78%) say they first used the Internet. Some 15% say they first used the Internet at school. Many children (36%) say they started using the Internet between age 7 and 8, and at that age 66% have begun using the Web. A rough estimate is that children aged 9 to 15 spend 1.6 hours online each day, compared to about one hour in 2003.

As almost all children in Iceland have a home connection to the Internet, access does not increase with age. The only variable which is likely to show a correlation with Internet access is again location, as children who live in remote areas sometimes have poor or no Internet

[1] The information below is based on a survey carried out for SAFT-Iceland which is run by the parents and teachers association in Iceland (Heimili og skóli). The data was collected in a field survey which was carried out between March 21 and April 26 2007 amongst 955 randomly selected children aged 9 to 15 years (born 1991 to 1997).

connections. The official policy of the Icelandic government is that ISDN should be available throughout the country, which most young people consider to be insufficient. Younger children tend to access the Internet through a shared computer at home while older ones are much more likely to have their own PC. About 16% of 9 year old children access the Internet through their own personal computer, compared to 58% of 15 year olds. The youngest children are the most likely to use the Internet a few days a week (28%) whereas most of the oldest children (79%) use the Internet a few times each day. Only about one in five does so in the 9 year old age group. The biggest increase in Internet use seems to occur between age 13 and 14 where the average use is estimated to increase from about 1.7 hours each day to about 2.3 hours.

There are no gender differences when looking only at access to the Internet (as mentioned previously, almost all children in Iceland say they have access to the Internet at home). However, boys are more likely to have their own personal computer (42% compared to 34% of girls) and they are also more likely to have a shared family computer located in their room. Girls on the other hand are more likely to have a portable or laptop computer.

1.4 Internet and media content for children

The Icelandic State Broadcasting Service (Ríkisútvarpið or RUV) and its main competitor Channel 2 (Stöð 2) are the main providers of television for young children, showing mostly dubbed foreign programmes on Saturday and Sunday mornings for two to three hours, and in the afternoon on weekdays for up to one hour. The only locally produced material is a weekly half-hour show run on RUV during the winter. For teenagers the most popular channel has for several years been the third nationally available channel which airs mostly American series. None of these channels focuses on online material, and it is safe to say that online material specially aimed at children is not widely available in Icelandic.

1.5 Opportunities experienced by children online

81% of the children surveyed use the Internet to play games, 71% use it to send instant messages (MSN), 49% to do homework for school, 48% to browse the Internet for fun, 46% to download music, 42% to create websites or blog and 34% say they use the Internet to send emails.

The available information indicates that as children grow older they are less likely to use the Internet to play games (83% of 9 year olds use the Internet for this purpose compared to 66% of 15 year olds). Other uses of the Internet, such as MSN, homework, browsing for fun, downloading music, creating websites/blogging and sending/receiving emails increase with age. It should be noted, however, that although older children are less likely to play games online, those who do spend more time playing them.

Boys are more likely to say that they use the Internet to play games (83% compared to 79%), browse for fun (51% vs. 43%) or download music (48% vs. 43%), while girls are more likely to use MSN (78% vs. 65%), do homework (55% vs. 44%), make websites or blogs (57% vs. 27%) and send emails (31% compared to 38%). Moreover, boys and girls seem to play different kinds of Internet games, with boys playing sports, racing and action games and girls playing party games like Singstar, Mario Dance or Etoy Play, mystical games such as The Sims, Black&White and Nintendogs, and mind-challenging games like Tetris, Parappa, and Minesweeper.

1.6 Risks experienced by children online

The SAFT-Iceland 2007 found that 25% of children aged 9 to 15 have received emails or messages of a sexual nature. 24% of these children have met people online who asked them to give information about themselves such as a picture, phone number, home address or the name of their school. 20% have received sexually explicit messages on the Internet which they did not want to be given, 15% have been asked to provide a naked picture on the Internet, 16% have received emails which made them worry or frightened them and 11% have

received pornography from someone they have only met online. To this it could be added that 23% say that they have purposely looked at websites with pornographic material.

The EB 2007 focus groups of children aged 9 to 14 have shown that:

- Boys were generally more concerned than the girls with technical risks related to the Internet like "clicking something blinking" or downloading something that might lead to viruses.
- Bullying online was also thought to be a serious problem and many could give examples of this happening to their friends or even themselves.

As children grow older they are more likely to have met a stranger on the Internet who asked for personal information about themselves (12% of 9 year olds compared to 30% of 15 year olds). They are also more likely to have received unwanted sexually explicit messages (16% of 11 year olds compared to 26% of 15 year olds). Moreover, they are more likely to have stumbled into websites with pictures of naked people or porn sites (44% of 11 year olds compared to 63% of 15 year olds).

There are slight differences in the range and types of risks encountered by boys and girls. Girls are more likely to have received unwanted sexually explicit messages (26%) than boys (15%). The are also more likely (20%) than boys (10%) to have been asked to send a naked picture of themselves. Boys are more likely (66%) than girls (42%) to have inadvertently stumbled into pornographic websites. Boys are also more likely (55%) than girls (13%) to have visited pornographic websites on purpose. Girls are much more likely (44%) than boys (14%) to say that they experienced discomfort when looking at pornography.

Children whose parents are less educated do not seem to be more exposed to risks on the Internet than children whose parents have finished more than just compulsory education.

1.7 Internet regulation and promotion

The government does not strictly regulate ICTs and the Internet. In recent months support has increased for "national filtering" concerning online child abuse. Save the Children in Iceland (www.barnaheill.is) runs a hotline in collaboration with the Icelandic police and international law enforcement which targets pornography and youth protection. A recent case demonstrated that people are being prosecuted for making illegal material available. There is a distinction between illegal and harmful content. The law also allows ICTs to shut down sites that contain both illegal and harmful content.

a) The government promotes technical safety guidelines through the Office of Post and Telecommunication. The Office collaborates with different bodies, including the EC Safer Internet Action Plan Awareness Node, parent associations and NGOs.
b) The government has supported the EC Safer Internet Action Plan through the SAFT project by producing leaflets, educational material, campaigns etc.
c) Work is currently being done to improve the information offered concerning media literacy.

In this area the National Parent's Association in Iceland (Heimili og skoli), which runs the EC Safer Internet Action Plan, SAFT, in Iceland, has significantly influenced both government regulations and ISPs by producing material promoting awareness and coming up with guidelines and regulations concerning the safer use of new media.

1.8 Parental mediation

When asked about regulations regarding use of the Internet at home children are most likely to say that they are not allowed to reveal personal information about themselves (63%), that they are not allowed to meet someone in real life who they have only met online (61%) and not to talk to strangers in chat rooms (55%). Only 8% of children say that no rules apply for their use of the Internet, which is a significant drop from 22% in 2003.

Some 41% of children aged 9 say that their parents sometimes sit with them while they surf the Internet compared to just 13% of 15 year olds. Children aged 12 were most likely to say that their parents stop by their rooms while they are browsing the Internet, which might indicate that parents do not consider the younger children to be as much at risk. The oldest children are the least likely to experience this kind of parental control. Some 33% of 9 year olds say that their parents use devices of some kind to prevent them from looking at particular websites, compared to 9% of 15 year olds. 78% of 9 year olds claim that their parents check which websites they have visited, as opposed to 22% of 15 year olds.

It should be noted that traditional definitions of SES are difficult to apply in Iceland, where society is to some extent less stratified than in most other European countries. The parents' education level is used here as an indicator of SES as this has proven to be a relevant factor in other research aimed at children. To be more precise, whether a parent has finished education above the compulsory level is considered relevant. Children whose parents have a higher level of education are more likely to say that their parents monitor which websites they visit and check on them when they are browsing the Internet.

Girls seem to be subject to slightly more parental control than boys; 23% of boys say that their parents sometimes sit with them to browse the Web, compared to 33% of girls. About 76% of boys say that their parents check on them when they are using the Internet compared to 84% of girls. Girls are also more likely (50%) than boys (42%) to say that their parents check which websites they visit. However, there is no gender difference when it comes to using devices to limit children's access to certain sites. All in all, 94% of girls say that some rules apply to their use of the Internet compared to 89% of boys.

1.9 Media literacy

As children grow older they seem to be more cautious about the Internet. For example, 20% of children aged 9 say they try to verify information obtained from the Internet, compared to 53% of children aged 15. The fact that younger children are less likely to believe the information they find online is accurate and trustworthy seems to contradict this, but 13% of 9 year olds say that information obtained through the Internet can be trusted compared to 43% of 15 year olds. Older children are, however, much more likely to use the Internet to search for information for school projects than younger ones (75% of 15 year olds compared to only 10% of 9 year olds).

The EB 2007 focus groups of children aged 9 to 14 have shown that:

- The participants in all the groups were very much aware of anonymity on the Internet and took it seriously. They said that they took precautions not to give out too much information about themselves on the Internet. The rules their parents set seem to be aimed at this specific risk.
- The first reaction among youngsters to something disgusting or shocking happening on the Internet is to "x it". They usually tell only their friends about it, if anyone at all. They report that they won't run to mom or dad "just because they see some bootyshaking", but parents are their ultimate confidantes if something really bad happens. For example, if someone started calling or sending MSN messages with "strange personal questions", young children would tell their parents.
- Most of the participants, especially girls, were not aware of the illegal side of downloading. When told, most of them did not seem to care much anyway as no one in their life has ever faced any type of consequences.

1.10 Factors shaping public discourses about the Internet

a) The National Parent's Association in Iceland has been very active in creating public awareness of online risks.
b) The National Parent's Association in Iceland has been active in this area since 2000. Prior to that some minor projects raised concerns about the Internet, but these were mostly related to technical issues.
c) The message of the NGOs speaks with one voice.

d) EC
e) Both a hotline and helpline
f) All groups
g) The general message is safe and positive use, but net-ethics and meeting strangers online have been in the forefront.
h) According to national surveys the campaigns have been very successful.

There are a number of events that have had significant influences over the last few years. In 2005 SAFT created a campaign on console gaming that, according to before and after national surveys, created significant changes in the public awareness of content and labelling. In 2006 a huge SAFT national campaign on net-ethics shaped a new landscape concerning online conduct. The start of the campaign was followed by a TV documentary analysing the online conduct of paedophiles, laying online traps that where aired to the general public. This has resulted in changes in the online behaviour of young people as well as discussion about new laws in this area.

2 The Educational system

2.1 General education

Complete illiteracy, or not being able to read at all, is very rare in Iceland. On the other hand, functional illiteracy in Iceland, or not being able to properly understand written text, is estimated to be similar to other Nordic countries where it is estimated to be around 10% amongst the adult population (see www.bjorn.is/pistlar/2001/08/04).

Higher education is widely available in Iceland. Compulsory education is free of charge as are most secondary schools programmes. Most universities charge only modest registration fees (c.a. 500 euro per student per academic year). In a survey conducted in 2007 amongst parents of children aged 6 to 16, 21% had only finished compulsory education, 39% had finished secondary education (grammar school or vocational education) and 40% had completed university education (see Gallup survey for SAFT-Iceland).

It is safe to say that today's parents and children have had a rather similar experience of schooling. The current legislation concerning compulsory education was passed in 1995, and in 1996 municipalities took over the running of compulsory education. This comprises primary and lower secondary education, which often takes place at the same institution. The law states that education is mandatory for children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 16. The school year lasts nine months, and begins between August 21 and September 1, ending between May 31 and June 10. The minimum number of school days is 170, but after a new teachers' wage contract, this will increase to 180. Lessons take place five days a week. What has changed during the past twenty years or so is mainly that whereas in the 1980s it was not uncommon for students to seek education beyond the compulsory level, this has now become an exception with almost 90% of students entering upper secondary schools.

2.2 Education and the Internet

Almost all schools (with the exception of very small schools in remote areas) have broadband and it is probably easy for children to get access to the Internet at school. But as most children have access at home, school is not considered a place to access the Internet.

Although media is on the curriculum, until recently education has focused more on its technical aspects. Media and life skill educators have some opportunity to shape the curriculum according to what they think is important, and they are increasingly focusing on the social and psychological side of the Internet/IT/Media. The general educational curriculum is currently under review and Internet/IT/Media education will probably receive more focus in the coming years.

3 Wider society

3.1 Social change

The most significant social change to occur in Iceland in the past ten years is the increasing number of people with foreign citizenship living in the country. This figure rose from about 3% in 1996 to 6% in 2006.

There has been a significant emphasis on the importance of information technologies for Icelandic society, and politicians have regularly expressed a strong belief that Iceland should be at the forefront when it comes to using these technologies. The government set up a four-year action plan on information technologies in 2004.

Iceland is not a classless society. Social class is only based on the distinction between manual and non-manual work to a limited extent. Traditional measures of social class based on SES have been difficult to apply in Iceland. There is, however, a notable difference between urban and rural communities and between the capital area and other regions in Iceland. Iceland is very sparsely populated (only 3 inhabitants per square km, compared to 12 in Norway). The possibilities of jobs and education are more limited in the sparsely populated areas outside the capital.

Urbanisation has been one of the main characteristics of social change in Iceland in the 20th century. At the beginning of the 21st century more than 60% of Icelanders were living in the capital area, compared to 17 to 26% in the other Nordic countries. In addition, only about 9% of the population was living in sparsely populated or rural areas in Iceland (see Ólafsson and Gíslason, 2006) The Internet is available to almost all citizens with the official goal being the proliferation of ISDN as a minimum. Access to broadband and DSL connections is not available in the most sparsely populated areas.

Icelandic society is traditionally rather homogenous. For example, in 1981 about 99% of the population in Iceland was of Icelandic origin and half of those with foreign citizenship were from the other Nordic countries. In 2006 94% of the population was of Icelandic origin and only 9% of the foreigners were from the other Nordic countries. This change has not had an impact on tolerance of what is found on the Internet (see www.hagstofa.is).

3.2 Role of the state

The state in Iceland is generally considered to be a little bit less interventionist than in the other Nordic countries. This can be seen from the tax level and how welfare provisions are organised (see Ólafsson, 1999).

There is probably a high level of tolerance towards expression of political opinions in the public sphere in Iceland. There have been some cases related to free speech in which the Supreme Court refused to put restrictions on peoples' freedom to express their views.

4. Other factors affecting children's online experiences

English is the first foreign language for children in Iceland. Most students in Iceland will start English lessons in the 5th grade (aged 10), and lately many elementary schools have started to teach English at an even earlier age. The second foreign language is Danish (or Swedish or Norwegian for students who have lived in those countries for long enough to learn those languages). Most students start to learn Danish in the 7th grade (aged 12) (see www.hagstofa.is). Most children in Iceland are thus able to understand content on the Internet in English and to some extent in other Scandinavian languages (Danish, Norwegian and Swedish).

It is difficult to say whether Icelandic children stay indoors more or less than other children in Europe. If they happen to spend more time inside the reason has more to do with the weather than parents being concerned about their security when outdoors. Most children in Iceland have their own bedroom (92% of 13 year olds and 98% of 15 year olds, according to HBSC-Iceland unpublished data), and in general these children have good access to media technologies in their bedrooms.

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