National report for Italy

By Maria Francesca Murru, Giovanna Mascheroni

1. The Internet

1.1 Children's Internet access

According to ISTAT (National Institute of Statistics)[i], in 2006 households with Internet connection increased from 34,5 % as registered in 2005, to 35,6%. Among these, 18,7% have a narrowband Internet connection and 14,4% have a broadband connection. When analysing the penetration rate of broadband, it is important to consider that in Italy there is still an infrastructural digital divide: in fact only 88% of the total population live in regions where the necessary infrastructure for broadband connection is available. According to *Osservatorio sulla Banda Larga*, a national Executive Committe for Broadband constituted by Communication Ministry that monitors the diffusion of broadband, there were nearly 6 million Italian households with a broadband connection in 2006, almost 27% of the total population living in regions covered by broadband infrastructure.

ICTs' diffusion is strictly related to the age of family members and to the professional status of breadwinners. According to ISTAT (2006)[ii], among families with at least one teenager, 69,7% have a personal computer and 51,8% have an Internet connection. These families also have the highest penetration rate of broadband connection (21,1%). By contrast, among families whose members are over 65 years old, only 5,5% have a personal computer and only 2,8% have an Internet connection.

With respect to work status, among families whose breadwinner is an entrepreneur or carries out a managerial role, 70% have an Internet connection. In contrast, only 30% of factory workers' families have access to the Internet.

If we consider the ICTs' penetration rate across the country, we find remarkable asymmetries, even though they seem to be lessening in recent years. In northern and central regions, statistics register higher penetration rates of Internet connection: 39,6% in the central region and 38% in the north, versus the 29,5% in the southern region and just the 21,9% in the islands.

In general the use of PCs is significantly higher among young people; 75% of people between 11 and 19 years old use the personal computer. The usage peak of the Internet is registered among people aged between 15 and 24 years old, among them 67%said they accessed the Internet at least one time within the last three months before the survey. The great majority of people that regularly accessthe Internet are students (79,9%), followed by employees (71%) and managers (69,8%).On average, 41,4% of people over three years old use the personal computer, and 34,1% of people over six years old have access to the Internet.

With respect to the place of access, the majority of minors access to Internet mainly at home and secondarily at school. Among children aged 6 to 10, 75,6 % access the Internet at home and 35,1% at school. 79,4 % of young people aged 11 to 14 access the Internet at home, 40,2% at school. 76,1% of young people aged 15 to 17 access the Internet at home, 57,2% at school. 83,2% of young adults aged 18-19 access the Internet at home, 46,6% at school. Therefore we can suppose that as the children get older their access to Internet at home increases and the access to Internet in educational context become significant, especially for students at secondary school.

If we take a look to international data sources, we find some differences. According to Eurostat, in 2006 40% of Italian households have Internet access at home, so the percentage is slightly higher than that registered nationally by ISTAT (35,6%). The diffusion of Internet connection rose to 43% during the 2007, still remaining among the lower performances in EU. In regard to broadband connection, according to Eurostat the percentage of households that

have a broadband connection (among households that are connectable to broadband technologies) rose from 16% in 2006 to 25% registered in 2007, therefore getting closer to national data provided by Osservatorio sulla Banda Larga (27%). Data regarding individual usage are difficult to compare essentially because international and national sources use different criteria to assess the frequency of use and also different age groups. According to Eurostat, among individuals aged 16 to 74, 62% regularly use broadbandInternet access (accessed the Internet at least once a week, within the last three months before the survey), and the 49% use the non-broadband Internet access (with the same usage frequency).

In 2003 the most important trade associations of Internet providers (AIIS, Italian Association of Internet Providers; Federcomin, Association of ICT industries, Association of economic operators involved in convergent communication services) subscribed to a self-regulation code for the safeguard of minors on the Internet[iii]. The code binds Internet service providers to make available on their websites appropriate webpages providing information and advice about Internet safety tools and the ways to indicate potential violations of the code. Moreover, subscribers have to provide a variety of electronic navigation services or as an alternative point users to other websites offering this kind of services. We checked a sample of the major Italian provider of broadband connection (Tiscali, Fastweb, Libero Wind and Tele2). The only website that partially fulfils the code is Tiscali, which provides a range of filters available for a payment, promoting its own products. The Italian Ministry of Communication plays an important role in raising awareness. In a website dedicated to minors' safety online (www.tiseiconnesso.it), organised by Save the Children Italy but financed by the Ministry of Communication, a list of filters is provided including both free and pay software. Searching for keywords like "*filtro Internet minori*" (filter Internet minors) in Google, the third result (the first is a commercial website promoting all kind of free software, the second website is not available) we found was www.ilfiltro.it (18 December 2007), a website that offers a comprehensive presentation of the major available Internet safety tools, organised by a non-profit organization and financed by Italian Home Office. Apart from that, other industry players also play a key role, like Microsoft for example, which offers in its website safety advices for parents, drawing attention to its own filters.

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

According to ISTAT (2006) 35,6% of Italian households had access to the Internet. Of these, the 51, 8 % are families with at least one child. Among households with an Internet connection, 14,4% have a broadband connection. Of these, 21,1% of those having a broadband access are families with at least one child. In the a study conducted by the Ministry of Education of the technological infrastructure of the Italian schools (including primary school, lower secondary schools and upper secondary school), 86% of the national schools have an Internet connection. Of these, 62,45% have a broadband access (*Observatory of ICT Infrastructure*, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione).

Inequalities in access are strictly related to socioeconomic status. As shown by the research Mediamonitor Minori (Tirocchi, Andò, Antenore, 2002), ICTs' availability increases as socioeconomic status rises.

SES	**Have/use ICT**	**Don't have/use ICT**
Low	54%	45%
Middle	74%	26%
High	82%	16%

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

In 2006, 48,2 % of Italian children (aged 7 to 19) had access to and used the Internet (Eurispes, Telefono Azzurro 2006), of which 38,2% had domestic access, 3,4% access the Internet in friends' houses, 2,9% in relatives and acquaintances' houses, 2,2% used the Internet from school and 1,5% from Internet points. In 2007, 34% of Italian children (aged 7 to 11) had access and regularly used the Internet while 53% did not use the Internet. 78% of teenagers aged 12 to 19 regularly used the Internet. 63,8 % of teenagers accessed the Internet mainly from home, 5% from their friends' house, and 3,3% from school. A technological gap from different national regions is reported. 82,4% of teenagers residing in the centre, 75,1% in north-west, 71,6% in the north-east have access from home, versus 46,2 % of those living in the south, and 32,5% living in the two majors islands. 32,7% of those residing in the south and 35,6% of those located in the islands report they never access the Internet (Eurispes, Telefono Azzurro (2007), Eighth National Report on Childhood and youth).

Here are two figures that show the frequency of Internet usage and the daily average use respectively:

	INTERNET USE (ISTAT 2006)					
AGE	YES	EVERYDAY	ONCE A WEEK	SOMETIMES PER MONTH	SOMETIMES PER YEAR	NO USE
3-5	-	-	-	-	-	-
6-10	13,0%	1,1%	5,9%	4,0%	2,0%	84,4%
11-13	39 %	3,5%	18,7%	11,1%	5,8%	60,3%
14-17	62%	12,2%	35,3%	10,8%	3,8%	36,8%
TOT	36,7%	5,6%	19,4%	8,2%	3,6%	61,7%

[ISTAT, Information and Communication Technologies: Availability in households and individual use, 2006]

Average daily use of the Internet by kids aged 7-19 (Eurispes, Telefono Azzurro 2006)	%
I don't' use the Internet everyday	44,5%
5-30 minutes per day	15%
31-60 minutes per day	11,8%
2-3 hours per day	6,1%
4-5 hours per day	0, 9%
More than 5 hours per day	1,9%
Doesn't know, doesn't answer	19,8%
Total	100%

[Eurispes, Telefono Azzurro (2006), Seventh National Report on Childhood and youth]

Most of the research showed that the access rate to the Internet and other online technologies, as well as the frequency of Internet usage, increases as children grow:

	INTERNET USE (source: Children's everyday life ISTAT 2006)					
AGE	YES	EVERYDAY	ONCE A WEEK	SOMETIMES PER MONTH	SOMETIMES PER YEAR	NO USE
3-5	-	-	-	-	-	-
6-10	13,0%	1,1%	5,9%	4,0%	2,0%	84,4%
11-13	39 %	3,5%	18,7%	11,1%	5,8%	60,3%
14-17	62%	12,2%	35,3%	10,8%	3,8%	36,8%
TOT	36,7%	5,6%	19,4%	8,2%	3,6%	61,7%

[ISTAT 2006, Children's everyday life]

There is no available evidence regarding gender difference in children's access, because in general children's access to ICTs is related to the households' access. However, there is some evidence as regards gender differences and frequency of use. According to Eurispes Telefono Azzurro 2006, the average daily use of online technologies is higher for boys than for girls:

Average daily use of the Internet	**Gender**	
	Boys	Girls
I don't use the Internet every day	37,7	53,9
5-30 minutes per day	18,2	12,1
31-60 minutes per day	14,8	7,8
2-3 hours per day	7,3	5,0
4-5 hours per day	0,8	0,7
More than 5 hours per day	3,1	0,4
Doesn't know, doesn't answer	18,2	20,2
Total	100,0	100,0

[Eurispes, Telefono Azzurro (2006), Seventh National Report on Childhood and youth]

Two of the studies identified present findings that support the hypothesis that there are gender differences in the levels of skill (i.e. higher for boys). According to Accorsi and Gui (2006), 56% of the boys interviewed demonstrate high level of digital skills, while only 35% of the girls show similar competencies. The statistics presented by Eurydice (2006) confirm the overall results:

Skills	**Boys**	**Girls**
Downloading files	70%	52%
Using Power Point	50%	33%
Creating a web page	26%	13%
Sending email with attachment	50%	33%

1.4 Internet and Media Content for Children

In line with the recommendations of the Television without Frontiers Directive, the Italian self-regulation code about television and minors provides that media industries owning more than one channel with a non-thematic scheduling undertake to introduce into at least one of their channels a “protected” strip of scheduling, from 1600 to 1900, devoted to content suitable for children, respecting the quality and safety parameters outlined by the same code (e.g. contents enabling children to have authentic and autonomous experiences to develop a critical aptitude towards media, increasing their chances to actively participate in their real life contexts).

Within this framework, broadcasters differ from each other in respect to the total amount of time-scheduling dedicated to content for children. In Italy the main provider of content for children on analogue TV is Mediaset, the major Italian commercial television network. One of its three channels, Italia1, dedicates 20,1% of its weekly scheduling to content for children, more than any other terrestrial analoguel channel, and 7,3% on the weekend (Starcom 2007[iv]). Italia1 is the most popular channel among children aged 8 to 14. Its audience share in the afternoon is 40% and its content (mostly cartoons like the Japanese manga Dragon Ball, Naruto, Hunter x Hunter, and TV series like The Simpson) is the most viewed by children (Starcom 2007).

The national public service broadcaster provides content for children through two of its three channels, RaiDue and RaiTre. The last public service contract of Rai for 2007-2009 provides that in the time slot 700 – 2230, at least 10% of the total broadcast programming on analogue terrestrial channels should be dedicated to minors. According to Starcom 2007, RaiDue dedicates 11% of its weekly programming to content for children, and 2,8% during the weekend. It reaches its highest audience share in the early morning, with cartoons and entertainment programmes dedicated mostly to children aged 4 to 7. RaiTre, covers 3,1% of the total weekly programming with content for children, whereas the corresponding quota during the weekend reaches 9,4%. Programmes are mostly for children a bit older than those targeted by RaiDue and are concentrated in the early afternoon. They include telefilms but also high quality programmes mixing originally entertainment and education, produced directly by Rai.

There are no publicly available data about the proportion of home (i.e. Italian) produced programming for children broadcasted by Rai, nonetheless public broadcasting has a long tradition of home produced programmes for kids, and some of these formats (Melevisione, www.melevisione.rai.it) have been leaders in exploring and exploiting Internet opportunities through interactive and rich websites.

Over the last few years there has been a consistent decrease in content for children on analogue terrestrial TV, related to the increasing importance of digital terrestrial TV and most of all of satellite TV. In 2007, the penetration rate of digital terrestrial television does not exceed 20% of the potential market (17% according to ITMedia Consulting[v], 20% according to Starcom 2007) whereas satellite TV (free and pay) is adopted by 30% of the Italian population and it’s still registering remarkable high penetration rate. In general, Sky subscriptions are taken up most typically by households with young children. In fact, Italian parents decide very often to take out subscriptions to satellite television in order to find in its thematic channels better and safer content than those offered by free television, even by public service broadcasters (Aroldi 2007)[vi]. In digital terrestrial television, one of the most viewed channels is Boing, owned by Mediaset and Turner Broadcasting, that reaches a 2,4% share of children aged 4 to 14. In satellite TV, the national public service broadcaster is present with two channels, RaiSat YOYO, whose target is children up to the age of 6, and RaiSat Smash for teenagers. Their audience shares are respectively 0,3% and 0,5%, lower than other dominant channels, like Disney Channel, Boing, Playhouse Disney, Disney Channel +1, that each represent an average share of 2%.

Several broadcasters have websites that carry programme schedule information, sometimes allowing one to download podcasts and videos of TV programmes. This possibility is offered especially by websites of public broadcasters, in line with the recent normative framework that requires the availability on the web of all the contents produced by Rai. Websites built on television brands are in general very rich in additional contents, providing games, videoclips, music and photos, within interactive patterns of consumption and production offered to visitors. Though there are many data concerning web 2.0 and social networking sites for the whole Italian population online, no data on kids' favourite websites are publicly available.

Regarding the extent to which children are targeted by commercial media content, as far as the regulative framework is concerned, the self-regulation code about television and minors provides some kind of restriction on commercial targeting of children. There are in particular three stages of protection. The first two levels apply to the entire programme scheduling or to a scheduling strip when parental control is assumed to be exercised (from 0700 – 1600, and from 1900 – 2230) and it consists in restrictions on advertising contents, forbidding for instance misleading advertising, spots representing children consuming alcohol or in harmful situations, spots undermining parents' and teachers' authority. The third level applies to the protected strip 1600 – 1900 and requires that broadcasters alert children when a commercial break is beginning and ending, forbidding at the same time some specific kind of products' advertising like for instance hard liquor.

We must note that the last public service contract of Rai for 2007-2009 has introduced some new rules even in relation to advertising restrictions. It forbids advertising interruptions for programmes lasting less than half an hour and for cartoons and it forbids that cartoon characters appear in advertising preceding and following cartoons.

According to a research undertaken by Altroconsumo[vii], an Italian consumer association, in the 2004, 30% of advertising broadcasted during a week in the time slot 1600 – 2230 by Italia1, the most popular TV channel among kids and teenagers, was dedicated to children (the total amount of time dedicated to advertising corresponds to 23% of the total programming).

RaiDue and RaiTre, the other two channels of the public broadcasters, represent a lower percentage, respectively 22% and 16% of total advertising, that in turn does not exceed 9% of the total weekly programming. On satellite television, advertising onj thematic channels for children is completely commited to this target. Disney Channel for instance dedicates 4% of the total programming to advertising.

1.5 Opportunities experienced by children online

According to Eurispes Telefono Azzurro 2006, the main opportunities experienced by children themselves are:

- Finding educational resources online (40,2% of the sample report using the Internet to find information and data for school-related activities)
- Social networking with old/new friends (19,3% of the interviewees communicate via email, 15,9 % communicate by chat, and 16,5% participate in an online forum)
- Entertainment, games and fun (54,9% plays videogames and 19,3 % is involved in online role-playing games).

In ISTAT 2006, the most practiced activities are:

ACTIVITIES	**AGE**			
	6-10	11-14	15-17	18-19
Sending and receiving an email	25,7	37	60,4	72,9
Searching information on products/services	12,6	22,3	39,1	50,9
Other activities or information seeking	29,3	52,3	59,7	67,4
Gaining information from National or Local Government	1	4	7,2	19,8
Visiting Travel related sites and servicest	3,3	6,7	15,6	28,4
Reading or downloading news, newspapers, magazines	6,3	21,0	31,0	33,2
Gaming or downloading games, photos, music	65,8	60,4	63,4	60,7
Downloading software	1,2	15,0	24,7	30,5
Seeking health advice	2,1	7	11,5	17,2
Downloading national/local Government forms	0,3	2,8	4,7	13,3
Chatting	6,8	28,7	43,6	50,2
Online banking	-	-	1,9	4,0
Online shopping	-	5,9	9,3	16,9
Radio/TV streaming	7,4	18,6	24,3	23,1
Finding a job	-	-	3,8	14,1
e-learning (schools, universities)	11,4	17,7	25,3	41,5
Professional education	-	-	6,8	10,5
Other learning activities	7,9	12,8	15,1	17,2
Sending Local/national Government forms	0,3	2,1	4,5	9,2
VoIp, videoconferences	0,9	3,7	7,7	7,4
Selling products/services	-	-	2,9	6,5

[ISTAT, Information and Communication Technologies: Availability in households and individual use, 2006]

On the basis of a quantitative research based on a non-representative sample on teenagers aged 14 to 19 (Bisi, 2003), the Internet seems to have an impact on the political and civic participation of the interviewees. 44,30% of them perceive the Internet as a place for free and democratic expression of personal opinions. 10,13% consider netstrike as a useful and non-violent means of expression, and 37,55% as means of expressing dissent. The online opportunities perceived by parents are investigated in the 2002 Agcom report (a non-representative sample). The Internet is mainly perceived by parents as a source of information, so the main opportunity is access to global information and, secondly, as a resource for education. The research project outlined above on the penetration of ICTs in Italian households (Istat 2006) provides evidence that the range of online activities increases as children get older.

There are considerable gender differences in the range and type of uses. Research conducted in 2001 (Tirocchi, Andò, Antenore, 2002) shows that girls tend to use the Internet mainly for educational purposes (61% versus 39% that prefer games activities). In contrast, boys demonstrate a strong inclination towards playful usage (57% versus 43%). These

findings are also confirmed by subsequent research (Eurispes Telefono Azzurro 2006, Seventh Report on Childhood and Youth):

Activities	**Answers**	**Gender**	
		Boys	**Girls**
Chat	Yes	15,9	17,0
	No	63,7	61,3
Looking information relevant for education	Yes	38,5	44,0
	No	42,5	35,5
Participating in chat and forum	Yes	17,9	15,2
	No	60,3	60,6
Visiting weblogs	Yes	10,9	8,2
	No	65,6	66,3
Downloading music/film	Yes	54,2	39,4
	No	27,4	37,2
Looking for forbidden contents	Yes	8,4	6,4
	No	67,8	68,8

According to Accorsi and Gui (2006), there is a marked connection between the level of digital skills and two of the factors that influence socioeconomic status: the work status of parents and their cultural background.

Professional status of parents	**High digital skills**
Manager/Professional/ Entrepreneur	55%
Clerical work	50%
Worker	40%

Cultural Background (parental education)	**High digital skills**
High	60%
Middle	46%
low	35%

1.6 Risks experienced by children online

According to Eurispes Telefono Azzurro 2006, the main risks experienced by children aged 7 to 11 when online are:

1. Exposure to harmful or offensive content (24,9%)
2. Harassment (20,5 %)

Among teenagers aged 12 to 19, 17,6 % have said they were victims of harassment (there are no available data about exposure to harmful content for this group). As far as cyberbullying is concerned, Eurispes Telefono Azzurro 2007 provides some evidence for the children aged 7 to 11. 11,5% of the children interviewed have admitted being victims of cyberbullying. Among these, 3,8% have received threatening content, 4,5% have received fake information about themselves, and 3,2% have been forced out of forum or chats. Among teenagers aged 12 to 19, 8,1% have received threatening content, 5,1% have been foced out of forum or chats, 21,7% have received fake information about themselves.

The recent study, "Use of Community, Instant Messaging and Social Network. Research about teenagers aged 13-17[1]", conducted by Doxa (one of the most important private research institute in Italy) and commissioned by Save the Children Italy, revealed that 16% of those interviewed have experienced bad and unpleasant situations on the Internet. Within the research's sample a particular group is distinguished as the group of *users*, labelled as those who have visited at least once a site of instant messaging, social networking and/or communities. Among users, the percentage of persons claiming unpleasant experience in

[1] The survey has been realized from January the 31th and February the 3th. The interviews were conducted with C.A.T.I system and the representative sample was composed by teenagers aged 13-17.

web usage approaches 33%. These bad experiences are expressed and distributed as in the following schedule:

	Users	All
Coming upon paedo-pornoghapic contents	15,2%	7,4%
Receiving harmful/threatening contents	9,8%	4,8%
Coming upon someone asking for sexual images	8,6%	4,8%
Coming upon someone asking to have online sex	7,4%	3,6%
Receiving embarrassing images of known persons	6,4%	3,1%
Unauthorized diffusion of personal information	5,6%	2,7%
Unauthorized diffusion of personal embarrassing images	2,3%	1,1%

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

- At a spontaneous level, the only potential risks which childrenperceived come from virus attacks or hidden payment services. However when filling-in the self-completed exercise it appears that they are conscious of potential risks arising from the use of different applications.
- As far as disturbing contents and images, until now, nobody went through a shocking experience on the Internet.
- Bullying is unfortunately a spreading phenomenon in school, but it is a face-to-face type of abuse rather than through the Internet.

According to the Eurobarometer survey of 2005/6, 19% of parents/guardians think that their child has encountered at least some harmful or illegal content on the Internet

According to Eurispes Telefono Azzurro (2006) there are no significant gender differences in exposure to harmful or offensive content (25,7% boys and 24,8 % girls). Gender differences increase in relation to the risk of harassment: it is notably higher for boys (23,7%) than for girls (16,7%). As far as exposure to cyberbulling is concerned, there is no clear evidence of gender differences, but there is some evidence of the uneven distribution of this practice being perpetrated by boys and girls. According to Eurispes Telefono Azzurro (2007), 4% of boys aged 7 to 11 have admitted they had sent harmful content through the Internet or mobile phones, versus 2,4% of girls. 5% of boys compared to 1,8% of girls reported giving out false information about another person. Among teenagers, 11,9% of boys compared to 2,6% of girls admitted sending harmful content through the Internet or mobile phones. 12% of boys versus 6,1% of girls reported giving out false information about another person.

1.7 Internet regulation and promotion

The Italian legislative framework relating Internet and paedo-pornographic content has been built through three subsequent regulatory interventions. The first, in 1998, acknowledged the legal paradigm of paedo-pornography and sexual exploitation of minors committed on the Internet. In 2006 the second legislative intervention led to the establishment of “Centro Nazionale per il contrasto della pedopornografia”, a monitoring unit managed by the police that specifically looks for sexually abusive images of children circulating on the Internet, working at the same time as an important interface between law enforcement, industry, child protection, and government policy. This normative path was definitively implemented in January 2007, with a law requiring Internet service providers to adopt technically appropriate filtering systems able to black out pornographic websites six hours after the police notification.

Beside these strong regulatory interventions, increasing awareness of the presence of harmful content on the web has begun to spread, mostly thank to CNU (Consiglio Nazionale degli utenti), a national agency related to AgCom, the national authority for communication. The CNU brings together academic research and law enforcement stakeholders, and its main purpose is the promotion and safeguard of the rights of citizens within the media and

communication environment. In 2002 the CNU formulated the guidelines for a “Code of rights” for children and teenagers online. Besides a strong emphasis on equality and on the necessity to eliminate any cultural, economic and infrastructural obstacle to ICT access, the document explicitly ratifies the right for children to be protected against “violent” or “ethically unacceptable” content available on the Internet. This purpose has to be accomplished with the active involvement of Internet service providers and Internet content providers, which have the responsibility to classify content according to the specific cultural, educational and social needs of children.

These guidelines are very important because they functioned as the basis for the subsequent Self Regulation Code about Internet and minors, subscribed to by the most important Italian trade association of ICT industries in November 2003. The Self Regulation Code outlines three areas of safeguard: privacy, protection from harmful content and protection from commercial persuasion. It identifies an array of tools and practices that subscribers (access providers, housing providers, content providers and also Internet point administrator) have to follow in order to assure the safety of children online. Firstly, Internet service providers have to make available on their websites appropriate webpages providing, as noted earlier in this report, information and advice about available Internet safety tools and the ways to indicate potential violations of the code. Secondly, subscribers, according to technological tools available, have to provide a variety of electronic navigation services or as an alternative, refer users to other websites offering this kind of services. Lastly, content providers can (if convenient) control access to certain kinds of content based on the identification of websites’ users. A National Committee “Internet @ Minori” has to monitor the correct application of the rules and mediate in case of rules’ contravention. But it is important to note that the efficacy of the code is very limited. In fact, it holds good only for those few providers showing in their websites the logo “Internet@Minori”.

In general, this is a problem concerning all self-regulation tools, whose effectiveness must be measured essentially in terms of a moral suasion. The code is at the moment under review and the actual Communication Ministry is assessing the possibility to unify it with the self-regulation code for television, binding both of them into a legislative framework valid erga omnes.

As regards content available through mobile phones, a self-regulation Code subscribed to by the four major operators contains a distinction between contents inciting hate, racism, religious discrimination or legal infraction (typical illegal content for Italian laws), that are explicitly banned from additional service, and “sensitive” content with a declared erotic and sexual nature, subordinated to various kind of parental control systems as imposed also by AgCom (the national communication authority).

Recently Italian public opinion has become very sensitive especially to the problem of cyberbullying, related to a long series of key events emphasized by the press. What happened in most cases was that children published on social networking websites like YouTube, photos or videos produced at school in which they made fun of fellow students. Some politicians have questioned the hypothesis of attributing strict liability to Internet service providers, but the guidelines of the Ministry of Education have taken a different approach. Firstly, they forbid the use of cell phones at school and secondly they introduced disciplinary sanctions or penalties enforced by the Authority for Privacy aimed at children (and those parents/guardians responsible for them) who spread unauthorized photos or videos via Internet or cell phones. Moreover, in December 2007 the Ministry of Education obtained the collaboration of the major telecommunication companies for a communication campaign aimed at raising awareness of privacy rights among children and teenagers.

Under the past government (2001-2006), political interventions supporting the E-Society were managed centrally by the Ministry of Innovation, whose tasks have now been redistributed among other departments like the Communication Ministry, which supervise the Committee for Broadband Commission and the economic regulation of the ICT market, the Ministry for Innovation in Public Authority, responsible for e-government policies and the Ministry of Education which takes charge of promoting ICT at school. The current intervention of the Communication Ministry seems to prioritize mostly programmes promoting the diffusion of

broadband infrastructure. In 2005, public grants for ADSL operators have consistently accelerated the broadband diffusion rate but the availability of broadband services is still problematic. 9% of Italian population live in regions, mainly southern regions, where implementation of infrastructure is too expensive in relation to potential profits for telecommunication companies. In order to cope with this problem, the current government has established a Committee for Broadband diffusion, whose aim is primarily to monitor the implementation of the network, to lead negotiations between public local governments and private operators, in order to identify priorities for government resources.

Among programmes aimed at promoting the diffusion of ICT among youth, one initiative of the previous government consisted of soft loans for PC purchase made by primary, secondary and university students and for courses of European Computer Driving Licence. The initiatives of the Ministry of Education are more specifically targeted at promoting the adoption of online technologies in school contexts. Besides some agreements with private companies, such as Cisco Systems and Microsoft, in order to support the ICT adoption by teachers, an observatory for technology at school has been established with the collaboration of academic researcher in Informatics. The observatory aims at providing online support for schoolsto adopt ICT, at promoting and facilitating the adoption of free software and at describing and spreading the best practices in ICT implementation. A specific section is dedicated to safety issues in websurfing, with a list of advice about how to transform safety tools like filters and whitelisting into fruitful teaching projects. Moreover, a vast array of initiatives promoting e-learning have been undertaken involving regional institutions, but it is very difficult to assess their real impact.

a) Implemented programmes at raising awareness of potential social impacts and risks related to the Internet

Programmes aimed at raising awareness of potential risks related to the Internet have been promoted by the Communication Ministry. The Communication Ministry has recently run a communication campaign, spread through television, the press and the Internet and targeted mainly at parents. It focuses on the concept that the best way to protect children from online risks is to know new technologies and to share with children related activities. Press campaigns play on technical terminology, like “URL”, “streaming”, “spamming”, “Bluetooth”, as if it were part of the youth slang in order to emphasize the existing gap between parents and their kids. This initiative has also involved the Italian trade association of Internet providers, which has made sure banners are present on all affiliated websites, and Vodafone Italia, which has sent customers a MMS to promote responsible use of mobile phones.

Besides these campaigns, the Communication Ministry has commiaaioned Save the Children Italy to create a website, www.tiseiconnesso.it, (promoted also through advertisement), whose contents are organized into three sections, targeted respectively at parents, teachers and children. The website offers advice and explanations about the Internet and its main applications, attempting to raise risk awareness with a communication style very near to that of children and to offer to parents safety tools easy to implement. It also provides links to and information on recent initiatives trying to promote a fruitful and proactive use of the Internet and new ICTs by children. For instance, at the moment it is announcing a competition called “Bumpers” thAt consistS of producing funny videos in which children and parents, or children and teachers, speak about their Internet usage in amusing ways (the competition is promoted within the Internet Safer Day 2008).

b) Implemented programmes to promote media literacy

In Italy, there have been as yet no official and systematic policies from the Ministry of Education and Media Education. Such programmes have only been proposed by some scholars in universities and by teachers in schools. Both the Conservative Government and the current one of the Centre-Left, were involved in plans for changing the school curricula, unmodified since 1929. In both cases Media Education seems to remain outside the preoccupations of the Ministry (Media Literacy in Europe, 2007)[viii]. Recently, from the Nineties until today, public institutions have paid growing attention to computer education, multimedia

and new technologies, mainly the Internet and mobiles. In 1995, the Ministry of Education announced ICT skills that were to bea primary goal of the National Plan for New Technologies in the School (1995), but only from an instrumental, non-critical, perspective, with limited connection to the mass media.

As we can assess by the vast array of e-learning project promoted nowadays by the Ministry of Education (see part a), media and technology are also considered to be important supporting tools for developing other subjects, such as Italian (language), history, music or art and images. Some media literacy-related skills and competencies can be found in various subjects in the Italian curriculum. The situation is quite different according to the different levels of instruction. In Primary School (6 to 11 years) there is a teaching area, named "Media and Languages", that traditionally involves all the activities related to nonverbal forms of communication: drawing, photography, movie-making, computer use and Internet use. In the Low Secondary (12 to 14), the main tradition is to charge the teacher of Italian Literature (and those who of Techniques and Art) with the role of media education teaching. Here the problem is that, lacking a curriculum established at a national level, everything is left to the single teacher's initiative. At the High School level, the main interest in Media Literacy is oriented to Education Technology (Media Literacy in Europe /Country Profile 2007). The National guidelines for individualised study plans, approved in April 2007 by the Ministry of Education (see par 5.3) identify media education as a core performance to be accomplished but common operative pattern has not yet been defined.

Apart from systematic educational policies, the Ministry of Education has financed the project "TV On Line", designed to be an introduction to the world of multimedia, allowing students to find out about the language of television and film and TV production techniques. It focuses on educational aspects, to increase critical senses (www.TVgiovani.it/index.asp; 76 videos produced by 25 institutes can be downloaded). Besides the intervention of public institutions, media education has been promoted by many civil society and academic initiatives. Among those worth mentioning are Cremit, *Centro di Ricerca sull' Educazione ai Media*, *all' Informazione e alla Tecnología* (CREMIT), at the Catholic University of Milan, which develops the OMERO program (Online Media Education Resources for Organizations) devoted to teacher training and didactic initiatives in the classroom and the MED (*Associazione Italiana per l'Educazione ai Media and the Comunicazione*; Italian Association for Media Education and Communication) which coordinates the work of some Catholic organisations and teachers working in media education in Italy.

Interesting organisations come from the convergence of civil society initiatives with public support. One is the OnLine School of the Osservatorio sui Diritti dei minori (Observatory of Children's Rights, a scientific committee created in Milan in 2001 by a group of sociologists, psychologists, child psychiatrists, officials from the state police's department of minors, educational specialists, and lawyers specialising in children's rights is one of these (www.osservatoriominori.org/index.htm). Its website, run by the observatory and sponsored by the Ministry of Communication, provides information on media education. Its objective is to develop a shared culture in which the media are used as instruments to promote education.
In the media industry, Media Education activities are mainly developed by RAI, the Italian Public Service broadcaster. In particular by RAI Educational in satellite TV and RAI TRE in analogue TV, with programs like *Screen Saver,* a programme that invites and helps young people and schools to produce videos and short films, and projects like *TG in class***,** whose objective is for schools (50 schools involved) to produce their own television news (with students taking on the roles of producers, directors and journalists and using their own stories).

1.8 Parental mediation

There is no available evidence about the most practiced strategies of parental mediation, but among the research included in the repository, two of them provide some general information about parental mediation. The first (Eurispes Telefono Azzurro 2007) shows that 45,1% of parents limit the total amount of time spent online by their children aged 7 to 11, versus 26,9% of parents of teenagers aged 12 to 19. The second (Moige 2006) reveal that almost all

the parents interviewed give advice to their children about safety online. The three most cited pieces of advice are: to avoid pornographic websites (72%), not to reveal personal information like email or phone number (69%) and to avoid communication with unknown persons (54%).

1.9 Media literacy

Many research projects state that the greater the amount of Internet usage, the higher are the skills developed, and the older the kids are, the wider competencies they develop. For example, in the research on ICTs in Italian households produced by ISTAT 2006, the skills investigated tend to significantly increase according to the interviewees' age:

	Search engine	Email With attachment	Participating to chat, newsgroup and forum	Make a VoIP call	File sharing	Creating a web page
6-10	69,4%	33,7%	12,7%	2,6%	4,8%	2,8%
11-14	85,3%	56,4%	44,2%	12,3%	23,1%	13,5%
15-17	91,3%	82,0%	68,5%	20,2%	40,7%	22,5%
18-19	93,0%	87,5%	75,9%	25,8%	45,4%	25,5%

The data refer to a national representative sample, which includes people aged 6 and over. [ISTAT 2006, Information and Communication Technologies: Availability in households and individual use]

The last Eurispes Telefono Azzurro 2007 report shows that 21,2% of children aged 7 to 11 cope with harassment online by asking the harasser to stop molesting them, 10% decide not to communicate with those strangers anymore, and 10,6% decide not to visit those virtual places where harassment has happened.

Facing the same risk, 28,9% of teenagers aged 12 to 19 avoid chat rooms or forums where harassment has taken place, 23,3% ask the harasser to stop troubling them, 17,9% simply ignore any disturbing messages, and 1,3% express curiosity and thus continue the conversation.

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

- The perception of risk, however, doesvnot mean that they are scared or worried: the warnings from their parents and the exchange of experiences with friends and schoolmates make children feel quite safe.
- Messaging is limited mostly to MSN, which is considered rather safe, definitely safer than open chat rooms. However children follow some rules: theyvdouble-check unknown new entries, do not give personal details, avoid personal contact/meeting, etc.
- Children report that downloading is quite a widespread practice within families – parents, other members of the family or children themselves do usually download music, video or movies. They know that it is illegal if downloading is aimed at sales, duplication or parallel distribution, rather than their own personal use. Moreover they do not think that their parents are going to do something illegal.
- Children demonstrate a certain good relationship with their parents, with an open and friendly attitude. Nevertheless when they have a problem their preference is to talk to friends. Only in cases of very serious problems are parents involved immediately

According to the Eurobarometer 2005/06, 68% parents/guardians think their child knows what to do if uncomfortable online, 31% think they do not.

1.10 Factors shaping public discourses about the Internet

Italian NGOs have played an important role in creating awareness of risk among the public and even in shaping the related legislative tools. The self-regulation code Internet@Minori has been introduced mainly thanks to the contribution of the principal civil society subjects, like Save the Children Italy, Telefono Azzurro, a charity active since 1987 that instigates many of initiatives to protect children's and adolescents' rights, Adiconsum, which works to defend consumer rights and other associations. Their role has been noteworthy especially in relation to the shaping of public discourses.

Telefono Azzurro Onlus is a permanent observatory of childhood. Every year a National Report on the condition of children and adolescents is published in cooperation with Eurispes (a private research centre). These studies usually resonate strongly in then national media and consistently influence the subsequent media treatment of youth. In the past they have contributed significantly to the public awareness of Internet related risk and safety issues. This year the Italian media coverage of the Telefono Azzurro report highlighted with great emphasis the cyberbullying phenomenon, reinforcing the great attention given to it in recent years.

Telefono Azzurro also runs the Hot114 project that, within the EC Safer Internet Programme, offers a communication line for notifying illegal or harmful contents via the Internet or telephone, in close collaboration with the police and Internet service providers. Besides monitoring illegal and harmful contents on the web, it offers through a website (http://www.hot114.it/progetto) an informative service for teachers, parents and children about Internet related risks and the most important safety tools. The project has been promoted with a communication campaign conducted through the Internet and a vast array of events involving academic communities and public institution representatives.

Together with Telefono Azzurro, Save the Children is one of the most active charities. It is in charge of all the projects promoted by the Communication Ministry and raising awareness of Internet safety issues, such as the project TI SEI CONNESSO (www.tiseiconnesso.it, see paragraph 2.2 b). Like Telefono Azzurro, Save The Children is a member of InHope with the project STOP-IT (www.stop-it). Save The Children is also responsible for the Easy project, with Adiconsum, aimed at increasing awareness on Internet Safety with tours in primary and secondary schools.

There is also a constellation of smaller charities, whose actions are local and very rarelycoordinated, so it is very difficult to assess how successful and useful their initiatives have been.

The event that contributed to putting risks associated with the Internet and new media onto the public agenda was a case of "happy slapping" that happened in February 2007 in Torino. A young disabled person had been the victim of bullying, and the episode had been filmed by mobile phone and published on YouTube[ix]. This fact raised awareness of bullying in general and happy slapping in particular, resulting in a general media panic. The attention to the issues of risks and opportunities on the Internet for children was from that day onwards polarized in two main topics: sex offences and paedophiles on the one hand; cyberbullying and happy slapping on the other.

2 The Educational system

2.1 General education

As reported in the UNICEF indicators, the adult literacy rate in Italy is 98%. Despite this statistic, the UNLA (National union against illiteracy), drawing on the data provided by the

National census in 2001 and the ISTAT data referring to the period 2001-2005, has shown that:

- 7,51% of the population over 6 have graduated.
- 25,85% of the population over 6 have a secondary school diploma.
- 30,12 % have completed a professional training or have a lower secondary school diploma.
- 25,41% have completed primary school.
- 11,11% are illiterate or have no educational title[x].

Italy has a high level of educational attainment among the adult population: census statistics for 2001 (ISTAT) show that the rate of possession of a secondary school diploma among the group age 35 to 44 years is 40,79%. The shift of the Italian upper secondary and higher education system from an elite system to a relatively mass one has been taking place since the Seventies and has been largely promoted by the youth social movements of those years.

The educational system in Italy is still articulated in two cycles. The first includes primary school (pupils aged 6 to 10) and lower secondary schools (pupils aged 11 to 14). Upper secondary school (14 to 19) is divided into General Upper Secondary Education and Vocational Upper Secondary Education (see Eurydice). The former Minister of Education, Letizia Moratti, has reformed the curricula and the educational system as a whole on the basis of the "three i", three keywords starting with i- (in Italian) that is Internet, English (inglese), companies (impresa). Moratti's reform was aimed at promoting a greater connection between education and the economic life of the country. According to the contemporary Minister of Education, Fioroni, this has led to a loss and a deterioration in the pupils' general level of education. Therefore, Fioroni has called for a greater attention to be paid to the teaching of mathematics and the Italian language. Fioroni has also promoted the Indicazioni nazionali per i piani personalizzati delle attività educative (National guidelines for individualised study plans), approved in April 2007, which define the essential performance levels that should be ensured by each school. Specific learning objectives at primary school level have been defined for the following subjects: Catholic religion, Italian, English language, history, geography, mathematics, science, technical education and ICT, music, art and drawing, sport and physical sciences. As for the lower secondary school, the specific learning objectives have been defined for the following subjects: Catholic religion, Italian, English language, a second Community language, history, geography, mathematics, science, technical education, information and communication technology, music, art and drawing, sport and physical sciences. As far as tertiary education is concerned, Italy has seen an impressive growth in tertiary qualifications in recent years and, with 41% of the typical age cohort completing a full-length first higher education course (as shown in the Education at a glance 2007 report by OECD). Italy doubled its graduation rate between 2000 and 2005, also thanks to the 2002 reform of tertiary education that now allows university degrees after 3 years of study.

2.2 Education and the Internet

According to a recent survey made by the Ministry of Education[xi], 86% (8.839) of the schools of all levels in the sample (the total amount of schools considered is 10.263) use the Internet for educational purposes. Of the same sample, 62,45% of the schools have a broadband connection. Another survey conducted by the Minister on the use of technological innovations in Italian schools showed that in 2004 the average number of pupils per PC was 10,9 and that, therefore, the target of a PC for every 5 to 15 pupils as indicated by the European Commission in 2001 has been reached. The Eurydice 2004 report showed that the average percentage of computers connected to the Internet in schools attended by pupils aged 15 in 1999/2000 is 24,10%, while the average number of pupils per PC is 15,30.

As outlined in the National guidelines for individualised study plans, both primary and secondary lower education should reach the specific learning objectives of the teaching of English language and information and communication technology literacy. Nonetheless, as reported in the Eurydice's Key Data on Information and Communication Technology in

Schools in Europe 2004, a minimum annual allocation of hours for teaching ICTs and media education has not been set yet in compulsory education curricula.

3 Wider society

3.1 Social change

Immediately after the Second World War era, Italy undertook a substantial and rapid modernization process, which led to a significant transformation of the Italian society: the move towards an industrial society (and now a services society), the emergence of new demographic patterns and a strong urbanisation process are the main phenomena and effects of the social change. Nonetheless, the country has experienced in recent years an economic crisis, often measured in media and public discourses by a comparison with other Mediterranean countries, especially Spain. The recent news that the Spanish economy has surpassed Italian economic growth has been a major issue in the political debate. A significant effect of the economic crisis is the rate of unemployment (especially in the South) and of precarious employment (in the North). Another important consequence discussed in the news is the increasing number of industrial injuries and deaths.

As far as immigration is concerned, Italy has faced several flows of immigration form different areas (the Albanians, the North-Africans, the Romanians etc.). The main concern is now focusedon Romanians (and especially Roma), deemed responsible for an increase in crimes.

Though Italy is a leader in the mobile phone penetration rate, with 122 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants (second only to Luxembourg, which has 157 subscriptions out of 100 inhabitants, as shown in the OECD Communication Outlook 2007), the penetration of the Internet in Italian society can still be considered relatively low: according to Eurostat, in 2006 40% of Italian households had Internet access at home. National policies have been directed towards overcoming the digital divide by promoting the DTT: the digital terrestrial television has been seen as the easiest technology to convey broadband services, especially when older people, or some rural areas, are concerned.

Media and public discourse express a sense of being left behind the USA and some European countries, such as the UK. Despite this, Internet access and usage is growing: 23% of Internet users are heavy users (Osservatorio Contenuti Digitali and AC Nielsen 2007), while instant messaging and social networking sites are becoming increasingly popular among teenagers. 24% of the Italians spend more than two hours a week on social networking sites, versus the 19% of the British and the 16% of the French[xii].

One of the main sources of social inequality is income. Nonetheless, income inequalities do not represent the unique, nor the best measure of poverty in the country. As shown by the 7th Caritas report on social exclusion and inequality, based on empirical data collected in 2006, the number of Italian families suffering from poverty is increasing (900.000 households are at risk poverty, which means that their income is just above the poverty line). According to this research and others, the government has just set a new poverty line for households. The same Caritas report shows that income inequalities are combined with other factors, such as regional gaps and ethnicity: so 70,6% and 78,1% of those attending Caritas centres respectively in the North and in the Centre of the country are immigrants, while the majority (54,6%) in the South are Italians[xiii]. Social groups who are more vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion are immigrants, retired and low-income older people, lone parents, the unemployed and people with poor education and literacy skills.

A new source of poverty can be identified in the spread of precarious or atypical employment, which involves the majority of young adults aged 25 to 35 (also called the “1000 euros generation” because their income is lower or equal to 1000 euros per month). According to the sixth IARD survey on Italian youth (IARD 2007), 20% of young workers aged 15 to 34 have a precarious employment, that is temporary employment and permatemp[xiv]. The

unemployment rate (ISTAT, July-September 2007) is higher for 25 to 34 years olds (4,2%) than for the group aged 35 to 64 (2,1%). Unemployment is higher in the southern regions, where it sometimes reaches 10% of the labour force (ISTAT 2007).

Regional gaps have an impact also on ICTs' penetration rate across the country: in northern and central regions, statistics (ISTAT 2006) register the higher penetration rate of Internet connections: 39,6% of the households in the central region and 38% in the north, versus 29,5% of southern region and just 21,9% in islands. The same divide is registered on the level of broadband connection: while 15,5% of the households in the northwest, 16,1% in the northeast and 16,2% in the centre have a broadband access, only 11,3% of the families living in the south and 11,9% of those residing in the islands have a broadband connection compared to the national average of 14,4%. The same report (ISTAT 2006) also shows that digital gaps and inequalities in access are also connected to the professional status of parents or of the breadwinner.

Though a significant urbanization process took place in the Sixties and Seventies (associated to the industrialisation of the country as well as the migration from the South to some industrial and urban centres of the north – Milano, Torino, Genova) the rural population remains constant (32% in 2005 versus 68% in urban areas). Nonetheless the employment rate in agriculture is quite low: 4,2% of the employed population in 2005 (the majority, 65,1%, is employed in the service industries, while the 30,7% in manufacturing. Agriculture is increasingly providing seasonal work for migrant labour (mainly illegal immigration with no visa). If the gap in broadband penetration between North and South is decreasing (ISTAT 2006, see 4.2), broadband coverage in rural areas is still lower (44% of the households) than in urban areas (66%).

Social class is measured and defined mainly in terms of occupation. Therefore, data on the labour market are always given great attention within political and public debatew. As shown by the ISTAT data on the third trimester 2007 (July-September), the labour market is growing (registering 1,8% employed more than the same period in 2006), as well as the employment rate, which is 59,1% for those aged 15 to 64 (compared to the 58,4% occupation rate registered in July to September 2006). Drawing on the same ISTAT data, we can outline a decline in agriculture and related labour (-7,1%), a small growth in manufacturing (+0,2%, but there is a decrease in the North and a growth in Centre-South), and a clear growth in services (+2,5%). The move towards a services economy is not something new, representing a clear trend in Italian economy since at least the Nineties.

Immigration into Italy became significant in the late '80s and early '90s. Since then, Italy has faced several flows of immigrants from diverse ethnic groups (such the Albanians in the early Nineties, etc.). According to the 8th Eurispes Telefono Azzurro Report, the foreign population under 17 years old has increased from the 13,1% registered in 1996 to 21,2% of 2006. In January 2007 (ISTAT, 2007), the non-national residents in the country were nearly 3 million, 10% more than 2006. Foreign babies born in Italy represent the 10% of the total number of childbirths; of these, the 50% are born from Moroccan, Albanian, Romanian, Chinese and Tunisian mothers. It is thanks to these foreign births that the birth rate in Italy has turned back to positive values within a few years. According to the data on foreign students in the period 2001-2005 (ISTAT), 5,9% of pupils in Primary schools and 5,6% in lower secondary schools, and 4,8% of pupils on all schools are foreign.

Nonetheless, though the number of immigrants has grown significantly in recent years, and despite the numerous governmental and NGO anti-racism initiatives, regular racist campaigns addressed towards specific ethnic groups are promoted by political parties (such as Lega Nord) and racist movements on the basis of some key events. The last campaign, raised after the death of an Italian woman robbed and killed by a Roma last November in the city of Romae, was fiercely debated in the national media (both press and TV). The concern about the Roma population in Italy was also strongly expressed by left-wing and democratic parties (who supported some restrictive measures on illegal immigration), so that the impression of a general intolerance in the country, expressed by some NGOs, was shared. The sixth IARD survey on Italian youth (IARD 2007) provides evidence of this increasing intolerant attitudes towards immigration: 32,4% of the interviews strongly agree and 37,4% agree with the idea

that there are too many immigrants in the country; moreover, 43,7% of the interviews agree with the claim that the majority of immigrants are involved in criminal activities. In any event, it is hard to tell how this intolerance can affect the level of tolerance on the Internet.

3.2 Role of the state

After the Second World War, with the Constitution enacted in 1948, Italy became a parliamentary Republic. In what has been called the "First Republic" Italy has been mainly ruled by Centre-Catholic or Centre-socialist coalitions, whose traditions led to general state intervention in the fields of Health, education, law as well as in the economic life of the country. The welfare state crisis begun around the 90s, and became more evident after 1994, with the centre-right government and the rise of the so-called "Second republic". Since then the prevailing trend of government policies seems to be the emphasis on individual responsibility, openness to market liberalism and the reduction of state intervention in all fields (health and education included). The same attitude seems also to characterise policies concerning the Internet and ICTs in general, where strategies demanding self-regulatory policies to the Internet service providers (ISPs) are prevailing (see 2.1).

The question of free speech and freedom of information was largely debated during the previous government, since the former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi could rely on the ownership and control of large sectors of the Italian media industry. Furthermore, he was suspected of concentrating all commercial investments from the public broadcasting service (RAI) towards Mediaset. Drawing on these concerns and in order to prevent future concentrations of symbolic power, the Minister of Communication, Gentiloni, is working on a law relating to TV commercial investments in order to mitigate conflicts of interest.

4. Other factors affecting children's online experiences

Though English is taught as a second language in schools since primary education (7 years old), Italian people are known all over Europe for having little familiarity with the English language (or at least this is a shared self-perception). This could be also linked to the fact that all cultural products, from movies to TV series to books, are translated into Italian. For these reasons, the main language on the web is Italian: the most popular social networking sites like MySpace are mainly accessed in their Italian version.

The latest Eurispes-Telefono Azzurro report on youth 2007 investigates the activities and places of children's leisure time. Though they report a variety of outdoor activities (among which the preferred are cinema and sports – football for male and volleyball for females – and, increasingly shopping malls as leisure spaces), data on the amount of time dedicated to domestic media provide evidence for the diffusion of the "bedroom culture" in Italy. Reading, television watching, radio listening and online activities take up a significant amount of children everyday lives: 7,3% of a 24 hour day for kids aged 6 to 10, 9,1% for those aged 11 to 14 (which equates to 2 hours and 11 minutes per day). Gaming is also very popular: 39% of the kids interviewed spend up to two hours per day playing the PlayStation videogame console.

As previously indicated, homes are the main place where children have access to the Internet: Though we have no clear data on the location of ICTs in the home, we can state that their home-based entertainment activities (Internet, gaming and TV) are accomplished alone, or together with peers, but without parental control.

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