

## Ireland

Children's use of the internet in Ireland falls into that group of countries classified as 'lower use, some risk'. This is despite the fact that a number of findings highlight above average patterns for Irish children: for instance, use of the internet at home (IE 87% vs. EU 62%); mobile internet access (IE 46% vs. EU 31%) and going online via gaming consoles (IE 44% vs. EU 26%). However, fewer children in Ireland access the internet from their own room compared to the European average (IE 37% vs. EU 49%). Daily use of the internet is below the European average and time spent online is 50% below that of the United Kingdom - 61 minutes compared to 99 minutes per day.

Irish children's online activities are fewer in number and at the lower end of the 'ladder of opportunities' highlighting an important area for educators and policy makers to focus on. In terms of risk, children in Ireland are more risk averse than most European countries: just 39% of children on average have experienced one of the risk factors asked about, placing Ireland very much on the lower end of the spectrum for experience of risk. This, combined with the fact that restrictive mediation in Ireland at 91% is actually the highest in Europe, suggests that internet use overall is conservative, and that as online access becomes more pervasive, children and young people may be less prepared and inadequately skilled to deal with the range of activities and risks they may encounter.

From a policy point of view, therefore, a number of priorities emerge, which include:

- A focus on supporting digital literacy initiatives that target both skills development and also encourages the broadening of online internet activities. A number of pilot projects in Irish schools that seek to foster digital creativity should be expanded as part of a national digital literacy initiative. Given the importance of the IT sector in Ireland's economy with many of the world's leading technology firms locating their European headquarters in Ireland, it is essential that infrastructure for education and policies to support maximising information society opportunities for all go to the top of the policy agenda.
- Awareness raising also has to foster better public awareness of digital literacy. In particular, parental awareness and capacity to provide social support in the digital world should be emphasised. As in many other countries, public debate is often informed by sensationalist media reporting. The current high levels of restrictive mediation suggest that parents are ill-equipped to support young people online. Here, the media, including public service broadcasting, can play a positive role supporting content creation.
- Finally, greater coordination between the various public agencies and non-governmental organisations is required in order to successfully bridge the skills and knowledge gaps revealed in the EU Kids Online survey. The responsibility for promoting media literacy, for instance, currently vested in the broadcast regulator needs to be expanded to encompass the online world. Similarly, educational agencies such as the National Centre for Technology in Education need to be adequately resourced to provide the necessary expertise, infrastructural development and leadership in developing initiatives in an area of strategic national importance.