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Internet safety improving for children in the UK finds new report

No one-size-fits-all solution to children's internet safety state academics, who publish new recommendations on how to keep European children safe online

This week, the European Commission will meet with stakeholders internationally – at the Safer Internet Forum - to discuss how to create a better internet for children.

A new report, 'National Perspectives' from the EU Kids Online project based at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), provides country-specific commentaries on children's experience of the internet, with European and national recommendations that reflect the variation found across Europe. For example, the UK is noteworthy for the very high proportion of children who access the internet at school, making the school a particularly appropriate setting for the delivery of digital literacy skills.

Commenting on the results, Dr Leslie Haddon, Senior Researcher on the EU Kids Online project at LSE said: "For the first time, we present findings for 33 European countries, allowing direct comparisons in the experiences of children as they go online in different countries. These national differences mean that there is no one-size-fits-all-solution for children's internet safety."

LSE Professor Sonia Livingstone, who is responsible for the survey, puts the overall UK results into context: "EU Kids Online has categorised the UK as a 'high use, some risk' country, an improvement on previous findings of 'high use, high risk'. It seems that the considerable multi-stakeholder efforts are bearing fruit. But this should not be grounds for complacency, for it reveals how much effort it takes to reduce risk exposure among children."

The UK stands out in a number of ways:

- Compared to the European average, more UK children go online at school (91% vs. 63%). Hence, school a particularly appropriate setting for the delivery of digital literacy skills.
- 9-16 year olds children were eight years old on average when they first used the internet, putting UK children among the youngest in Europe when they first go online. Future efforts should focus on younger children as they gain internet access.
- UK children are more likely to go online via a mobile or handheld device, putting them in the vanguard of new risks associated with personal internet access and, equally, making protective oversight by their parents more difficult.
- The array of possible risks online continues to change - for example, one in five teenage girls in the UK has visited a pro-anorexia/bulimia website, yet little is known of such practices and little help is available.
- Concern remains that 28% of UK 9-10 year olds and 59% of 11-12 year olds have a social networking profile, despite most SNSs, like Facebook, having a minimum age of 13 years. Distinctively, UK children report substantially more SNS contacts than the European average, but also a higher use of privacy settings than children and young people across Europe. Only 11% in the UK, compared with 26% across Europe, have a public profile.

- The UK tops the European rankings for use of filters on the internet-enabled devices that children use at home. Still, half of UK parents don't install filters, and this may leave their children unprotected.

Ends

For the full report, *National Perspectives*, see <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20III/Reports/PerspectivesReport.pdf>

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For more information:

National Perspectives reports the comparative experiences of children across a range of indicators in the countries participating in EU Kids Online. Researchers, stakeholders and others can find a concise summary of children's internet usage, risk and harm experiences and parental approaches to mediation. The report is based on interviews with 25,000 children and parents across 25 European countries, plus additional research conducted in the eight countries that more recently joined the network.

Information about the project and survey:

- EU Kids Online aims to enhance knowledge of European children's and parents' experiences and practices regarding risky and safer use of the internet and new online technologies, and thereby to inform the promotion of a safer online environment for children. The project is funded by the EC Safer Internet Programme (SI-2010-TN-4201001).
- EU Kids Online conducted a face-to-face, in home survey of 25,000 9-16 year old internet users and their parents in 25 countries, using a stratified random sample and self-completion methods for sensitive questions.
- Countries included in the survey are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the UK. In addition the project includes research teams from Croatia, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Russia, Slovakia and Switzerland.
- For more findings, reports and technical survey details, see www.eukidsonline.net or visit us on Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/pages/EU-Kids-Online/102320089891626>
- EU Kids Online will represent these findings at The Safer Internet Forum. The forum has been organised by the EC's Safer Internet Programme as an annual conference on safer internet issues since 2004. It brings together representatives of industry, law enforcement authorities, child welfare organisations and policy makers. The past editions of the Safer Internet Forum have welcomed guests not only from Europe, but also from countries such as Australia, Brazil or the Russian Federation.