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From EU Kids Online, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

## **Parental responses to children's online risks differ across Europe**

### **Children in the UK are protected by restrictions, with parents tending to overprotect their children, significantly reducing their online opportunities**

New research on children's online risk and parenting practices across Europe reveals that a potentially negative pattern is developing in some countries that either limits children's engagement or does not prevent risk of harm.

The report published today (Monday 22 July) by EU Kids Online explores how parental responses to children's online use differs according to country and how this translates to children's online safety. Researchers found that European countries divide into four main groups, based on children's risk profiles: Supported risky explorers; Semi-supported risky gamers; Protected by restrictions and Unprotected networkers.

In Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, and the UK - the *protected by restrictions* countries - parents tend to overprotect their children, significantly reducing their online opportunities. In Austria, Hungary, Lithuania, and Slovenia – the *unsupported networkers* countries - children engage more intensely but most parents are not involved in their children's internet use. Children in other countries encounter risks but have parents who are more active in mediating their internet use.

Researchers are concerned that both too much parental restriction and the lack of support for children's online use might lead to higher levels of harm when risk is encountered.

For the UK, researchers note that 26% of children have parents who prefer restrictive mediation of their children's internet use and 80% are part of the group that encounters no risks online. However, 25% are restricted learners and 20% are part of the moderates group, both of which have only limited engagement with the Internet.

Dr Ellen J. Helsper from the London School of Economics and Political Science and one of the authors of the report notes that:

*“A key question for policy makers, parents and educators in the UK is whether online opportunities for children can be increased while simultaneously limiting more extensive risk of harm. It is possible that this could be achieved by a move away from more restrictive forms of mediation towards more active mediation patterns.”*

### **Countries are most clearly distinguished in terms of the sexual content risks experienced by children:**

Clusters of countries where children encounter higher levels of risk are most clearly distinguished in terms of sexual content risks. Children who are bullied or who give away personal data are more uniformly distributed across country clusters. **In the UK, 6% of children are part of a group that encounters mostly sexual content risks and 8% is part of a group that encounters a variety of risks and has subsequently higher levels of harm.**

## **European countries divide into four groups:**

Researchers have found that European countries divide into four main groups, based on children's risk profiles:

### **•Supported risky explorers (Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden)**

This cluster has more children who are experienced social networkers. They encounter more sexual risks online and their parents are more actively involved in guiding their children's internet use.

### **•Semi-supported risky gamers (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, and Romania)**

In these countries, children encounter only moderate online opportunities, mainly focused on entertainment, especially games. Yet they still experience relatively high levels of risk and harm: some encounter a specific risk, others a range of risks.

### **•Protected by restrictions (Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, and the UK)**

Children's online experiences in this cluster of countries is characterised by relatively low levels of risk probably because internet use is also more limited, largely restricted to practical activities. While parents might be glad that their restrictive mediation practices prevent risk, it does seem that they may miss out on many of the online opportunities

### **•Unprotected networkers (Austria, Hungary, Lithuania, and Slovenia)**

Finally, there is a cluster of countries where children's experiences are fairly narrow but potentially problematic since parents are not involved in their children's use: web 2.0 opportunities are intensely taken up and the children encounter related risks but not as much harm, other opportunities are less likely to be taken up.

## **For more information:**

The report *"Country Classification: Opportunities, Risks, Harm and Parental Mediation"* updates and deepens the understanding of cross-national differences among the countries surveyed in EU Kids Online. This new analysis reveals that differences within countries are substantially larger than differences between countries, whether measured in terms of online opportunities, risk of harm or forms of parental mediation. The advantage of such pan-European similarities is that it makes sense for policy makers in one country to learn from the best practice initiated in another.

For the full report, see

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20III/Classification/Home.aspx>

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## **Information about the project and survey:**

**The *EU Kids Online*** project 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** among 25,000 9-16 year-old internet users and their parents in 25 countries, using a stratified random sample and self-completion methods in the case of 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**, see Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full findings*. LSE, London: EU Kids Online, available at <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/33731/>. Other reports and technical survey details are at [www.eukidsonline.net](http://www.eukidsonline.net)