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**LSE press release: On Safer Internet Day 2026, a new report underlines how AI is already a major part of childhood for European children**

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Children across Europe are already using generative artificial intelligence in their everyday lives, from homework and information search to social media, games and creative applications. A new report from EU Kids Online provides the first large-scale, comparative evidence of how children access, use and understand GenAI across Europe, highlighting both emerging opportunities and growing concerns about safety and children's rights.

The report examines GenAI use among children aged 9 to 16 across 20 European countries, including Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The study combines survey responses from more than 25,000 children in 17 countries with qualitative interviews with 244 young people aged 13 to 17 in 15 countries. **Published in connection with Safer Internet Day 2026 (10th February 2026)**, the report shows how AI tools have become increasingly embedded in children's digital lives.

The findings show that around seven in ten European children report using some form of GenAI. However, children are often not making a conscious decision to use AI. Rather, GenAI is increasingly integrated directly into platforms they already use, such as search engines, messaging services and social media. As one teenager in Serbia explained, *"I think the first time I used artificial intelligence was on Snapchat, because I didn't even have to install a special application; it was already possible. It was kind of weird. I don't know who I'm writing to. Someone's answering... everyone had an update on the app."*

Across countries, children primarily use GenAI for practical and educational purposes. They value its ability to save time, help with homework and explain complex concepts. "It saves a lot of time, both for schoolwork and everything else," said a 14-year-old participant in Portugal. GenAI is also used to pass time or satisfy curiosity, while more creative and participatory uses remain less common.

Age strongly shapes use. While many younger children report little or no engagement with GenAI, use increases sharply during adolescence. Differences linked to socioeconomic status are also evident, with children from more advantaged backgrounds more likely to use GenAI and to use it in a wider range of ways, pointing to the emergence of a new "AI divide". Gender differences are small.

Children's attitudes towards GenAI are often ambivalent. Some express concerns about inaccurate or misleading outputs, becoming overly reliant on AI or losing skills and confidence in their own thinking. In terms of trust, some children see AI-generated

information as more reliable than other online sources because it is fast and personalised, more digitally skilled children describe checking AI outputs against other sources and recognising the limits.

A smaller but significant group of children also describe using chatbots for companionship or advice, particularly during moments of boredom or loneliness. While GenAI is not yet a dominant source of emotional support for most children, these uses raise important questions about wellbeing, trust and responsibility.

Overall, the findings underline the need for urgent, coordinated action as GenAI becomes a routine part of children's digital environments. The report calls on policymakers to ensure the effective implementation of existing regulatory frameworks, including the GDPR and the EU Artificial Intelligence Act, with explicit attention to children's rights, safety and participation. It urges industry to design age-appropriate and privacy-respecting AI tools by default, and highlights the role of schools and families in supporting children's critical and responsible use of GenAI.

Report co-author Dr Mariya Stoilova, Department of Media and Communications, LSE commented: "Children are not meeting artificial intelligence in the future – they are growing up with it now. They are curious and pragmatic about AI, and what they are asking for is not bans, but guidance, skills and safeguards that let them benefit without being put at risk."

Professor Sonia Livingstone, Department of Media and Communications at LSE, Director of Digital Futures for Children and Founder of EU Kids Online said: "Generative AI is already reshaping children's everyday lives – but not equally. Without urgent, evidence-based action, AI risks deepening existing inequalities rather than expanding children's opportunities."

## **Ends**

### **For more information or to request a copy of the report, contact:**

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### **Notes to editors:**

The report is available to access here:

<https://researchonline.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/137132/>

About EU Kids Online: <http://www.eukidsonline.net/>

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