Child experts warn of internet risks facing very young children

Clear parental guidelines are necessary to protect very young children from the risks of internet use as toddlers and pre-school aged children gain greater access to tablets and smartphones, according to a new report released by EU Kids Online today.

The report, prepared at the London School of Economics and Political Science, recommends a number of measures to ensure children under eight years of age can use the internet safely.

These include the development of internet safety education packages for parents, carers and childcare centres, and the integration of default privacy protections on smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices.

"Zero to eight – Young children and their internet use" reviews a range of recent studies showing that children across Europe are going online at a younger and younger age, and argues that their lack of technical, critical and social skills may pose a greater risk than for older children.

"EU Kids Online has spent seven years investigating 9-16 year olds' engagement with the internet, focusing on the benefits and risks of children's internet use. There is now a critical need for information about the online behaviour of 0-8 year olds due to the emerging trend of very young children using internet-connected devices," according to Dr Leslie Haddon from EU Kids Online.

One of the main concerns relates to parents posting pictures and videos of their children online, and the potential effect these postings may have on their children's digital footprint.

"It has not been established that children under nine years of age have the capacity to engage with the internet in a safe and beneficial manner in all circumstances," according to one of the report authors Professor Sonia Livingstone from the LSE's Department of Media and Communications.

"This is particularly the case involving young children accessing social sites intended for teenagers and adults, such as Facebook and YouTube."

The report recommends greater transparency regarding how data are collected, collated, used and shared via children's apps, and the provision of opt-out choices for parents and children.

It also calls for a review of user consent policies and the responsibilities of online service providers to remove risky information inadvertently posted by children and/or their parents.

For the full report, visit:
http:/www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20III/PDFs/Zero_to_eight.pdf

For more information please contact Dr Leslie Haddon (l.g.haddon@lse.ac.uk) or Candy Gibson, LSE Press Office, 0207 849 4624, c.gibson@lse.ac.uk.

Additional notes:

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