

Bulgaria

Bulgaria has been classified in the group of countries with higher use and higher risk as well as in the specific category of Eastern European countries called 'new use new risk'. Bulgaria is also the country where regular research in the field is missing. Therefore, it is a challenge for professionals dealing with risk assessment and risk prevention of internet use to formulate policy recommendations.

According to the EU Kids Online research, Bulgarian children are usually found on the top of most of the cross country comparative graphs: 85% of them use the Internet at home and 61% of these users have access in their own room (the average is 49%); Bulgarian children are in 3rd place after Greece and Slovenia in using the Internet via mobile phones; they are top of the list for average daily usage and 83% go online every day (only in Sweden children are 84%). In relation to skills, Bulgarian children are a little above average with 4.7 skills (average 4.2), but the highest in excessive use (44% - only Estonia being before with 50%). Bulgarian children are also those spending the most time per day in the Internet – 120 minutes and although they start to go online at 9 years of age in common with most European children, they learn to do everything in shorter time than the others. They are also those who feel bothered most when they cannot be on the Internet.

This speedy catching-up is alarming when it is not backed-up by the appropriate educational and regulatory environment. At the same time, Bulgarian schools are among the few European schools where computers are not used on regular basis in class rooms and where the broadband Internet is still not wide spread.

Bulgarian children are classified among the "Digital natives" because their parents are those who are very much behind their children in use of the Internet (only 50% of the parents use it regularly). They also feel strongly that they should do much more. Parental control and mediation is rather low and the awareness of parents of the online activities of their children is the thing that has to be tackled more seriously.

In this context, recommendations for Bulgaria focus on the following four aspects:

- The education system from elementary school up needs to change dramatically. This begins with the education of teachers: all professional teachers should have high computer and internet literacy in order to be able to respond to the needs of children; internet literacy, including internet safety literacy should be a compulsory specialty in teachers' curriculum; furthermore teachers should regularly update their knowledge.
- Internet providers should be obliged to provide information on filtering and other protection software to private users.
- Media should be much more engaged in passing the message of internet safety of children targeting specifically parents.
- Mobile operators should not be allowed to openly advertise openly services that can be risky for children.