



The EU Kids Online 2026 comparative study: Children's views, experiences, opportunities and risks in a digital world

Full findings from the EU Kids Online representative survey of 10- to 16-year-olds across 19 countries

Elisabeth Staksrud, Ellen Helsper, Sonia Livingstone, Bojana Lobe,
Giovanna Mascheroni, Mariya Stoilova and Kjartan Ólafsson
- with members of the EU Kids Online network

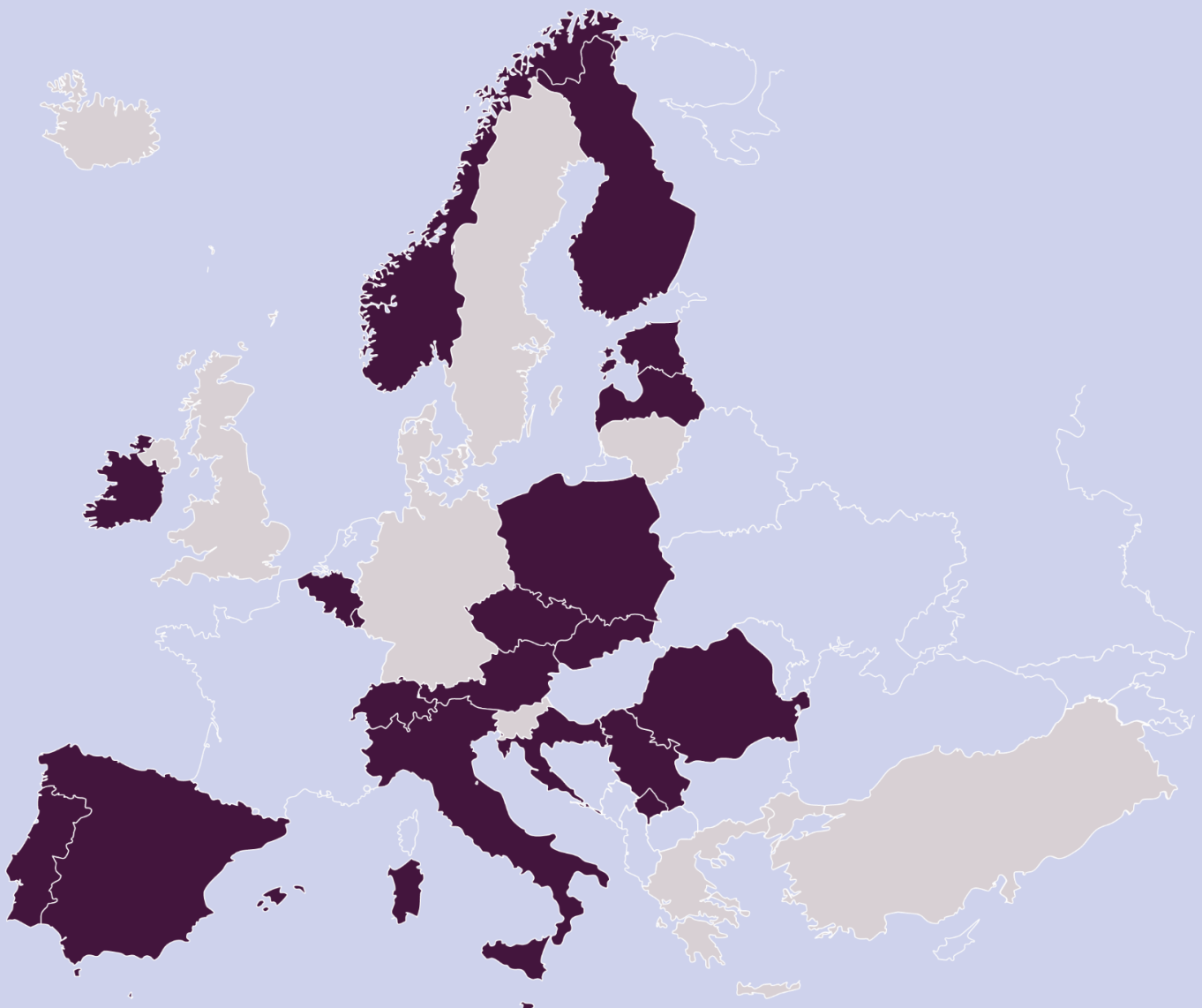


Table of contents

Foreword: Twenty years of EU Kids Online	11
Acknowledgements.....	13
Reviewers:	13
Suggested citation:	13
Executive summary	14
About the study	14
Part I. Access, opportunities and skills for participation	14
Access and connection	14
Schools and mobile-phone rules.....	14
Opportunities for communication, learning and participation	14
Digital skills and knowledge	15
Digital media in everyday life	15
Part II. Worries, safety and risk of harm	15
What children worry about	15
Feeling safe and getting support.....	15
Bullying and hurtful treatment	16
Harmful content	16
Hateful messages	16
Sexual messages and requests	16
Excessive use	17
Part III. Parental support, enabling and regulation	17
Part IV. Looking forward: Children and the digital future	17
Overall	17
Introduction	18
More recognition of children's rights – and more calls to restrict children's access	18
More dependent on digital technologies – and more worried about their use	19
More connected – but not necessarily more equal	19
More skilled – and potentially more exposed.....	20
More regulation – while the object of regulation keeps changing.....	20
What this report contributes	20
About the authors	21
About EU Kids Online.....	22
Organisation	22
Current phase and ongoing work	22
Previous phases.....	22
EU Kids Online principles	23
Methodology	25

Survey design	25
Translation and national adaptation.....	25
Target population and sampling	25
Fieldwork and survey administration.....	27
Piloting and quality assurance	27
Ethical considerations and informed consent	27
Data management and preparation	28
Anonymisation and disclosure protection	28
The final analytical sample	28
Analysis and interpretation	28
PART I	30
1. Access and connection	31
Devices used	31
2. Use of mobile phones in schools	37
What we asked.....	37
Age differences related to mobile phone bans in schools	38
Children's views on having a mobile phone ban in their school	39
3. Digital media during everyday life	41
A new measure of the timing and temporal reach of screens	42
Overall times of screen use across the day	42
Country differences in screen use across the weekday.....	45
Use of screens after bedtime and during the night.....	46
4. Communication, learning and citizenship.....	51
Online opportunities	51
Measuring online activities.....	51
Daily online activities	53
Communication with friends	56
Recreation and leisure.....	58
Information and learning	61
Use of the internet for schoolwork.....	61
Gaming	65
Using AI.....	67
Use of AI for schoolwork.....	69
Internet and everyday communication and engagement	71
5. Children's digital literacy and skills for participation.....	73
Overall skills and knowledge and their distribution in different countries	75
Age-related skills differentials	80
Gendered skills differentials	86
Socioeconomic status-related skills differentials.....	90

Differences in literacy and skills	90
PART II	93
6. What children are worried about	94
Worries about screen time	98
7. Perceptions of safety and communication online.....	102
Perceived online safety and social climate	102
Response confidence.....	106
Online self-expression and disclosure	106
Perceived online agency	107
8. Children's experiences of bullying and hurtful treatment.....	109
What we asked in the EU Kids Online V survey	110
Experiences of bullying and hurtful treatment	111
Differences between online and offline bullying and hurtful experiences	113
Who treated children in a hurtful or nasty way?	115
Why children believe they are or were treated badly	118
9. Harmful content	122
Measuring harmful user-generated content	122
Exposure to potentially harmful online content	123
Exposure to content about ways of physically harming or hurting oneself	124
10. Hateful messages	129
Measuring hateful messages.....	129
Seeing hateful messages online.....	130
Intention and response to hateful messages	133
How children felt about seeing hateful messages.....	136
Frequency of exposure to hateful messages and how children felt	139
Intention to see hateful messages and how children felt	139
11. Sexual messages and requests.....	141
Whether and how often child has received sexual messages	141
Who sent sexual messages to the child.....	144
Are children being asked for sexual information?.....	145
12. Upsetting online experiences and coping strategies	148
How often children get upset by something online	148
Who the child talks to after being upset online	150
13.Excessive use	154
Excessive use overall and by country	155
Excessive use: age, gender and socioeconomic status (SES)	158
Differences in excessive use	160
PART III	162
14. The role of parental mediation	163

Parental mediation survey question in EU Kids Online V	164
Quality of child-parent communication	165
Parental activities relating to children's internet use	167
Use of parental tools	171
Relating parental activities and use of technical tools	175
PART IV	177
15. Children's views, hopes and worries about platforms and AI	178
Measuring children's hopes and worries for their present and future with technologies	178
Children's hopes and worries for their present and future with technologies	178
Children's AI imaginaries	182
Children's understanding of datafication	188
Points to consider	192
References	194
Annexes	199

List of figures

Figure 1: Frequency of using a smartphone to access the internet, by country.....	33
Figure 2: Using a smartphone to access the internet, by country and age group.....	33
Figure 3: Using a smartphone to access the internet, by country and gender.....	34
Figure 4: Using a smartphone to access the internet, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country.....	35
Figure 5: Mobile phone ban in schools, by country and age group.....	38
Figure 6: Children's agreement with rules regarding mobile phones in school, by country.....	39
Figure 7: Overall reported time of daily use of screens on regular weekdays, by age.....	43
Figure 8: Overall reported time of daily use of screens on regular weekdays, by gender.....	44
Figure 9: Overall reported time of daily use of screens on regular weekdays, by socioeconomic status (SES).....	44
Figure 10: Use of any type of screens during the night, by country and frequency.....	47
Figure 11: Using any type of screens during the night, by country and gender.....	48
Figure 12: Using any type of screens during the night, by country and age group.....	50
Figure 13: Using any type of screens during the night, by socioeconomic status (SES).....	50
Figure 14: Online activities.....	52
Figure 15: Overall engagement in social interaction and communication activities, by gender and country.....	55
Figure 16: Overall engagement in social interaction and communication activities, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country.....	55
Figure 17: Communication with friends, by country and frequency.....	56
Figure 18: Communication with friends, by country and age group.....	56
Figure 19: Communication with friends, by country and gender.....	57
Figure 20: Communication with friends, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country.....	57
Figure 21: Overall engagement in recreation and leisure activities, by gender and country.....	59
Figure 22: Overall engagement in recreation and leisure activities, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country.....	59
Figure 23: Communication with friends, by country and age group.....	60
Figure 24: Communication with friends, by country and gender.....	60
Figure 25: Communication with friends, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country.....	61
Figure 26: Use of the internet for schoolwork, by country and frequency.....	63
Figure 27: Use of the internet for schoolwork, by country and age group.....	63
Figure 28: Use of the internet for schoolwork, by country and gender.....	64
Figure 29: Use of the internet for schoolwork, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country.....	64
Figure 30: Playing games, by gender and country.....	66
Figure 31: Playing games, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country.....	66
Figure 32: AI-based online activities in the past month.....	67
Figure 33: Use of AI for schoolwork, by country.....	69
Figure 34: Use of AI for schoolwork, by country and age group.....	70
Figure 35: Use of AI for schoolwork, by country and gender.....	70
Figure 36: Use of AI for schoolwork, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country.....	71
Figure 37: High levels of digital skills for different types of skills, by country.....	75
Figure 38: Critical digital knowledge distribution among European children.....	78
Figure 39: Skills at a high level for different subdomains, by age group.....	81
Figure 40: Critical digital knowledge, by age group.....	83
Figure 41: Skills at a high level for different subdomains, by gender.....	84
Figure 42: Critical digital knowledge, by gender.....	86
Figure 43: Skills at a high level for different subdomains, by socioeconomic status (SES).....	88
Figure 44: Critical digital knowledge, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country.....	90
Figure 45: What children are worried about.....	95
Figure 46: What children are worried about, by age group, gender and socioeconomic status (SES) (% 'quite worried or very worried').....	97
Figure 47: What children are worried about (using screens too much), by country.....	99
Figure 48: Total screen use vs worry about using screens too much, by country.....	100
Figure 49: Worry about using screens too much, by age group.....	101
Figure 50: Worry about using screens too much, by socioeconomic status (SES).....	101

Figure 51: I feel safe online, by gender	104
Figure 52: I feel safe online, by socioeconomic status (SES)	105
Figure 53: Children who feel safe online, by frequency of being bothered or upset online (%).....	105
Figure 54: Treated in a hurtful or nasty way, by country.....	111
Figure 55: Treated in a hurtful or nasty way, by country and age group	112
Figure 56: Treated in a hurtful or nasty way, by country and gender.....	112
Figure 57: Treated in a hurtful or nasty way, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country	113
Figure 58: Treated in a hurtful or nasty way in the past year face to face, by country	114
Figure 59: Treated in a hurtful or nasty way in the past year online, by country	114
Figure 60: Comparison between perceived perpetrators face-to-face and online, whole sample	115
Figure 61: Frequency of seeing harmful user-generated content (ways of physically harming or hurting oneself), by country.....	125
Figure 62: Frequency of seeing harmful user-generated content, by country and age group	126
Figure 63: Frequency of seeing harmful user-generated content, by country and gender.....	128
Figure 64: Frequency of seeing harmful user-generated content, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country	128
Figure 65: Frequency of child having seen hateful messages, by country	130
Figure 66: Frequency of child having seen hateful messages, by country and age group	131
Figure 67: Frequency of child having seen hateful messages, by country and gender.....	132
Figure 68: Frequency of child having seen hateful messages, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country	133
Figure 69: Intention to see hateful messages, by country	134
Figure 70: Intention to see hateful messages, by country and age group.....	134
Figure 71: Intention to see hateful messages, by country and gender	135
Figure 72: Intention to see hateful messages, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country	136
Figure 73: How the child felt about seeing hateful messages, by country	137
Figure 74: How the child felt about seeing hateful messages, by country and age group	137
Figure 75: How the child felt about seeing hateful messages, by country and gender.....	138
Figure 76: How the child felt about seeing hateful messages, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country	139
Figure 77: Frequency of exposure to hateful messages and how children felt	140
Figure 78: Intention to see hateful or degrading messages or comments and how children felt	140
Figure 79: Frequency of receiving sexual messages, by country.....	142
Figure 80: Frequency of receiving sexual messages, by age group	143
Figure 81: Frequency of being asked for sexual information, by country.....	146
Figure 82: Frequency of being asked for sexual information, by gender.....	146
Figure 83: How often the child has been upset online, by country	149
Figure 84: How often the child has been upset online, by age group	150
Figure 85: Children who did not talk to anyone after being upset, by country	152
Figure 86: Children who did not talk to anyone after being upset, by gender	152
Figure 87: Number of aspects of excessive internet use experienced at least weekly, by country	157
Figure 88: Experienced at least one aspect of excessive use at least weekly, by age group	159
Figure 89: Experienced at least one aspect of excessive use at least weekly, by gender	160
Figure 90: Experienced at least one aspect of excessive use, by socioeconomic status (SES)	161
Figure 91: Ease of discussing upsetting things with a parent or caregiver, by country	165
Figure 92: Ease of discussing upsetting things with a parent or caregiver, by country and age group.....	166
Figure 93: Ease of discussing upsetting things with a parent or caregiver, by country and gender	166
Figure 94: Ease of discussing upsetting things with a parent or caregiver, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country	168
Figure 95: Parental activities relating to the child's internet use.....	169
Figure 96: Combined parental activities relating to the child's internet use, by country and age group	170
Figure 97: Combined parental activities relating to the child's internet use, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country	170
Figure 98: Parental use of technical tools relating to the child's internet use	172
Figure 99: Combined parental use of technical tools relating to the child's internet use, by country and age group ..	174
Figure 100: Combined parental use of technical tools relating to the child's internet use, by country and gender	174

Figure 101: Combined parental use of technical tools relating to the child's internet use, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country	175
Figure 102: The balance between enabling mediation and technical mediation, by country	176
Figure 103: Children's hopes and worries about their future with technologies	180
Figure 104: Fear that humans will lose control over AI and technologies, by country	183
Figure 105: Fear that humans will lose control over AI and technologies, by country and age group	184
Figure 106: Fear that humans will lose control over AI and technologies, by country and gender	184
Figure 107: Fear that humans will lose control over AI and technologies, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country	185
Figure 108: Worries for AI's impact on the environment, by country	185
Figure 109: Worries for AI's impact on the environment, by country and age group	186
Figure 110: Worries for AI's impact on the environment, by country and gender	187
Figure 111: Worries for AI's impact on the environment, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country	187
Figure 112: Trust that companies will keep their data safe, by country	188
Figure 113: Trust that companies will keep their data safe, by country and age group	189
Figure 114: Trust that companies will keep their data safe, by country and gender	189
Figure 115: Trust that companies will keep their data safe, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country	190
Figure 116: Belief that algorithmic classifications and personalised ads are okay, by country	190
Figure 117: Belief that algorithmic classifications and personalised ads are okay, by country and age group	191
Figure 118: Belief that algorithmic classifications and personalised ads are okay, by country and gender	191
Figure 119: Belief that algorithmic classifications and personalised ads are okay, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country	192

List of tables

Table 1: Number of respondents, by country, gender and age group	26
Table 2: Daily use of different devices, by country	32
Table 3: Period of screen use every or almost every weekday, by country	45
Table 4: Social interaction and communication engaged in every day or almost every day, by country.....	54
Table 5: Recreation and leisure activities engaged in every day or almost every day, by country	58
Table 6: Information and learning activities engaged in every day or almost every day, by country	62
Table 7: Gaming activities engaged in every day or almost every day, by country.....	65
Table 8: Use of AI, by country	68
Table 9: Technical and operational and information navigation and processing skills, by country	76
Table 10: Communication and interaction and content creation and production skills, by country.....	77
Table 11: Critical Digital Knowledge (% of children correctly identifying statements as true+ or false*), by country.....	79
Table 12 What children are worried about (% 'quite worried' or 'very worried'), by country	96
Table 13: General perception of safety and communication online, by country	103
Table 14: Who child was victimised by <u>offline</u> , by country	116
Table 15: Who child was victimised by <u>online</u> , by country.....	117
Table 16: Children's understanding of why they were treated badly, by demographic differences	120
Table 17: Why children believe they have been treated badly, by country	120
Table 18: Experience and frequency of potentially harmful online content, by country.....	124
Table 19: Who sent sexual messages to the child, by country.....	145
Table 20: Who children talk to after being upset online, by country.....	151
Table 21: Excessive use aspects experienced at least weekly, by country	155
Table 22: Excessive use aspects experienced at least weekly, by country comparison, 2018–24 (12- to 16-year-olds)	156
Table 23: Child's account of whether parent uses tools to restrict their internet use	173
Table 24: Hopes and fears about technologies, by country, Part I	181
Table 25: Hopes and fears about technologies, by country, Part II	182

Foreword: Twenty years of EU Kids Online

Twenty years ago, EU Kids Online began with a demanding ambition: to collaborate across the countries and academic disciplines to build reliable, comparative knowledge about children's lives in a rapidly changing digital environment. Since 2006, hundreds of researchers across Europe and beyond have contributed their expertise, time and judgement to this objective. Many have remained involved for 20 years; others have brought new disciplinary perspectives, national contexts and generations of researchers into the network. This report belongs to all of them.

We celebrate our 20th anniversary with the knowledge that the study of children and their engagement with digital media and societies' response have grown from a relatively specialised field into an important domain of substantial academic, political and public importance. Digital technologies now mediate education, play, friendship, family life, creativity, civic participation and access to information. They also introduce or reshape risks and unequal participation. Understanding these developments requires more than tracking technologies or responding to the latest public concern. It requires sustained, independent and methodologically rigorous and ethically sound research centred on children's own voices and experiences and the conditions in which they grow up at home, in school, among peers, and the communities and countries where they belong.

EU Kids Online was established to produce insightful research, and also to ensure that the resulting knowledge informs policy, regulation, education and professional practice to ensure and enhance children's rights and wellbeing. Across its five phases, the network has developed comparative surveys, qualitative studies, conceptual frameworks, research tools, open resources and timely policy recommendations. It has consistently sought to communicate findings beyond academia while remaining transparent about the strengths and limitations of the evidence. Our research has informed policy developments both at the international level (United Nations, UNICEF, European Commission, Council of Europe, OECD) and national level (such as national governments and administration, regulatory authorities, media companies and educational institutions).

Our work is based on the principle of scientific independence. EU Kids Online engages with governments, international organisations, civil society, educators, practitioners and industry, but our research questions, analyses and conclusions remain free. Such independence is particularly important in a field where powerful economic interests shape both children's digital environments and the evidence available about them. Our task is not to provide convenient support for predetermined positions, but to generate reliable cross-national European research, champion and foster evidence-based policy, and challenge both technological optimism and unsupported alarmism.

Our approach is grounded in the full breadth of children's rights. Children have rights to protection from violence, exploitation and discrimination, but also to privacy, information, education, expression, association, participation, play, culture and access to beneficial services. These rights cannot be reduced to online safety alone, and nor can children be treated simply as vulnerable users always requiring restriction. Researchers, policymakers and wider society must recognise children's agency, evolving capacities and diverse circumstances while examining and advising on the responsibilities of families, schools, public authorities and technology companies.

EU Kids Online receives no core funding. Its continuity relies heavily on the personal commitment of researchers, support from their institutions, and the capacity of national teams to secure resources separately. We are deeply grateful to the ministries, public authorities, research councils, universities and other bodies that enabled data collection in participating countries. Without their support, and without the considerable after-hours work contributed by individual network members, this comparative study would not have been possible. Yet uneven, project-based national funding cannot provide a secure foundation for the long-term international research infrastructure that children, policymakers and societies increasingly need. As digital environments continue to change, the need for independent, child-centred and rights-based research will only become more urgent.

In presenting here the new findings from 29,000 children across Europe, we believe that this report demonstrates the continuing value of comparative evidence. It marks the beginning rather than the end of the analysis needed to unpack

the significance of children's digital experiences. EU Kids Online research will next examine more deeply which children experience particular opportunities and risks, under what conditions, and with what consequences. We look forward to discussing these findings and their implications with policymakers, practitioners and the public across Europe and beyond.

We dedicate this report to the children and young people who shared their experiences, and to every researcher who has helped build EU Kids Online over its first 20 years.

Professor Sonia Livingstone, London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom

Founding Coordinator, EU Kids Online, 2006–14

Professor Emeritus Uwe Hasebrink, Leibniz Institute for Media Research | Hans-Bredow-Institut (HBI), Germany

Coordinator, EU Kids Online, 2014–22

Professor Elisabeth Staksrud, University of Oslo, Norway

Coordinator, EU Kids Online, 2022–present



Acknowledgements

This research was conducted within the EU Kids Online (EUKO) network, a multinational research network on European children's online opportunities, risks and safety. For a full and country reports see the Annex.

The report draws on the EU Kids Online V Children Comparative Dataset (2026), a collaborative effort by researchers in the EUKO network. The questionnaire builds on previous EUKO surveys, and was updated and designed by Elisabeth Staksrud, Ellen Helsper, Vilde Kalin, Sonia Livingstone, Bojana Lobe, Giovanna Mascheroni, Kjartan Ólafsson and Mariya Stoilova, in collaboration with EUKO national team members.

Questionnaire citation: Staksrud, E., Helsper, E., Kalin, V., Livingstone, S., Lobe, B., Mascheroni, G., Ólafsson K., Stoilova, M. (Eds) [with members of EU Kids Online]. (2025). *The EU Kids Online V Children's Questionnaire*. EU Kids Online.

EUKO members acknowledge the support of institutions that enabled the survey to be carried out in 19 countries. We thank all the research agencies, teachers and school staff who helped to administer the survey and who helped in the research process, as well as all the children and young people who participated.

The authors of this report also acknowledge the tremendous support and work from the EUKO national research teams across Europe.

For other details, see www.eukidsonline.net

Reviewers:

Professor Leen d'Haenens, Media Culture & Policy Lab, KU Leuven, Belgium

Professor Brian O'Neill, Emeritus Research Fellow, Technological University Dublin, Ireland

Suggested citation:

Staksrud, E., Helsper, E., Livingstone, S., Lobe, B., Mascheroni, G., Stoilova, M., & Ólafsson, K. (2026). *The EU Kids Online 2026 comparative study: Children's views, experiences, opportunities and risks in a digital world*. University of Oslo, EU Kids Online. <https://hdl.handle.net/11250/5561363>
<https://doi.org/10.21953/researchonline.lse.ac.uk.00140901>

Executive summary

About the study

- The EU Kids Online 2025/26 survey provides representative comparative data from **28,465 children aged 10–16 in 19 European countries**: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain and Switzerland. The target population comprised children born between 2009 and 2015. Data were collected between April 2025 and April 2026 through a school-based, self-administered questionnaire.
- The report provides a primarily descriptive overview of children's digital lives, comparing patterns across countries and examining differences by **age, gender and socioeconomic status (SES)**.
- Four broad findings recur across the report: First, country differences are often substantial: there is no single European digital childhood. Second, age is one of the strongest and most consistent differentiating factors, particularly for access, activities, skills and exposure to risk. Third, socioeconomic disadvantage is associated with less favourable outcomes across several domains, although the strength and sometimes the direction of these differences varies between countries. Fourth, gender differences are more specific to particular experiences rather than forming one consistent pattern.

Part I. Access, opportunities and skills for participation

Access and connection

- The **smartphone is by far the main device through which children access the internet**. Across the 19 countries, 87% use a smartphone or mobile phone to go online at least daily, compared with 33% using a desktop or laptop, 20% a tablet and 19% a games console.
- Frequent smartphone access is widespread but varies significantly between countries. Overall, 58% use a smartphone several times each day. Age is the clearest differentiating factor: this rises from 27% among 10-year-olds to 76% among 15–16-year-olds. Girls report somewhat more frequent access than boys overall, while SES differences are smaller and inconsistent across countries.

- Regular smartphone access appears somewhat more widespread than in the previous EU Kids Online survey: 87% now report at least daily access, compared with 80% in the survey published in 2020. However, **frequency of access should not be confused with screen time or with what children actually do online**. It describes how routinely children connect, not the duration, purpose or quality of their use.

Schools and mobile-phone rules

- School approaches to mobile phones differ markedly across countries and age groups.
- Overall, 49% of children report a rule prohibiting pupils from bringing a phone to school. The age difference is striking: **78% of 10-year-olds report a complete prohibition compared with only 30% of 15–16-year-olds**.
- Children's views of these restrictions are mixed. Across the full sample, 28% report having such a rule and agreeing with it, while 21% report having the rule but disagreeing.

Opportunities for communication, learning and participation

- **Digital media are deeply embedded in children's social relationships, entertainment and learning**. Daily activities most commonly include communicating with friends (78%) and family (67%), watching videos on social media (74%), listening to music (71%), streaming television or films (52%), gaming (50%) and schoolwork (38%).
- Civic and participatory activities are less common. Twenty-three per cent follow news daily, while 5% publicly discuss social or political issues and 3% participate in campaigns or petitions. Country differences are substantial, indicating that opportunities for digital participation are taken up differently across national contexts.
- Some activities remain clearly gendered, most notably gaming, while gender differences in communication, entertainment and schoolwork are smaller. Daily internet use for schoolwork has increased somewhat since the previous survey, but differences between countries and age groups remain considerable.
- Around **two in three children regularly use generative AI**. Educational and practical uses predominate, while creative use and turning to AI for personal or health-related advice are less



common. GenAI use increases strongly with age. Gender and SES differences are less consistent, but substantial variation between countries suggests that inequalities in access to and use of AI require continued attention.

Digital skills and knowledge

- Children's digital competencies vary considerably according to **which skill is measured**. Technical and operational skills and communication and interaction skills are generally stronger than information-navigation and evaluation skills and content-creation skills.
- Critical knowledge is uneven. Many children have poor understanding of how algorithms organise information, of the economic interests shaping online content and promotion, and of some of the wider implications of technology use.
- Age differences are noticeable. Older children report substantially higher skills across most domains. Gender differences depend on the type of competence: girls generally report stronger communication and interaction skills, while boys report higher technical and operational skills. SES differences are less consistent, but in some countries children from more advantaged backgrounds report stronger skills, particularly in communication and interaction.
- An EUKO central finding is that **being connected does not automatically imply being digitally skilled**.

Digital media in everyday life

- Countries cannot be placed on a simple continuum from "low" to "high" screen use when we examine **when during the day screens are used**. Instead, digital media are incorporated into everyday routines in different ways across countries.
- Across the sample, screens are most commonly used after school: 81% report doing so every day or almost every day. This is followed by the evening before bedtime (68%) and the morning before school (52%). Use during dinner is comparatively uncommon.
- Around 29% use a screen after bedtime almost every day or every day, with substantial country variation. Night-time use is less common, but in 16 of the 19 countries it is more frequent among low-SES than high-SES children. This points to a possible socioeconomic inequality in **the timing of screen use**, rather than simply in access.
- Age is again the strongest differentiator. Use becomes substantially more common across most parts of the day as children grow older,

particularly before school, during school breaks, in the evening and after bedtime.

Part II. Worries, safety and risk of harm

What children worry about

- Children's strongest concerns relate to **family, school and their future**, rather than to digital technologies. Serious illness or death in the family is the most widespread worry (51%), followed by school performance (39%), future employment (39%) and being affected by war (37%).
- Digital concerns are nevertheless significant. Thirty-two per cent are quite or very worried about someone taking and sharing a nude image of them, and 29% about someone creating and posting a fake image of them. Twenty-five per cent worry about using screens too much, while more than one third are not worried about this at all.
- Importantly, **countries with more frequent screen use are not consistently those where children are more worried about using screens too much**. Children's own concerns provide a useful counterpoint to public debates about digital media.

Feeling safe and getting support

- **Feeling capable online does not necessarily mean feeling safe**. Sixty-two per cent say they know what to do when someone behaves online in a way they dislike, but only 48% say they feel safe online. The gender difference is substantial: 57% of boys report feeling safe compared with 40% of girls.
- Negative experiences become more common with age. The proportion encountering something upsetting online at least monthly rises from 11% among 10-year-olds to 28% among 15–16-year-olds. **Sources of support also change**: younger children are more likely to turn to parents, while older adolescents increasingly turn to friends. The proportion who tells nobody rises from 11% among 10-year-olds to 23% among 15–16-year-olds.
- Socioeconomic disadvantage is a particularly important cross-cutting pattern. Low-SES children are less likely to feel safe online and more likely to report upsetting experiences. They also report higher levels of worry across all 20 issues examined.
- Almost one in four children (23%) report being bothered or upset by something online at least monthly, compared with 7% in the previous survey. Among those affected, 43% talk to a friend

and 35% to a parent or caregiver, while 20% talk to nobody. **Exposure and support need to be considered together.**

Bullying and hurtful treatment

- Thirty-nine per cent of children report having been treated in a hurtful or nasty way during the past year, with substantial variation between countries.
- **Face-to-face victimisation remains more common than online victimisation:** 29% report face-to-face experiences compared with 17% online. This continues the broad pattern found in earlier EU Kids Online studies. Digital environments have become an important additional setting for victimisation, but they have not displaced face-to-face experiences.
- Friends, classmates and other children from school are the most frequently identified perpetrators in both settings, indicating considerable continuity between online and offline relationships. The digital lives of children can involve a wider social field, with strangers and online-only contacts playing a more prominent role in experiences of bullying.
- **Socioeconomic differences are noticeable.** Hurtful treatment is reported by 36% of high-SES children, 43% of medium-SES children and 51% of low-SES children. Among children reporting recurrent treatment, the most common perceived reasons are how they look or behave (35%), their height or weight (31%), and their opinions or beliefs (28%). Low-SES children report every listed reason more frequently than high-SES children, suggesting that recurrent victimisation may involve several overlapping aspects of social position, identity and personal characteristics.

Harmful content

- Children encounter a range of potentially harmful online content. Violent or gory images are the most commonly reported category (40%), followed by content about ways to be very thin (39%) and ways of physically harming oneself (37%). Content about suicide is reported by 25%.
- Country differences are substantial. Exposure generally increases with age and is often higher among girls. Children from lower-SES households also report greater exposure overall, although this pattern varies between countries.
- For self-harm content specifically, 15% report exposure at least monthly, while 62% say they have never encountered it. Exposure rises substantially with age.
- These figures measure **exposure to potentially harmful content, not harm itself**. They do not tell

us how children interpreted what they saw or whether it resulted in a negative outcome.

Hateful messages

- Thirty per cent of children report encountering hateful messages at least monthly, but exposure varies considerably between countries.
- Age is the clearest differentiator. Overall exposure rises from 26% among 10-year-olds to 77% among 15–16-year-olds. Girls report somewhat greater exposure than boys overall, while SES differences are relatively small and inconsistent.
- Most encounters are unintentional. Among children who had encountered hateful content, only 10% said they had intended to see it the last time. Intentional exposure is more common among boys than girls.
- How children respond depends strongly on the nature of the encounter. Around half report being upset by the most recent hateful message they saw, with girls considerably more likely than boys to report this. However, whether the exposure was intentional is particularly important: 57% of children who encountered hateful content unintentionally report being upset, compared with 21% of those who intentionally sought it out. Conversely, children who intentionally encountered such content are much more likely to say they felt good or found it funny.
- Our findings illustrate a central EU Kids Online distinction: exposure to risk does not in itself tell us whether, or how, a child is harmed.

Sexual messages and requests

- Receiving sexual messages becomes substantially more common through adolescence. Across countries, 12% of 11–12-year-olds report receiving such messages during the past year, rising to 23% among 13–14-year-olds and 37% among 15–16-year-olds.
- The senders come from different social contexts. Among recipients, 38% identify someone they do not know, 25% a friend, while romantic partners, classmates and people known only online are each identified by around 14%. The relevant questions therefore concern not only whether children receive sexual messages, but **who sends them, in what context, and whether children have control over the interaction and their boundaries are respected**.
- Being directly asked for sexual information is less common. Five per cent report this at least monthly, while 85% say it has never happened. Such requests increase markedly with age and are more frequently reported by girls and by low-SES children. They raise distinct issues concerning

privacy, consent, pressure and personal boundaries.

combinations of strategies vary considerably between countries.

Excessive use

- Most children report **few or no indicators of excessive internet use**, and very few report all the indicators measured. It is in countries where levels were low in 2020 that the increase has been largest, levelling out the playing field across Europe.
- Nevertheless, experiences of difficulties regulating internet use have become more common since 2020. The largest increases concern feeling that time spent online displaced things children would rather have done. More severe indicators, including sleeping less or experiencing conflict with family and friends, remain less frequent.
- Older children consistently report more difficulties regulating their internet use. Low-SES children are also more likely to report such experiences, although differences between countries are substantial.

Part III. Parental support, enabling and regulation

- Most children report good communication with parents or caregivers: more than three quarters say they can talk to them about upsetting experiences. However, 22% find this difficult, with higher levels among older children, girls and lower-SES groups.
- Parents use a combination of supportive, enabling, restrictive and technical strategies. Particularly common are responding supportively when children make mistakes online and listening when children wish to renegotiate rules.
- At the same time, some forms of **enabling mediation have declined since 2020**. Most notably, the proportion of children who say their parents talk to them about what they do online has fallen from 66% to 50%.
- Technical parental controls have moved in the opposite direction. Use of technical tools has increased substantially since 2020, including purchase controls and location tracking. Overall, the findings suggest some shift from **social and conversational towards more technical forms of parental management**, although

Part IV. Looking forward: Children and the digital future

- Children express both expectations and concerns about the technological future. Among their most prominent worries are the environmental costs of technology (41%) and the possibility that AI may escape effective human control (40%). Confidence in data protection is also limited: only 31% believe that platforms and apps will keep their personal data safe.
- Children are not passive recipients of technological change. They have views about the environmental, social and personal consequences of emerging technologies, and these perspectives should form part of decisions about how digital environments are developed and governed.

Overall

Across nearly every part of the report, **comparative analyses show considerable heterogeneity in the digital practices, opportunities, and risks reported by children**. Country differences are often substantial, and national patterns do not always follow the same age, gender or socioeconomic gradients. Age is nevertheless the most consistently important differentiator across access, activities, skills and many forms of risk. Gender matters strongly for some experiences but very little for others. Socioeconomic disadvantage emerges repeatedly across safety, victimisation, worries, some harmful content and difficulties regulating internet use, although its relationship with digital opportunities and skills is more context-dependent.

Taken together, the EU Kids Online 2026 findings show why children's digital lives cannot be assessed through **risk, access or amount of use alone**. Opportunities, skills and inequalities need to be considered alongside safety and harm, while parents, schools and regulation can both protect and enable.

A child-rights perspective requires attention to **protection, provision and participation together**, and to the national and social contexts in which children actually live their (digital) lives.

Introduction

The conditions of childhood in Europe have changed substantially, not only for the past 20 years, but also since our previous EU Kids Online (EUKO) survey in 2018–19.¹ The children who took part in the EUKO 2025 survey presented in this report have grown up through a pandemic, school closures and periods of social isolation; through war and renewed political insecurity in Europe; through growing concern about climate change and mental health; and through intensified public debate about what digital technologies may be doing to childhood.

The digital environment has also changed in the same period. Smartphones, social media and gaming have become even more deeply embedded in everyday life, and recommender systems increasingly organise children's experiences and affect their life chances. Most recently, generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has moved with extraordinary speed into search, schoolwork, creativity, communication and platforms children already use, as shown by our first report drawing on data from 2025, also revealing substantial differences by age and country.²

As societal and technological transformations become increasingly intertwined, we are witnessing a series of paradoxes regarding children's place in the (digital) world.

More recognition of children's rights – and more calls to restrict children's access

The first paradox is striking: just as children's rightful place in the digital environment has gained stronger international recognition, calls to restrict their access have gained momentum – often with little or no input from children themselves.

Since the previous survey in 2018/2019, children have acquired a much clearer position in international law as rights-holders in the digital environment: in 2021, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted **General comment No. 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment**. This was a significant normative development. It clarified that the rights set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child do not end when children go online. Protection

from violence, exploitation and harmful content matters, but so do privacy, access to information, education, freedom of expression and association, participation, play and the right to have one's views heard. The General comment explicitly recognises that the digital environment has become important across most areas of children's lives.³

At almost the same time, public and political debate has moved strongly towards **restriction**. Social media age limits, age verification, banning mobile phone use and broader proposals to limit children's access to a range of technologies at home and school are now being considered or introduced in several countries.

We are hopeful that this paradox can be resolved by a further important development: the EU Digital Services Act (DSA) offers a distinctive regulatory logic that does not locate responsibility for children's safety, privacy, security and wellbeing primarily with children and parents, but requires platforms accessible to minors to take on this responsibility. Specifically, the European Commission's Article 28 guidelines on the protection of minors under the DSA (2025) address recommender systems, potentially addictive design, unwanted contact, harmful content and age assurance, while explicitly stressing that protective measures should not unduly restrict children's rights to participation, information and freedom of expression.⁴

The distinction is important: protecting children from a risky environment is not necessarily the same as preventing them from entering it. However, this creates a genuine tension. Children have gained stronger recognition as rights-holders in digital environments at precisely the moment when restricting their access is increasingly presented as a solution to complex problems.

Children's views, and their accounts of their own experiences, should be heard in relation to this and other public debates about their digital lives. By asking 29,000 children aged 10–16, the new EUKO survey contributes to this, and our second EUKO report on children's views on age bans across European countries contributes with an extensive evidence base.⁵

¹ See Livingstone et al. (2011); Smahel et al. (2020).

² Staksrud et al. (2026b).

³ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021).

⁴ European Commission (2025).

⁵ Staksrud et al. (2026a).

More dependent on digital technologies – and more worried about their use

A second paradox concerns the place of technology in children's everyday lives.

When Covid-19 closed schools and restricted physical contact in 2020, digital technologies became essential infrastructure for education, friendship, family contact and participation. **Children aged 10–16 in the present survey were aged approximately 4–11 when the first lockdowns began.** Thus, for much of this generation, a formative period of childhood coincided with an extraordinary expansion in the role of digitally mediated education and social life.

The pandemic demonstrated both the value and the limits of digital connectivity. Across Europe most countries introduced digital solutions for remote education, but inequalities in devices, connectivity and support excluded many already disadvantaged children. Subsequent World Health Organization (WHO) findings also show that children's experiences of the pandemic were heterogeneous: some reported negative consequences for relationships, schooling and mental health, others reported little effect or even positive experiences, and impacts varied substantially between countries and social groups.⁶

Only a few years later, the political language has shifted. Where screens were recently necessary to maintain schooling and social contact, 'screen time' is frequently framed as a problem from which children should be protected. Smartphones are being removed from classrooms; social media is discussed in relation to mental health; and governments are examining whether access itself should be limited. These concerns should be taken seriously, but the historical reversal is worth noting. The same technologies that can provide education, social connection and participation in one context may interfere with sleep, concentration or relationships in another. Asking only whether children use screens, or how much, tells us little about these differences.

For this reason, the present survey pays more attention to context and timing: when screens are used during the day, what children are doing, which services they use, what happens at school, and how digital practices relate to other aspects of their lives. The object of study is increasingly not 'the internet' as a place children

enter, but the conditions under which digital technologies become part of childhood.⁷

More connected – but not necessarily more equal

A third paradox is that widespread connectivity has not made children's digital lives equal.

Already in 2011, EUKO challenged the idea of a generation of uniformly competent 'digital natives'. Access did not guarantee skills, opportunities or safety. The report also identified a tension that remains central today: greater engagement can open more opportunities while simultaneously increasing exposure to risk, whereas reducing risk through restriction can also reduce opportunities.

By the time our 2020 report was published, internet access through smartphones was increasingly routine, but substantial differences remained in activities and skills and between countries. The 2020 report stressed that digital skills matter for participation, education and wellbeing, while also recognising that skills and a broader range of online activities may be associated with greater exposure to risk.

The question today is therefore less simply who is connected, but rather who is able to benefit from being connected, under what conditions, and with what consequences – and why?

This is also why socioeconomic status (SES) has a more prominent place in the present report. The new EUKO V questionnaire combines established measures of access, practices, skills, opportunities and risks with a subjective measure of household socioeconomic circumstances and a broader set of questions concerning wellbeing, school, family support, safety and digital rights. The aim is to examine whether apparently widespread digital access conceals differences in the opportunities children can take up, the skills and support available to them, the risks they encounter, and the resources they have when something goes wrong.

Schools illustrate the issue particularly well. They can potentially reduce digital inequalities by providing shared access, structured learning and support for developing digital and artificial intelligence (AI) literacy. But schools themselves vary in resources, practices and rules. The same period has consequently produced another tension: children are expected to

⁶ Carnelli & Dreesen (2022); WHO Regional Office for Europe. (2023).

⁷ Livingstone et al. (2018).

acquire increasingly sophisticated digital and AI competencies while some educational settings are simultaneously becoming more restrictive about the personal technologies, such as mobile phones, through which much digital participation occurs.

More skilled – and potentially more exposed

A fourth paradox has been present throughout EU Kids Online research: **risk and opportunity are not opposites.**

The 2011 report described this as a difficult balancing act. Children who explore, communicate, create and participate online may encounter more risks simply because they *do* more. Conversely, keeping children away from digital environments may reduce some exposure while also limiting opportunities to learn, participate and develop the skills needed to navigate those environments, to be part of peer groups and social interactions among friends, and importantly, to develop resilience and confidence.

This is particularly important in current debates because low exposure to risk should not automatically be interpreted as a good digital childhood, just as high levels of activity should not automatically be interpreted as problematic. Risk is not the same as harm. Skills are not the same as immunity from harm. Restriction is not the same as protection.

Generative AI makes this tension particularly visible. Our recent EUKO research found that children see GenAI as useful for learning, explanation, creativity and efficiency, while also raising concerns about reliability, manipulation, privacy and over-reliance. Older children engage with a wider range of GenAI activities, and children themselves, as demonstrated in our qualitative comparative GenAI study, often ask for guidance on appropriate use rather than simple prohibition. The challenge is therefore to enable informed and competent participation while reducing avoidable harms.

More regulation – while the object of regulation keeps changing

Finally, Europe now has a substantially more developed regulatory framework for children's digital lives than it did when the previous EUKO data were collected. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has been joined by the DSA and the AI Act;

platform design, recommender systems, profiling, targeted advertising, age assurance and AI literacy are increasingly matters of law and public policy rather than simply parental choice. The DSA explicitly shifts part of the responsibility for children's safety towards the design and governance of platforms themselves.⁸

Yet regulation is becoming stronger while the technologies being regulated are becoming less stable and, in important respects, less visible and transparent to the user. Children no longer simply choose whether to enter a chatroom, create a social network profile or download a file. Algorithmic recommendation shapes what they see; AI functions are increasingly integrated into existing platforms; and design choices can influence attention, contact and participation without requiring an explicit decision from the child. Our GenAI findings illustrate this development: AI may become part of children's environment because it is incorporated into services they already use rather than because they have deliberately decided to adopt a new technology.

This also creates a paradox for research, as we cannot preserve comparability when the digital world does not stand still.

EUKO exists partly because comparison over time matters. Yet studying change requires both continuity and change in measurement. In 2011, it made sense to ask children about instant messaging, webcams, file-sharing sites and chatrooms. By the 2018–19 survey, smartphones, Instagram and TikTok had substantially changed the environment, and the questionnaire was revised accordingly. Today we need questions about GenAI, platform restrictions, digital rights, school phone policies, contemporary harmful content and when screens enter children's daily routines. The current questionnaire therefore deliberately combines questions retained from previous surveys with adapted and newly developed measures, while prioritising comparison between participating countries.

What this report contributes

It is within these tensions that this report should be read. Drawing on representative comparative data from 28,465 children aged 10–16 from 19 European countries – Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, and Switzerland – it provides a comparative account of contemporary digital childhood in Europe. The emphasis is not simply on

⁸ European Commission (n.d.).



identifying which country has more or less of a particular behaviour; we examine differences between countries and between children, with particular attention to age and gender and, in this survey, a stronger and more systematic focus on SES.

This is primarily a descriptive report. Its purpose is to provide researchers, policymakers, educators, practitioners, parents, civil society and the wider public with a reliable snapshot of children's lives, and to challenge assumptions and establish the patterns that need explaining: where countries are similar, where they differ, whether differences by age or gender are consistent across national contexts, and whether socioeconomic inequalities appear across different dimensions of children's opportunities, risks, skills and wellbeing. It does not assume that country, age, gender or SES themselves explain these patterns, and nor does it not suggest causal effects.

That distinction is central to the comparative design. National contexts matter, but an international survey cannot capture all of the institutional, cultural, educational and regulatory conditions that may account for national differences. As in the previous EUKO report, national teams and national publications

will therefore provide greater contextual detail and more complex analyses. The comparative dataset will also form the basis for subsequent academic research that can test relationships and explanations that a broad descriptive report cannot.

The paradoxes described should not be understood as challenges that can be resolved simply by choosing one side: **rights or protection; connection or disconnection; opportunity or safety; skills or restriction; innovation or regulation.** EUKO has, from its beginning, been child-centred, comparative, critical and contextual, and has resisted both overly optimistic and alarmist accounts of technology. The task of this report is therefore not to decide in advance whether children are better or worse off in a more digital Europe; it is to provide the evidence needed to ask a more useful set of questions:

For which children, under which circumstances, does the use of digital media lead to benefits, and for which children, under which conditions, does it pose a risk of harm? And how can we protect children without depriving them of the opportunities, participation and rights that are an essential part of growing up in a digital society?

About the authors

Professor Elisabeth Staksrud (PhD), Department of Media and Communications, and Centre for Studies of Children, Youth and Media, University of Oslo, Norway

Professor Ellen J. Helsper (PhD) Department of Media and Communications, International Inequalities Institute and Digital Futures for Children centre, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

Professor Sonia Livingstone (PhD, OBE), Department of Media and Communications and Digital Futures for Children centre, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

Associate Professor Bojana Lobe (PhD), Social Science Methodology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Professor Giovanna Mascheroni (PhD), Sociology of Digital Media, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Italy

Dr Mariya Stoilova (PhD), Department of Media and Communications and Digital Futures for Children centre, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

Kjartan Ólafsson (MA), DATICE - the Icelandic Research Data Service, University of Iceland

Editorial coordinator: Vilde Sannerud Kalin

Editorial assistance: Stine Nygård (PhD) **Gülbin Şengül-İnal** (PhD) and **Ida Engan Farstad** (PhD), all Centre for Studies of Children, Youth and Media, University of Oslo, Norway.

About EU Kids Online

EU Kids Online (EUKO) is a multinational, multidisciplinary research network that conducts research on children's online opportunities, risks and safety. The network uses multiple research methods to examine children's and parents' experiences of the internet and to support the development of knowledge relevant to policy and practice at national, European and international levels. EUKO adopts a children's rights perspective, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and General comment No. 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment. This involves a holistic approach to children's digital lives that considers children's participation, protection, privacy, provision, dignity and voice.

Organisation

EUKO operates as an independent research collaboration without centralised core funding. Participation is based on contributions from national research teams, and participation in the EUKO survey and activities is contingent on available prioritisation, support and funding from national authorities.

Each participating country in the EUKO network is represented by a national research team, led by a designated national coordinator. National coordinators are responsible for coordinating data collection and research activities within their country, ensuring that common methodological standards are followed, and serving as the main point of contact between the national team and the international network.

In this context and responding to the growing need to understand both the opportunities and risks that children encounter in the evolving digital landscape, the EUKO network continues to conduct large-scale, comparative and methodologically robust research on children's digital lives. Building on more than two decades of international research, EUKO provides a unique evidence base to inform policy, regulation, education and child-centred interventions across Europe.

The network is currently coordinated by Professor Elisabeth Staksrud, Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo, Norway, assisted by a management group.

Current phase and ongoing work

Building on nearly two decades of research activity, EUKO is undertaking a new phase of work (EUKO V). This phase includes a new representative survey building on the previous 2011 and 2018 surveys, designed to capture developments in children's digital lives. New and emerging topics, such as generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), are included alongside established areas such as online safety, digital skills and wellbeing.

The EUKO network is also conducting thematic and comparative studies on selected topics, including children's experiences with GenAI, parental mediation, digital inequalities and children's democratic engagement.

Previous phases

Earlier phases (EUKO I–IV) focused on building comparative evidence on children's internet use, risks and safety across Europe. These phases included large-scale surveys, qualitative studies and the development of shared research resources and databases. Findings from these phases have informed academic research and policy discussions on children's digital lives.

For further information, see www.eukidsonline.net

EU Kids Online principles

EUKO researchers work in accordance with the following principles:

- **High-quality science:** We conduct scientific research using rigorous and transparent methodologies appropriate to the research task, including enabling cross-country comparisons.
- **Ethical:** We follow the highest standard of ethical principles and practices in research with children and young people.
- **Balanced analysis:** We seek to be informed and balanced in our approach, and to critique overly optimistic, alarmist, moralistic or reductive accounts of technology's impacts on children.
- **Evidence-based policy:** We actively seek to expand and deepen academic, policymaker and public understanding of children's digital lives by promoting relevant and high-quality research, also noting research weaknesses and gaps as appropriate.
- **Open:** We disseminate our findings fairly and honestly, using open-access and/or peer-reviewed outlets wherever possible.
- **Independence and transparency:** We engage with multiple stakeholders, including government, policymakers, industry and civil society, sustaining an independent approach and avoiding conflicts of interest.
- **Integrity:** We conduct all our research and collaborations with integrity and are transparent about our sources of funding.



Abbreviations and phrases used in footnotes

Abbreviation/ phrase	Explanation	See
EUKO2011	EU Kids Online 2011 survey	https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/research/research-projects/eu-kids-online
EUKO2018	EU Kids Online 2018 survey	
EUKO2025	EU Kids Online 2025 survey	
GKO2020	Question asked in Global Kids Online 2020 survey	globalkidsonline.net
GKO Key measure	Global Kids Online Key measures are questions from the Global Kids Online 2020 survey.	
ySKILLS	Youth Skills	yskills.eu
QC	The question codes consist of: ‘Q’ for question, ‘C’ for core questions which were mandatory for all participating countries to include in their national surveys, and the question number .	
Core	The question was mandatory for all participating countries to include.	
Optional	The question was optional for participating countries to use.	
Extended	Used in EUKO2018 questionnaire. The question was an extended core question that was considered important but optional for participating countries to include.	
Wording changed	The wording of the question or item was modified from a previous EUKO survey for EUKO2025.	
Different scale	The scale used in a previous EUKO survey is different than the scale used for EUKO2025.	

Methodology

This report is based on survey data collected in 19 European countries between April 2025 and April 2026 by members of the EU Kids Online (EUKO) network (see Table 1). The questionnaire was designed to be administered in a school-based sample. It contained both questions that can be compared with previous EUKO surveys and new questions that were intended to capture recent developments in children's use of digital technologies. The final analytical dataset used in this report contains 28,465 respondents.

Survey design

The EUKO 2025/2026 survey was designed as a school-based survey of children and young people, with respondents completing a self-administered questionnaire in a classroom setting. The survey instrument was developed by the EUKO network and built around a common international questionnaire designed to support comparisons across the countries while allowing national teams to address issues of particular national relevance. The questionnaire comprised three components: mandatory questions that were included in all national versions; optional packages covering specific thematic areas; and country-specific questions addressing issues of national importance.

The questionnaire retained a substantial set of questions from earlier EUKO surveys, allowing comparisons with previous waves while also introducing questions intended to capture more recent developments in children's use of digital technologies. The development and validation of the survey measures have been undertaken as an ongoing process within the EUKO network.

National questionnaires were constructed from the common international instrument. Mandatory questions followed the order specified in the master questionnaire, while optional questions were generally placed within the relevant thematic sections. The questionnaire was also structured so that more general questions preceded more specific questions, reducing the possibility that responses to specific questions would influence responses to subsequent items. Particular attention was given to the placement of sensitive questions.

Translation and national adaptation

The source language for the questionnaire was English, with national teams responsible for producing versions in the languages required for their target populations. Translation followed the TRAPD approach (translation, review, adjudication, pre-testing and documentation, developed by the European Social Survey), where the objective is not just literal translation but equivalence of meaning and scope across languages and cultures. The approach involved combining translation expertise with knowledge of the relevant national linguistic and cultural context, with questionnaire items reviewed and refined as part of a team-based process.

The questionnaire was intended to cover at least 95% of the target population in each country. Accordingly, translation into languages spoken as a main language by at least 5% of the target population was expected where relevant. Both the English source questionnaire and national language versions formed part of the documentation accompanying the national datasets.

Target population and sampling

The target population for the survey comprised children born between 2009 and 2015, corresponding broadly to ages 10–16 in 2025. The sampling protocol specified that the sample should be nationally representative of this population, and that at least 95% of the eligible population should be covered by the sampling frame. Students in regular, vocational, general and academic education were included, while a small number of students in special schools or classes, or with severe disabilities, could be excluded where this was necessary for practical reasons. Countries could also stratify their samples, for example by geographical area, school type or other relevant characteristics, provided that the sampling procedures were sufficiently documented to permit appropriate weighting.

The recommended design was a clustered school-based sample, with classes normally serving as the primary sampling unit. Where this was not feasible, schools could instead be used as the primary sampling unit and a class selected within each participating school. Where the number of eligible classes was not known, probability-proportional-to-size sampling could be used. Once a class had been selected, all

pupils within the selected class were included in the intended sample. Ireland could not implement a school-based sample and so had to conduct in-home face-to-face interviews with the respondents.⁹

The survey protocol specified a minimum target of 1,000 completed interviews per country, with the sample distributed as evenly as practicable across the seven birth cohorts. Because a school-based design introduces clustering, however, achieving an adequate effective sample size depends not only on the number

of respondents but also on the number and distribution of schools and classes. Experience from the previous EUKO data collection suggested an average design effect of approximately 2.4 in countries using school-based sampling. The protocol therefore recommended obtaining responses from a relatively large number of sampling units rather than concentrating respondents in a small number of schools. As a rule of thumb, countries were encouraged to obtain at least 1,000 respondents from at least 50 classes in 50 different schools.

Table 1: Number of respondents, by country, gender and age group¹⁰

	Total	Boys	Girls	9–10 years	11–12 years	13–14 years	15–16 years
AT	1,667	733	893	32	334	635	666
BE	980	487	475	–	–	389	583
CH	1,302	652	612	187	386	421	308
CZ	2,169	1,118	1,008	327	603	669	570
EE	2,408	1,111	1,201	313	738	725	632
ES	2,596	1,298	1,212	348	767	720	761
FI	1,008	451	514	–	350	350	307
HR	1,024	446	549	32	317	314	361
IE	805	400	405	107	253	235	210
IT	2,146	1,094	1,021	327	776	500	543
LU	1,199	576	605	137	428	325	309
LV	1,985	978	933	387	564	503	531
MT	225	111	106	104	49	32	40
NO	1,048	527	507	115	328	333	272
PL	1,502	667	750	43	480	490	489
PT	1,975	959	991	134	641	712	488
RO	1,063	498	547	154	264	302	343
RS	1,674	800	843	40	487	435	712
SK	1,689	819	830	114	602	564	409
Total	28,465	13,725	14,002	2,902	8,375	8,654	8,534

The resulting national samples varied in size, reflecting differences in national fieldwork arrangements and the practical requirements of achieving the target population coverage. The final dataset therefore includes some respondents outside the principal target age range where these children were included in selected classes or otherwise encountered through

the fieldwork process. These respondents have been retained in the data but are not included in the data analysis for this report.

For the purposes of the comparative analyses presented in this report, country weights were applied to compensate for differences in the number of

⁹ Data in Ireland was collected using two separate surveys of children aged 9–17 and a parent/caregiver of each child respondent. A total of 2,004 respondents were surveyed between July 2025 and January 2026 using a modified version of the EU Kids Online questionnaire. The surveys were conducted using a Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) approach for children and Pen and Paper Interviewing (PAPI) approach for parents/caregivers. Child fieldwork quotas were set for age, gender, region and social grade to

ensure a broadly nationally representative sample by aligning with the known population according to the latest census (Central Statistics Office, 2022).

¹⁰ Note: Numbers for girls and boys in Croatia and Czechia, as well as for girls in Switzerland, differ slightly from those reported in the EUKO AI report (Staksrud et al., 2026b) due to coding adjustments.

respondents contributed by individual countries. The weighting procedure adjusts the data so that each participating country contributes equally to the overall cross-national average, rather than allowing countries with larger samples to have greater influence on the pooled results. In the weighted dataset, the sample size for each country was therefore standardised to the same contribution to the overall analysis apart from Malta, which had a significantly smaller sample. More specifically, the data is adjusted so that the sample size in each country is 1,000 children, whereas in Malta, the sample size was adjusted to 250 children.

Fieldwork and survey administration

Data collection took place between April 2025 and April 2026. The survey was administered in schools using procedures intended to provide a consistent experience for respondents while allowing national teams to accommodate national education systems and fieldwork arrangements. The EUKO methodology allows survey administration to be undertaken by researchers visiting schools, by teachers or other school staff following standardised instructions, or by appropriately experienced external fieldwork organisations. Regardless of the specific arrangement, those administering the survey were expected to receive clear instructions concerning the survey procedures and to have experience of school-based data collection.

The school-based approach was intended to provide a controlled setting in which children could complete the questionnaire independently. The survey could be completed online even where schools were used as the sampling mechanism. National teams were also expected, where appropriate, to liaise with relevant education authorities before approaching schools and to take account of the burden placed on schools, teachers and pupils by participation in the research.

Because participation in a school-based survey can be affected by non-participation at several stages, the sampling strategy took account of potential losses among both schools and individual students. The survey protocol recommends planning for this type of attrition rather than routinely substituting new schools for those that decline participation, since substitution can affect the representativeness of the resulting sample.

Piloting and quality assurance

Before national fieldwork, each participating country was required to pilot its complete national questionnaire. The purpose of the pilot was to identify

problems with completion time, respondents' understanding of questions – particularly among younger respondents – and the layout and sequencing of the questionnaire. Piloting also provided an opportunity to identify translation problems and to assess whether the instructions provided to respondents were adequate.

The pilot formed part of a broader process of questionnaire testing and quality assurance. Mandatory and optional questions had been tested during the development of the international instrument, while national piloting provided an additional check of the questionnaire as it would actually be administered in each national context.

Ethical considerations and informed consent

The survey was conducted in accordance with relevant national ethical and legal requirements and with the EUKO principles for research involving children. The survey methodology places particular emphasis on children's rights, informed participation, confidentiality and protection from potential disclosure or other harm. National teams were responsible for appropriate procedures for ethical review, to comply with relevant requirements concerning research involving children, and to ensure that participants and their schools and parents or caregivers were adequately informed about the study.

Informed consent and assent was obtained from participants in accordance with the applicable national procedures. The EUKO protocol recommends passive or opt-out parental consent where permitted, while also emphasising that children themselves should have an opportunity to make an informed decision about whether to participate. Children were informed that participation was voluntary and that they did not have to answer any question they did not wish to answer. Procedures were also required to allow participants to withdraw from the study and to protect children's anonymity throughout data collection and subsequent data handling.

The information provided to children and their parents or caregivers explained the purpose of the research, the confidential nature of responses, how the data would be stored and used, and who would have access to it. The survey protocol further emphasises the importance of explaining these matters in language that children can understand.

Please consult national reports for specific information on each data collection process.

Data management and preparation

Responsibility for the initial preparation and cleaning of each national dataset rested with the national research team. National teams were required to submit a fully cleaned dataset together with copies of the questionnaires used, documentation relating to the survey process and a technical report describing the fieldwork and data preparation. Kjartan Ólafsson, head of data management at the Icelandic Research Data Service (DATICE), was appointed by the EUKO management group as data manager for the survey, and was responsible for overseeing the process of combining the national datasets into the comparative EUKO dataset.

A common coding framework was used to facilitate cross-national harmonisation. Data preparation also included checks for invalid or out-of-range codes, correct variable and value labels, completeness of the required core questions, and consistency with the common coding framework.

Anonymisation and disclosure protection

Protection against disclosure was considered both during national data preparation and before datasets were transferred for comparative analysis. Respondent and school identifiers were anonymised and constructed so that they could not be traced back to identifiers used in the sampling process, including geographical or other information that might facilitate identification.

National teams had to assess disclosure risks in their datasets before submission. This assessment took account not only of individual variables but also of the possibility that individuals could be identified through combinations of characteristics. Depending on the circumstances, measures to reduce disclosure risk can include aggregation, rounding, limiting extreme values, substitution and suppression of cells. Any measures applied had to be documented and justified by the national team.

For the present comparative dataset, national data were shared in anonymised form and subsequently merged into a single international dataset. No personally identifiable information was included in the international comparative dataset. This approach allowed the data to be used for cross-national analysis while maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of participating children.

The final analytical sample

The final dataset used in this report contains 28,465 respondents from 19 European countries. The achieved numbers vary across the countries, but the overall dataset provides coverage across the target age range and includes respondents from the different birth cohorts targeted by the survey. The distribution by age and gender is broadly balanced, although the precise composition varies between countries.

For the analyses presented in this report, the data were weighted to ensure that countries contributed equally to cross-national estimates. Additional attention was given to the distribution of respondents across age and gender categories. In particular, respondents who selected 'Other' in the gender question, or who did not answer the question, were considered separately from the binary gender categories. Because the number of respondents in the 'Other' category was too small to support reliable statistical analysis in the cross-national dataset, these respondents were excluded from analyses broken down by gender. The resulting gender comparisons therefore refer to respondents who classified themselves as boys or girls.

The age distribution was also taken into account in the preparation of the analytical dataset. The final sample contains respondents across the four age groups used in the report, providing representation of younger children, early adolescents and older adolescents. This distribution is important because children's access to and use of digital technologies, as well as their experiences and autonomy online, can change substantially with age.

Analysis and interpretation

The analyses presented in this report focus primarily on aggregated cross-national patterns rather than detailed country-level comparisons. Survey questions are analysed in relation to a common set of background characteristics, including country, age, gender and perceived socioeconomic status (SES). For selected measures, the analysis also considers children's views and attitudes.

The use of a school-based clustered sample means that observations cannot be treated as fully independent simple random observations. The survey protocol highlights the importance of clustering because children attending the same school may share characteristics arising from their school environment or social background. The sampling strategy therefore seeks to distribute respondents across a relatively large number of schools and classes rather than concentrating the sample in a small number of schools.

The results in this report should consequently be interpreted primarily as describing patterns across the participating countries and population groups represented in the survey. Although the harmonised survey design and common questionnaire support meaningful cross-national comparison, differences between countries in educational systems, social contexts, sampling frames and fieldwork arrangements should also be taken into account when interpreting observed differences.

PART I

Access, opportunities and skills for participation

What does it mean to grow up in a digital Europe today?

How do children get online, what opportunities do they take up, and how is generative AI becoming part of their everyday lives?

What skills and knowledge do they have to participate effectively, critically and creatively, and when during the day do screens enter their routines?



1. Access and connection

Internet access is now embedded in many aspects of children's everyday lives, and the ways in which children access the internet have changed substantially as internet use has shifted towards more personalised and portable forms of access.¹¹ However, being 'online' is not a single or uniform experience. The devices children use influence when and where they can access the internet, as well as the range of activities that are available to them. Smartphones in particular provide portable and personalised access, increasing children's autonomy over when and where they go online.¹² Examining the devices through which children access the internet therefore provides important context for understanding the wider patterns of digital activities, opportunities and risks considered throughout this report.

The portability and personalisation of internet-connected devices also mean that online activities can be increasingly integrated into children's everyday routines and social contexts.¹³ Children may, for example, check a message, search for information, watch a short video or communicate with friends repeatedly throughout the day rather than experiencing internet use only as a discrete period of 'going online'.

For this reason, **frequency of access should not be interpreted as equivalent to the amount of time children spend online.** Nor does frequent use of a particular device indicate what children are doing with it, or whether that use is beneficial or problematic. Research increasingly points to the limitations of aggregate measures such as 'screen time' for characterising children's digital experiences, since duration alone does not capture important differences in the content, context and nature of digital media use.¹⁴ Frequency of access is therefore understood here primarily as an indicator of how routinely different forms of digital access are incorporated into children's everyday lives.

Device access is also important from the perspective of digital inequality. As internet connectivity has become increasingly widespread, digital inequalities cannot be understood solely in terms of whether people are connected; the quality

and autonomy of access, digital skills and opportunities for participation also matter.¹⁵ For children, having access to a smartphone does not necessarily provide the same range of possibilities as having access to multiple devices. Smartphones provide mobility and greater autonomy of access, while different devices may facilitate different forms of online activity and participation.¹⁶ Examining device use can therefore help to identify differences not simply in whether children access the internet, but in if and how they are able to access it.

Devices used

Across the 19 countries surveyed, smartphones are by far the most commonly used devices for accessing the internet on a daily basis. On average, **87% of children aged 10–16 report using a mobile phone or smartphone to go online every day.** By comparison, **33% use a desktop or laptop computer daily, 20% use a tablet and 19% use a games console.** A further 21% report daily internet access through other devices.

The predominance of smartphones continues a pattern already clearly visible in the previous EU Kids Online (EUKO) survey.¹⁷ As reported in our 2020 report, an average of 80% of 9- to 16-year-olds used a smartphone or mobile phone to access the internet at least daily compared with 43% using a desktop or laptop computer and 22% using a tablet. In the present survey, daily smartphone use is somewhat higher, at 87%, whereas daily computer use is lower, at 33%, and tablet use is broadly similar, at 20%.

Daily smartphone use is high in most countries, although there is considerable variation. It reaches 99% in Belgium, 95% in Poland and Serbia and 94% in Austria and Finland. At the other end of the distribution, daily smartphone use is reported by 68% of children in Switzerland and Spain, 69% in Malta and 75% in Luxembourg. Although smartphones are the dominant means of accessing the internet across the participating countries, the extent to which they are used every day varies across the countries.

¹¹ Mascheroni & Ólafsson (2016); Smahel et al. (2020).

¹² Mascheroni & Ólafsson (2016).

¹³ Livingstone et al. (2018); Mascheroni & Ólafsson (2016).

¹⁴ Browne et al. (2021); Kucirkova et al. (2023).

¹⁵ Helsper (2021).

¹⁶ Mascheroni & Ólafsson (2016).

¹⁷ Smahel et al. (2020).

Table 2: Daily use of different devices, by country

	Mobile phone or smartphone	Desktop computer or laptop	Tablet	Games console	Other
AT	94	32	30	19	17
BE	99	71	21	20	15
CH	68	25	25	20	19
CZ	91	30	13	14	18
EE	93	40	14	13	22
ES	68	35	24	19	56
FI	94	28	11	19	16
HR	92	22	7	17	19
IE	76	15	28	27	9
IT	82	22	29	26	22
LU	75	18	44	22	20
LV	90	39	12	14	17
MT	69	37	35	27	24
NO	91	53	30	26	18
PL	95	36	10	11	19
PT	86	28	17	17	14
RO	93	32	13	19	21
RS	95	28	5	12	16
SK	89	29	12	14	16
Ave	87	33	20	19	21

QC7¹⁸: How often have you gone ONLINE or used the INTERNET using the following devices in the PAST YEAR? Base: All children 10–16

Looking beyond daily use to the frequency with which smartphones are used shows how firmly mobile internet access is integrated into children's everyday lives. Across the countries surveyed, **58% of children report accessing the internet through a smartphone several times each day**. A further 28% do so daily or almost daily, while only 14% use a smartphone to access the internet less often.

There are substantial cross-country differences in the proportion of children who use a smartphone several times a day. Very frequent access is highest in Belgium (86%) and Romania (78%), followed by Austria (72%), Finland (70%) and Norway (68%). By contrast, fewer than half of children report this level of smartphone use in Spain (38%), Malta (40%), Ireland (41%), Switzerland (44%) and Croatia (46%).

The contrast is also visible in the proportion using smartphones less frequently. Only 1% of children in

Belgium report using a smartphone less often than daily compared with 35% in Switzerland, 32% in Spain, 31% in Malta and 28% in Ireland. These differences indicate that the extent to which smartphone connectivity is integrated into children's everyday routines varies considerably between countries.

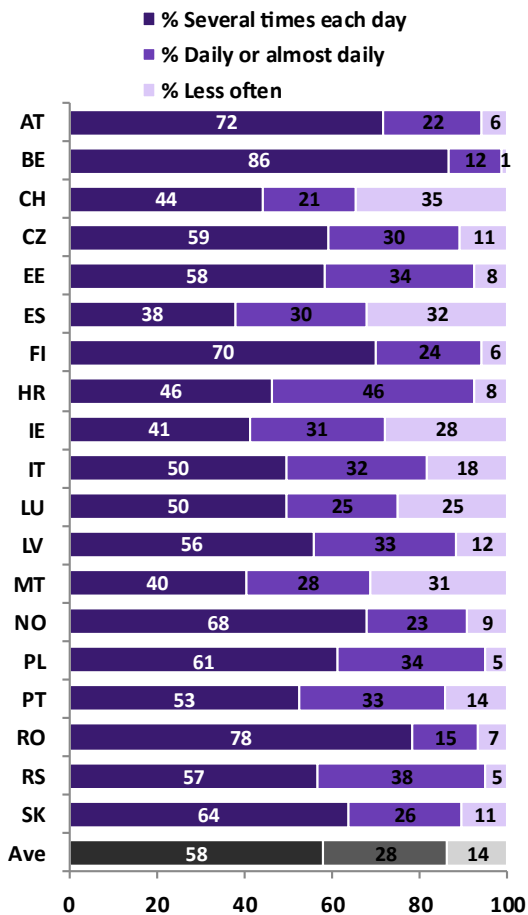
Comparison with the EUKO 2020 findings suggests both continuity and some further expansion of regular smartphone access. **In 2020, 57% of children accessed the internet through a smartphone several times each day or almost all the time**, 23% did so daily or almost daily, and 20% did so less often. In the current survey, the proportion reporting very frequent use is almost unchanged at 58%, whereas the proportion using smartphones less often has fallen to 14%. Taken together with the increase in daily smartphone use from 80% in 2020 to 87% in the current survey, this suggests that regular smartphone access has become more widespread, even though

¹⁸ In EUKO2011, EUKO2018 (QB5, core/extended) & GKO2020. EUKO2011: different wording. EUKO2011 & GKO2020: different scale. GKO2020 Key measure. Also used in ySKILLS project. Source: EUKO (2011) adapted. Changes from EUKO2018: wording changed from "How often do you go online or use the internet using the following devices?" for EUKO2025, added "in the past year"; scale: "Almost all the time" changed to "All the time"; some items have been modified or removed.

the proportion accessing the internet many times during the day has remained relatively stable.

Across the 19 countries, the frequency with which children use a smartphone to access the internet increases markedly with age. On average, 27% of 10-year-olds report using a smartphone to go online several times each day, compared with 43% of 11- to 12-year-olds, 65% of 13- to 14-year-olds and 76% of 15- to 16-year-olds.

Figure 1: Frequency of using a smartphone to access the internet, by country

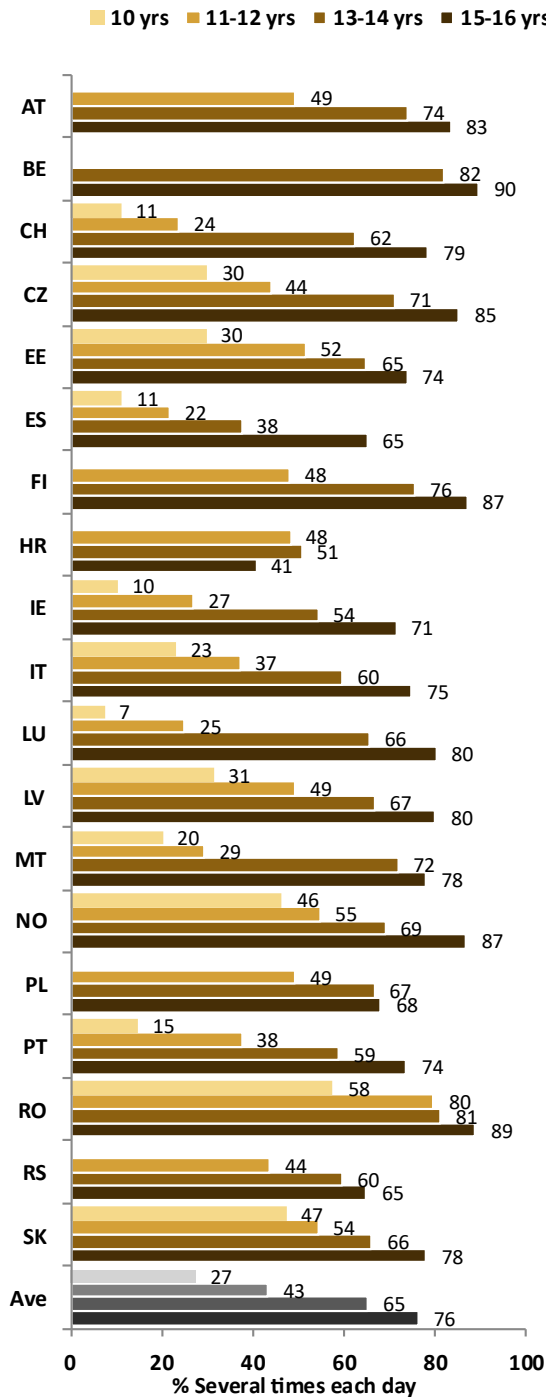


QC7: How often have you gone ONLINE or used the INTERNET using the following devices in the PAST YEAR? QC7a: A mobile phone or smartphone. Base: All children 10–16.

Looking within countries, the differences between the youngest and oldest children are considerable. In Switzerland, frequent smartphone use increases from 11% among 10-year-olds to 24% among 11- to 12-year-olds, 62% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 69% among 15- to 16-year-olds. A similar pattern is observed in Ireland (10%, 27%, 54% and 71%), Spain

(11%, 22%, 38% and 65%), and Luxembourg (7%, 25%, 66% and 80%). These countries therefore show particularly strong increases in frequent smartphone use across childhood and adolescence.

Figure 2: Using a smartphone to access the internet, by country and age group



QC7: How often have you gone ONLINE or used the INTERNET using the following devices in the PAST YEAR? QC7a: A mobile phone or smartphone. Base: All children 10–16.

Romania shows relatively high levels of daily smartphone use for younger children, rising from 58% among 10-year-olds to 80% among 11- to 12-year-olds, 81% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 89% among 15- to 16-year-olds. The same applies in Slovakia where 47% of the 10-year-olds and 54% of 11-12 year olds use smartphones daily and in Norway where 46% of 10-year-olds and 55% of 11-12 year olds use smartphones daily. In these countries, frequent smartphone access is therefore already widespread among the younger age groups for which data are available.

Croatia is an exception to a linear growth of access with age: 48% among 11- to 12-year-olds, 51% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 41% among 15- to 16-year-olds use smartphones daily to access the internet. In Poland, the difference between the two oldest groups is also very small (67% and 68%) and, as in Serbia, is relatively lower compared to other countries.

Taken together, the country results show that although frequent smartphone access generally becomes more common with age, there is considerable cross-national variation in both its prevalence and the age at which it becomes widespread. In Belgium and Romania, frequent smartphone access is already common among the younger age groups for which data are available, whereas in countries such as Luxembourg, Switzerland, Finland and Austria, much larger differences are observed between younger children and older adolescents. Previous European research has similarly identified age as an important factor in children's mobile internet access and use.¹⁹

Across the 19 countries, girls are somewhat more likely than boys to report using a smartphone to access the internet several times each day. Overall, 62% of girls report frequent smartphone access compared with 56% of boys.

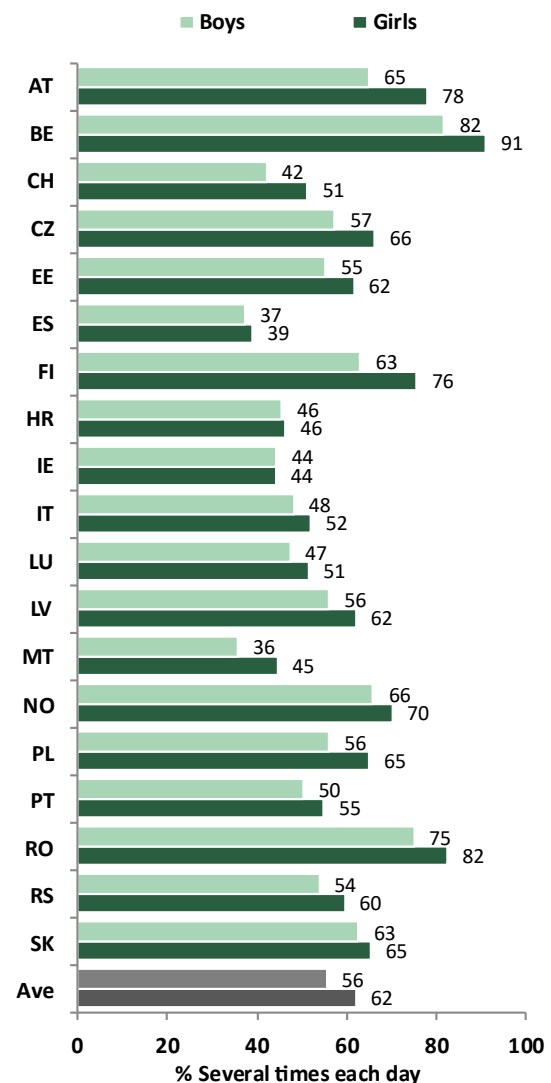
The country level results show that the size of the gender difference varies considerably. **Girls report more frequent smartphone access than boys in 17 of the 19 countries**, while the proportions are the same in Croatia (46%) and Ireland (41%). The largest differences are found in Austria, where 78% of girls compared with 65% of boys report frequent smartphone access, and Finland (76% compared with 63%).

Differences are also observed in Belgium (91% of girls and 82% of boys) and Malta (45% and 36%). Smaller differences in the same direction are found in several other countries, including Romania (82% compared

with 75%), Poland (65% compared with 56%) and Latvia (62% compared with 56%).

By contrast, there are only small differences found in countries such as Spain (39% of girls and 37% of boys) and Slovakia (65% and 63%).

Figure 3: Using a smartphone to access the internet, by country and gender



QC7: How often have you gone ONLINE or used the INTERNET using the following devices in the PAST YEAR? QC7a: A mobile phone or smartphone. Base: All children 10–16.

There is also substantial cross-country variation in the overall frequency of smartphone access among both girls and boys. Frequent smartphone access is particularly widespread in Belgium (91% of girls and 82% of boys), Romania (82% and 74%), Austria (78%

¹⁹ Mascheroni & Ólafsson (2016); Smahel et al. (2020).

and 65%) and Finland (76% and 63%). Considerably lower levels are observed in Spain (39% and 37%), Ireland (41% for both genders), Malta (45% and 36%) and Switzerland (51% and 42%). The findings therefore show that both the overall level of frequent smartphone access and the size of gender differences vary across national contexts.

Importantly, these findings concern the pattern with which girls and boys access daily the internet through a smartphone, rather than smartphone ownership or access to mobile technology itself. However, it is important to stress that this measure does not provide information about the duration or purpose of smartphone use.

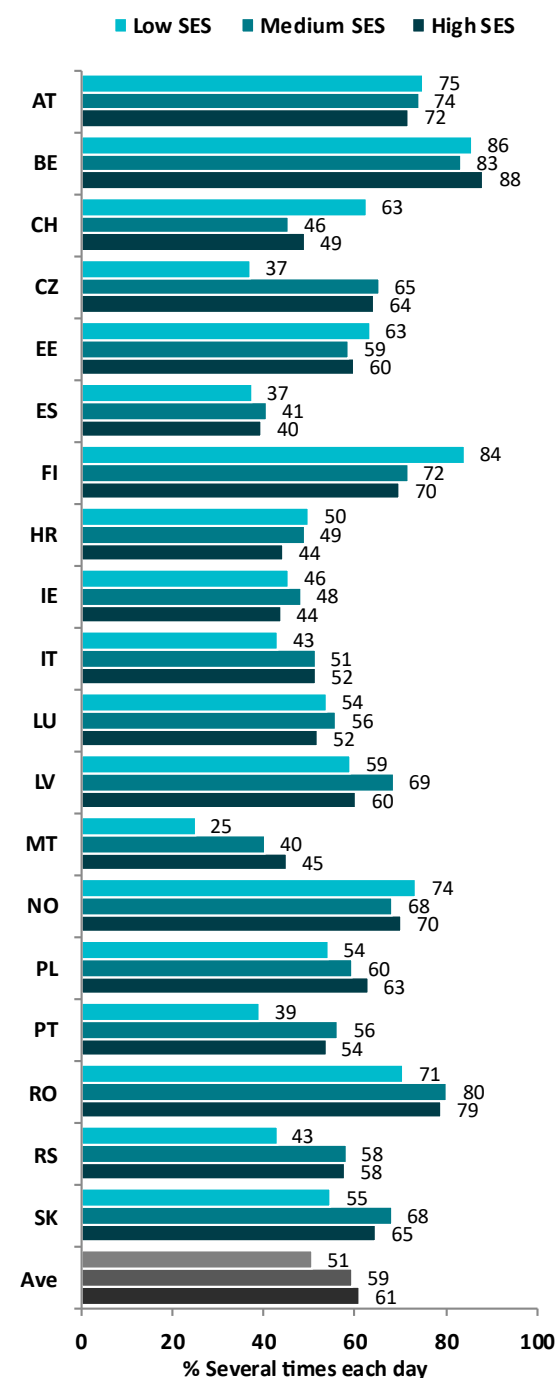
Across the 19 countries, children from higher socioeconomic status (SES) households are more likely to report using a smartphone to access the internet several times each day. On average in all countries, this is reported by 51% of children from low SES households, 59% from medium SES households and 61% from high SES households.

The relationship between SES and frequent smartphone access varies considerably across the countries. The largest differences between low and high SES children are found in Czechia and Malta. In Czechia, the proportion using a smartphone to access the internet several times each day rises from 37% among low SES children to 65% among medium and to 64% among high SES children, a difference of nearly one-third between the lowest and highest SES groups. In Malta, the corresponding proportions are 25%, 40% and 45%, observing a 20% difference between low and high SES children.

Smaller differences are observed in several other countries. In Poland the corresponding figures are 54%, 60% and 63%. Slovakia also shows lower use among low SES children (55%) than among medium SES (68%) and high SES children (65%), although the pattern is not strictly linear.

In several countries, however, there is little difference according to SES. This is particularly evident in Italy (low SES 43%, medium SES 51%, high SES 52%), as well as in Spain (low SES 37%, medium SES 41%, high SES 40%). In some countries, the pattern is reversed: in Finland, for example, frequent smartphone access is highest among low SES children (84%) and lower among medium SES (72%) and high SES children (70%) as well as in Austria (75%, 74% and 72%) and Estonia (63%, 59% and 60%). In Switzerland, frequent smartphone access also decreases by SES from 63% among low SES children to 46% among medium SES, and slightly increases to 49% among high SES children.

Figure 4: Using a smartphone to access the internet, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC7: How often have you gone ONLINE or used the INTERNET using the following devices in the PAST YEAR? QC7a A mobile phone or smartphone. Base: All children 10–16.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the overall consistent pattern between higher SES and more frequent smartphone access is not observed at the

country level. In some countries, children from more advantaged households report more frequent smartphone access, whereas in others SES differences are small, absent or reversed. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that socioeconomic inequalities in children's digital lives cannot be understood solely in terms of smartphone

access or frequency of use. **As smartphones have become increasingly widespread, inequalities may also concern the quality and autonomy of access, the range of devices available, digital skills and the opportunities children derive from their internet use.**²⁰

²⁰ Helsper (2021); Livingstone et al. (2018); Mascheroni & Ólafsson (2016).

2. Use of mobile phones in schools

Rules about phones in school, and in particular banning mobile phones, sit at the intersection of **education, digital participation and protection**. For the past few years, schools have become an important setting for debates about children's mobile phone use in general. Concerns about distraction, learning, social interaction and wellbeing have led some schools and (national) education authorities to introduce restrictions, but these rules vary considerably in the extent to which they limit access and use.²¹

Schools have a potentially important **levelling role in relation to digital inequalities**. Children differ substantially in the technologies, support and opportunities available to them at home, and these differences can shape both what they are able to do online and the skills they develop. Schools can partly compensate for such inequalities by providing common access to digital tools, structured opportunities to practise and guidance in areas such as information evaluation, privacy, communication and the responsible use of digital tools and services. At the same time, schools themselves differ in resources, teacher competence and how systematically digital skills are embedded in teaching. Digital policies, including mobile phone policies, are therefore relevant not only as rules about device use, but as part of a broader question about whether and how schools **reduce or reproduce inequalities in children's opportunities to develop digital competence**. Mobile phone rules, especially rules that enforce blanket bans, are therefore not only an issue of protection but also of the utilisation of other rights, through the creation of opportunities for children to develop competences they need.

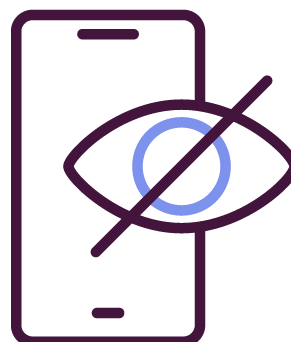
In this report we therefore consider country differences in school ban phone rules as perceived by the children. In some school systems, digital tools are embedded across subjects and treated as part of everyday learning, while in others, their educational use is more limited or more tightly separated from pupils' personal devices. Rules concerning mobile phones should therefore not necessarily be read as an indicator of whether a school system is more or less 'digital'. A school may restrict personal phones while making extensive use of other digital technologies for learning. This distinction is becoming even more important as new technologies enter education formally and informally. As an example, our recent EUKO report on GenAI²² found substantial country differences in children's engagement with GenAI, while use

increased particularly strongly with age. Children also described GenAI as a potentially valuable academic resource, including for explaining difficult material, generating ideas and making schoolwork more efficient, and several argued for guidance on appropriate use rather than simple prohibition.

What we asked

To **capture children's own perspectives**, we asked those who reported having a mobile phone rule at school **whether they agreed with that rule**. This adds an important dimension to the analysis. Knowing that a restriction exists tells us how schools regulate phone use; asking children whether they support it tells us something about the rule's **perceived legitimacy and acceptability** among those directly affected by it. Children may recognise the value of restrictions even when these limit their own behaviour, or they may experience particular rules as unnecessarily restrictive, or poorly adapted to their educational needs. Examining agreement can therefore help distinguish between rules that are simply imposed and rules that also command a degree of support from pupils. This is particularly relevant from a child rights perspective, where children should not only be protected but also have opportunities for their views to be heard in decisions affecting their everyday lives.

To avoid overinterpreting the school rule items, we focus here only on the clearest indicator: **whether children report that their school does not allow them to bring a mobile phone to school. We treat this as a reported school mobile phone ban**. The remaining items are not used to classify schools into policy regimes because they combine different permissions and restrictions and were not designed as mutually exclusive categories.



²¹ See, for instance, Crêteur et al. (2026); Kharazi et al. (2026).

²² Staksrud et. al (2026b)

Age differences related to mobile phone bans in schools

Looking more closely at age as a factor in if and how mobile phones in schools are regulated, we find that the differences between the youngest and oldest age groups are substantial. **Younger children are far more likely to report a rule prohibiting pupils from bringing a phone to school.** Across the sample, such a rule is reported by 78% of 10-year-olds and 64% of 11- to 12-year-olds compared with 46% of 13- to 14-year-olds and only 30% of 15- to 16-year-olds.

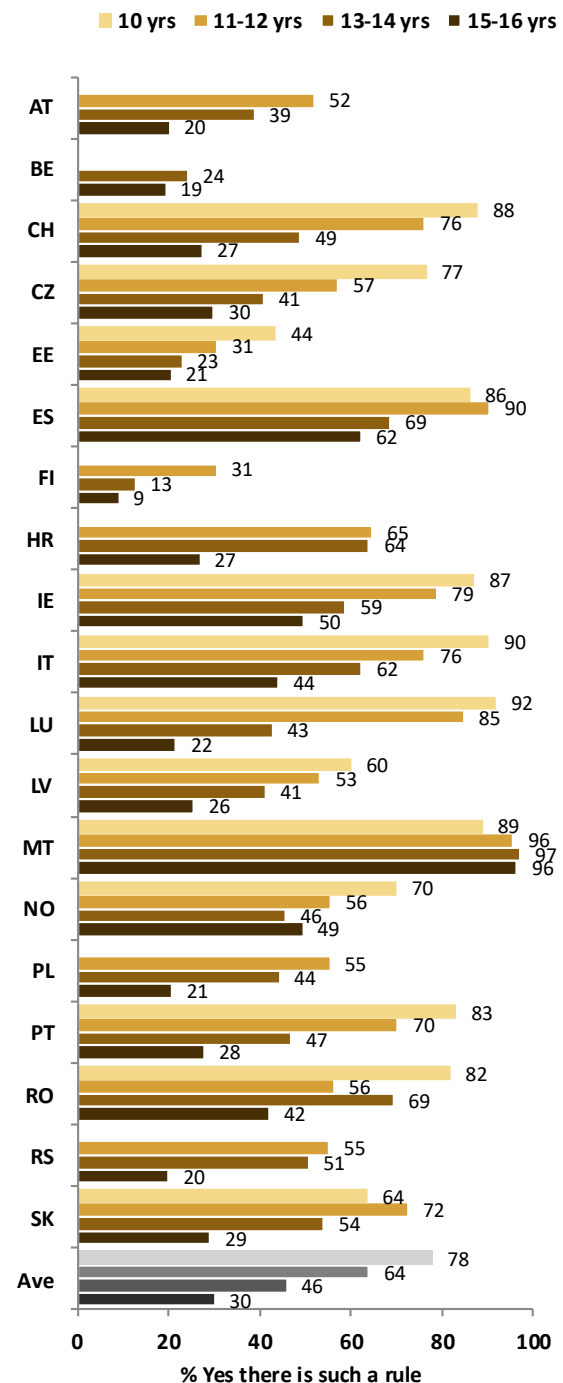
This broad pattern is visible in most countries. Particularly steep age gradients are found in Luxembourg (92% among 10-year-olds compared with 22% among 15- to 16-year-olds), Switzerland (88% vs 27%), Portugal (83% vs 28%), Czechia (77% vs 30%) and Italy (90% vs 44%). Ireland and Latvia show similar patterns.

There are nevertheless important country differences. **Malta is the clearest exception**, with an almost universal prohibition reported across all age groups: between 89% and 97% report such a rule. **Finland is at the opposite end**, with relatively few pupils reporting a complete prohibition, including only 9% of 15- to 16-year-olds and 13% of 13- to 14-year-olds. Estonia also has comparatively low levels across ages. Norway shows a more moderate age gradient: 70% of 10-year-olds report a prohibition, falling to 56% among 11- to 12-year-olds and around half of the two older groups (46–49%).

We note here how age is closely connected to **school level**: the findings may reflect differences between primary and secondary schools and expected autonomy levels as much as differences between children of different ages, and education systems in Europe differ in when pupils transition between school levels.

Overall, our results reinforce the need to distinguish between a complete prohibition on bringing phones and other forms of regulation: lower prevalence of a complete ban among older pupils does not necessarily imply unrestricted phone use but may instead reflect a shift towards more differentiated rules concerning classroom use, breaks and educational purposes.

Figure 5: Mobile phone ban in schools, by country and age group



QC34²³: Does your school... QC34a: Have a rule that you are not allowed to bring a phone to school? Base: All children 10–16

²³ New question in EUKO2025. Source: n/a.

Children's views on having a mobile phone ban in their school

Finally, we propose that it is important not only to ask **whether schools restrict phones, but also whether the children affected regard those restrictions as helpful and legitimate**. We therefore look further into those who report that their school has a rule that they are not allowed to bring a phone to school (a mobile phone ban), also highlighting the importance of children's own perception of regulation.

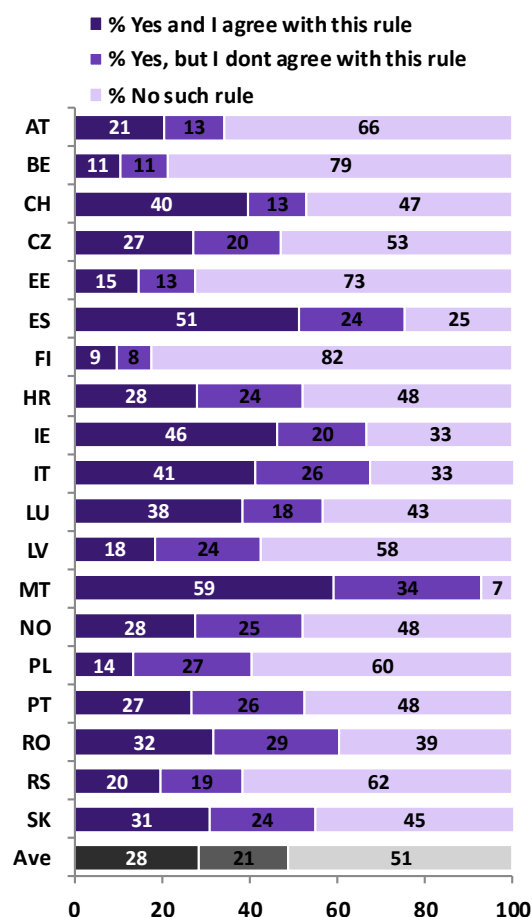
Across the sample just over half (51%) of children report no such rule and 49% report that their school has a rule prohibiting them from bringing a phone to school: **28% both have the rule and agree with it, while 21% have the rule but disagree with it**. Thus, among children who are subject to a complete prohibition or ban, support is somewhat more common than opposition, but there is no overwhelming consensus.

There are, however, substantial country differences, both in the prevalence of the rule and in children's views of it. **Malta stands out as the most restrictive context**: 93% report such a rule, with 59% of all children agreeing and 34% disagreeing. Spain also has a relatively high prevalence of the rule (75%), but here opinions are more divided: 51% agree and 24% disagree. In Ireland and Italy, around two-thirds report the rule, yet agreement and disagreement are also relatively balanced compared with Malta.

A different pattern is found in countries where complete prohibitions are relatively uncommon. In Finland, only around 17% report such a rule, and the sample is almost evenly divided between those agreeing (9%) and disagreeing (8%). Belgium and Estonia similarly have relatively few children subject to a complete prohibition, with almost equal numbers of children agreeing and not agreeing to the rule.

There are also countries where disagreement constitutes a substantial part of the overall picture. In Romania, 29% of all children report having the rule but disagreeing with it compared with 32% who have and support it. Poland (14% agreeing, 27% disagreeing), Portugal (27% vs 26%), Italy (41% vs 26%) and Norway (25%) also have comparatively large groups of children who are subject to the rule but do not support it.

Figure 6: Children's agreement with rules regarding mobile phones in school, by country

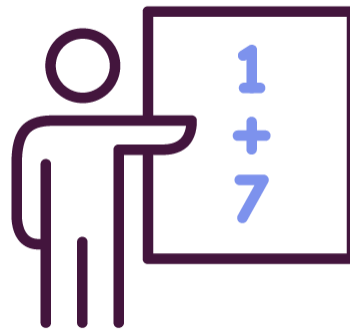


QC34: Does your school... QC34a: Have a rule that you are not allowed to bring a phone to school? Base: All children 10–16

Overall, the findings show that children's views cannot simply be inferred from how restrictive school policies are. In some countries, restrictive rules coexist with relatively strong support; in others, a sizeable proportion of affected children disagree. This is important for understanding the **perceived legitimacy of school regulation**. It also raises questions for age analysis: support for a rule that removes personal phones from school may differ as children become older, gain greater autonomy and increasingly use digital technologies for educational as well as social purposes.

Our findings illustrate an important distinction between **how common a rule is** and **how children experience it**. A restrictive policy can be uncommon but highly accepted by the children who are subject to it, or widespread but have relatively little support.

More broadly, the findings show that children do not necessarily oppose rules that restrict their own phone use. In several countries, substantial proportions of those affected support the restrictions, indicating that children themselves may recognise benefits associated with limiting phones at school. At the same time, the marked country differences propose that acceptance is strongly context-dependent.



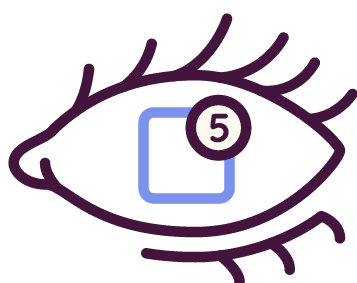


3. Digital media during everyday life

Since our previous EUKO survey in 2018, and in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, the term and concept of ‘screen time’ has become one of the most prominent topics in public debates about children’s digital lives.

Governments, schools and health authorities increasingly issue recommendations on children’s screen use, restrict mobile phones during the school day, or encourage screen-free routines such as at meal times and in bedrooms. Recent examples include age-specific screen use guidance in Sweden and Norway, UK government guidance for parents of under-5s, and expanding school mobile phone restrictions in countries such as Finland, Luxembourg, Belgium and Poland.

EUKO, as other researchers, has been cautious about using ‘screen time’ as either a theoretical concept or a general indicator of healthy or harmful digital media use, as the term ‘screen time’ combines fundamentally different practices into a single aggregate measure. An hour spent speaking to a grandparent, completing schoolwork, watching a film, creating a video, playing with friends, scrolling through short-form content or encountering harmful material may all count as an hour of ‘screen time’, although the activities, motivations, social relationships and possible outcomes differ substantially. The term ‘screen time’ also explicitly and implicitly groups together television, smartphones, tablets, computers and gaming devices, despite considerable differences in portability, interactivity, personalisation and design. More fundamentally, *time* is not an exposure with a uniform effect. For instance, an hour scrolling or watching a film in the middle of the night does not have the same implications as an hour scrolling or watching a film during the day.



Research since the introduction of movies, and in particular television, has highlighted how the relationship between screens and (digital) media use and children’s wellbeing varies according to what children do, the content and people they encounter, their age and circumstances, and how services are designed. Thus, and building on decades of research, empirical evidence and observations of generations that have experienced movies (since the late 1800s), TV (since the 1940s), videos (since the 1980s), video games (since the 1970s) and the internet (since the 1970s–1990s), there is a recognition that watching or interacting with something or someone on a screen does not in itself as a default constitute harm or benefits.

A narrow emphasis on total time in the public debate and regulation may consequently obscure more than it reveals. It suggests that all digital activities can or do displace sleep, exercise, learning or social interaction to the same degree, although some screen-based practices are themselves educational, social, creative or physically active. It also ignores all the factors on the individual, social and national level that influence whether children’s engagement with digital media leads to opportunities and benefits, or risk of harm. A minute spent seeing graphic images of victims of war on online newspapers might do more harm for a child than hours of playing computer games with friends. Furthermore, this framing places the responsibility and focus on children and parents to count minutes, while paying insufficient attention to platform features designed to prolong engagement, school requirements, the availability of non-digital activities and wider inequalities in children’s everyday lives. The problem is not measuring time but treating total time as a sufficient explanation.

This does not make time irrelevant. **How much, when and for how long** children use digital devices may matter where use displaces other important activities or enters contexts in which attention is essential. **Screen use during lessons differs from use during school breaks; use during a family meal may have different implications from use alone in the afternoon; and use after bedtime or during the night may be especially relevant to sleep.**

A new measure of the timing and temporal reach of screens

Acknowledging these challenges, and with the interest of understanding further the wider socioecological dynamics of children’s use of media informing the current debate, EUKO has introduced a new measure²⁴ for the current survey and questionnaire intended to capture the temporal organisation of screen use rather than the duration or quality of individual activities.²⁵ The question maps **how frequently screens enter different parts of a regular weekday**. Children aged 10–16 were asked how often, during the previous month, they had used *any* type of screen (including TV, mobile phones, computer games and tablets) at eight points in the day: before school, during class, during school breaks, after school, during dinner, in the evening before bed, after bedtime, and during the night. Then, five response options were given as a closed frequency scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Hardly ever, 3 = Once or twice a week, 4 = Almost every day, and 5 = Every day.

The measure retains the breadth associated with the word ‘screens’, but it addresses an important limitation of conventional screen time estimates. It identifies **where in children’s daily routines screen use is recurrent**, allowing potentially different institutional, social and developmental contexts to be considered separately. Importantly, it does *not* establish what children were doing, how long they were doing it, whether several devices were involved, or whether the use was beneficial or problematic. The findings should therefore be interpreted as a **map of the temporal reach of screens**, and not as a measure of exposure or harm.

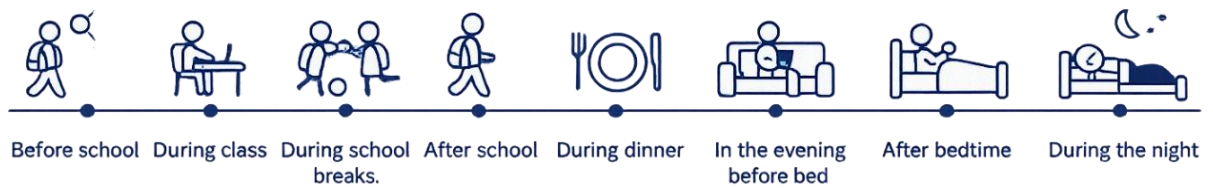
Since the previous EUKO survey, and particularly in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, ‘screen time’ has become even more prominent in public and policy debates about children’s digital lives. Yet EUKO has remained cautious about using screen time as either a theoretical concept or a general indicator of healthy or harmful digital media use. The term reduces

fundamentally different practices to a single aggregate measure, and risks shifting attention away from content, context, purpose, platform design and inequalities in children’s everyday lives.

‘Screen time’ is not only a conceptual problem, but also a question of how to measure it to inform research and practice. Traditional screen time questions were developed when media use was more easily associated with a particular device, activity and period of the day. Contemporary use is mobile, intermittent and frequently simultaneous with other activities. Children, as well as adults, may move repeatedly between applications and devices, use a screen while communicating face to face, or combine schoolwork, entertainment and social interaction within the same session. Reviews of existing measures show that studies commonly rely on a small number of self-reported questions about duration, while comparatively few measure content, context, co-use or purpose. The validity of reported estimates is also uncertain, particularly when respondents must reconstruct fragmented use across multiple devices.

Overall times of screen use across the day

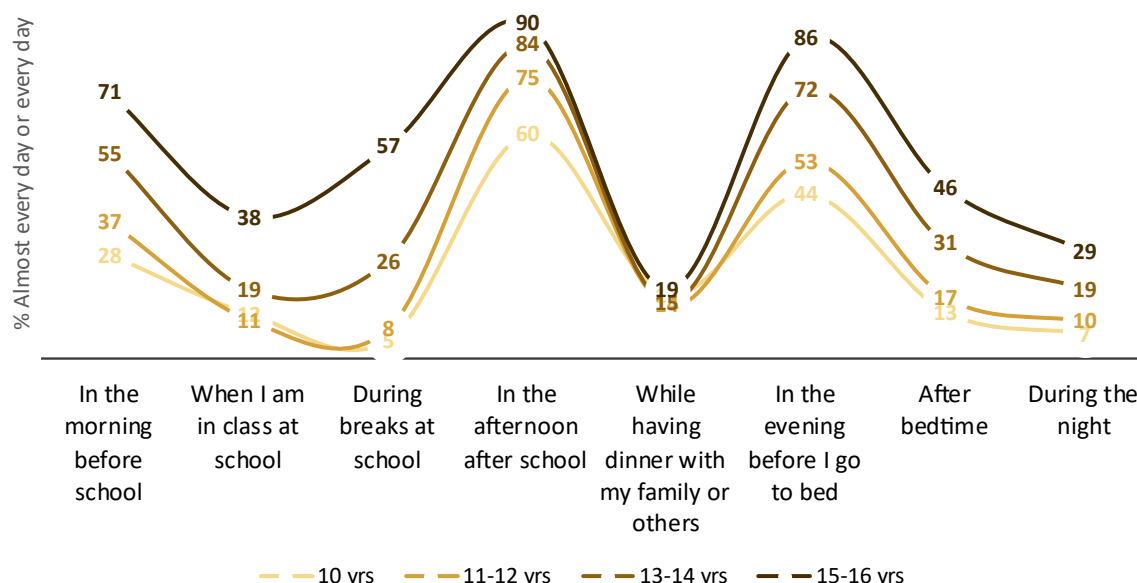
Age provides an important perspective on how screens are integrated into children’s daily routines. As children grow older, they generally gain greater independence in how they organise their time, communicate with peers and use personal digital devices. Their school environments, homework demands and leisure activities also change. Examining screen use across different parts of the day therefore provides more information than a single measure of overall use: it shows not only whether older children use screens more frequently, but when age differences are most pronounced, and at which points they largely disappear.



²⁴ Question QC8 added for EUKO 2025 (developed by Staksrud and Lobe). To replace EUKO 2018 QB7a/QB8b, core. In EUKO 2011, EUKO 2018 and GKO 2020. EUKO 2011 and

GKO 2020: different wording. EUKO 2011: different scale. Source: Adapted from EUKO (2011).
²⁵ See also Staksrud et al. (2026b).

Figure 7: Overall reported time of daily use of screens on regular weekdays, by age



QC8: In the past month during a regular weekday, how often did you use any type of screen, such as TV, mobile phone, computer games or tablet? (Only children who answered 'Almost every day' or 'Every day'.) Base: All children 10–16

Considering first our full sample, our results show a clear and remarkably consistent age gradient across most parts of the day. Daily or almost daily screen use before school rises from 28% among 10-year-olds to 37% among 11- to 12-year-olds, 55% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 71% among 15- to 16-year-olds.

A similar, but steeper pattern is found during school hours: only 5% of 10-year-olds report daily screen use during breaks compared with 8% of 11- to 12-year-olds, 26% of 13- to 14-year-olds and 57% of 15- to 16-year-olds. Screen use during class also increases with age, although at lower levels overall, reaching 38% among the oldest group compared with around one in ten of the youngest children.

After school, screens are widely used across all age groups, but the age gradient remains. Daily use increases from 60% among 10-year-olds to 75% among 11- to 12-year-olds, 84% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 90% among 15- to 16-year-olds. Evening use follows a similar pattern, rising from 44% among 10-year-olds to 86% among 15- to 16-year-olds. These findings suggest that the increasing integration of screens into everyday life with age is not restricted to one particular setting, but extends across school, leisure and social time.

Dinner is the notable exception. Daily screen use while having dinner remains comparatively uncommon

and varies little by age, ranging from 14% among the 11- to 12-year-olds to 19% among the 15- to 16-year-olds. This diverges significantly with the strong age gradients found before school, during school breaks, after school and in the evening. Family mealtimes may therefore represent one of the few parts of the day in which screen use practices remain relatively similar across age groups.

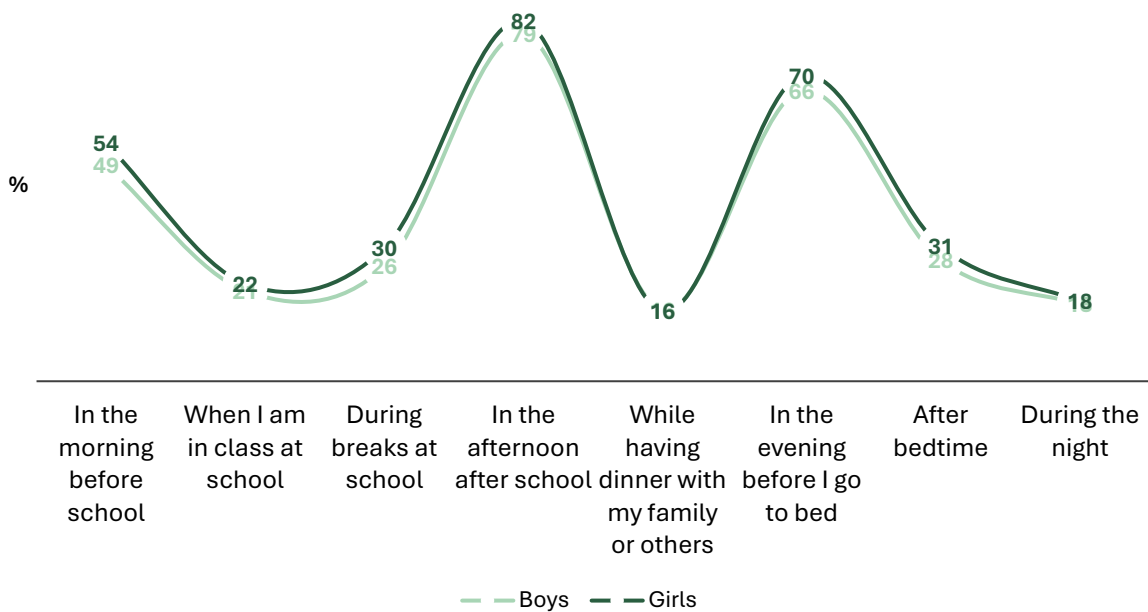
Daily screen use after bedtime is reported by a minority of children, rising from 13% among 10-year-olds to 17% among 11- to 12-year-olds, 31% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 46% among 15- to 16-year-olds.

Screen use during the night is reported by a minority of children, but it becomes more common with age. On average, close to three in ten 15–16-year-olds (29%) report using a screen during the night on a daily or almost daily basis compared with one in five 13- to 14-year-olds (19%), 10% of 11- to 12-year-olds and 7% of 10-year-olds.

Overall, our findings imply, not surprisingly, that **the timing of screen use changes substantially as children move through adolescence.**

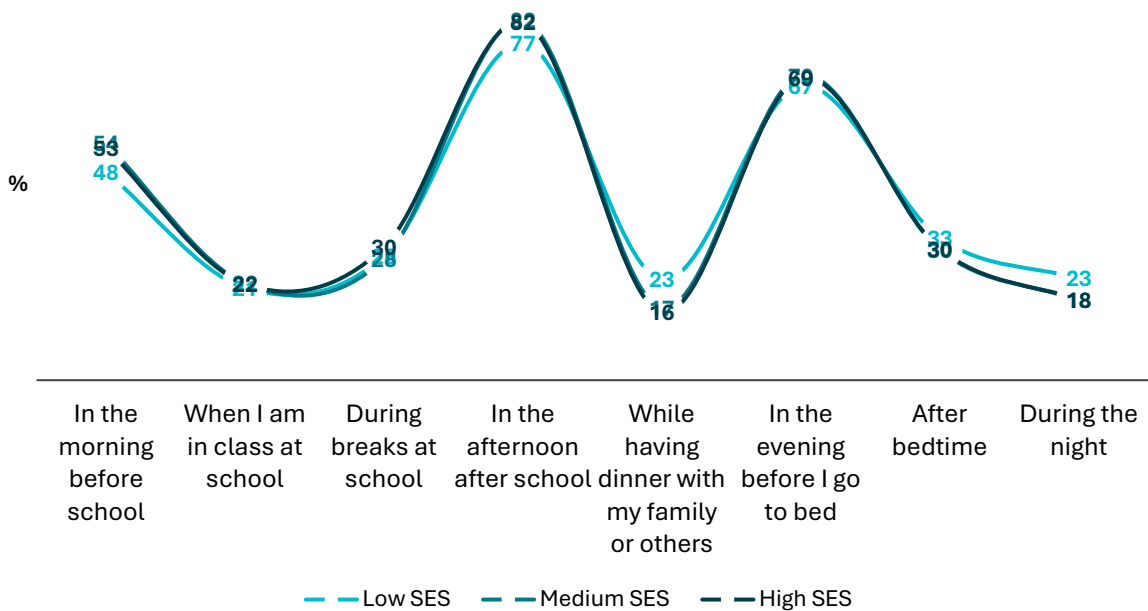
When it comes to gender, differences are small across all points of the day. Overall, more girls report frequent screen use than boys on most points of the day, while there is no gender difference during dinner or during the night.

Figure 8: Overall reported time of daily use of screens on regular weekdays, by gender



QC8: In the PAST MONTH during a regular weekday, how often did you use any type of screen, such as TV, mobile phone, computer games or tablet? (Only children who answered ‘Almost every day’ or ‘Every day’.) Base: All children 10–16.

Figure 9: Overall reported time of daily use of screens on regular weekdays, by socioeconomic status (SES)



QC8: In the PAST MONTH DURING A REGULAR WEEKDAY, how often did you use any type of screen, such as TV, mobile phone, computer games or tablet? (Only children who answered ‘Almost every day’ or ‘Every day’.). Base: All children 10–16.



Overall SES differences are also modest, although low SES children are somewhat more likely to report screen use during dinner (23% vs 16% among high SES children and 17% among medium SES children) and during the night (23% vs 18% for mid and high SES) (see Figure 9).

Country differences in screen use across the weekday

Across the sample, screen use was most frequently reported in the period after school. On average in the 19 countries, four in five children aged 10–16 (81%) reported using a screen in the afternoon after school daily or almost daily. More than two-thirds did so in the evening before going to bed (68%), and just over half used screens in the morning before school (52%). Thus, our overall results show that digital media use is not concentrated within a single period.

Use is less common in contexts structured by school or family routines. Around one in five children reported daily or almost daily screen use during class (22%), while 28% did so during school breaks. Daily use during dinner was less common, at 16%. However, these sample averages conceal substantial differences between countries, particularly during the school day.

The afternoon is the most screen-intensive period in nearly all countries. Daily or almost daily use exceeded 80% in most, and reached 95% in Finland, 94% in Norway and 92% in Croatia and Serbia, with Belgium is a notable exception, at 45%. In addition, Switzerland, Estonia and Luxembourg reported lower-than-average afternoon use, but in all these countries still over two-thirds of the children reported afternoon use.

Table 3: Period of screen use every or almost every weekday, by country

	In the morning before school	When I am in class at school	During breaks at school	In the afternoon after school	While having dinner with my family or others	In the evening before I go to bed	After bedtime	I During the night
AT	57	43	35	87	12	73	39	17
BE	65	33	42	45	13	82	35	20
CH	33	16	5	69	8	53	18	8
CZ	58	15	29	86	18	69	37	21
EE	53	17	46	68	21	64	29	19
ES	36	23	6	80	16	56	23	19
FI	73	16	44	95	14	67	23	17
HR	53	18	36	92	22	71	31	25
IE	42	18	13	75	20	75	20	11
IT	44	14	16	81	15	69	24	14
LU	35	17	28	69	11	58	25	14
LV	61	14	39	80	22	73	36	21
MT	35	18	5	83	29	65	21	18
NO	72	52	11	94	9	71	28	10
PL	55	21	34	89	20	71	50	25
PT	42	9	32	81	13	60	22	15
RO	62	23	38	90	20	76	31	26
RS	51	21	51	92	16	76	38	28
SK	44	15	15	75	20	63	28	20
Ave	52	22	28	81	16	68	29	18

QC8: In the PAST MONTH DURING A REGULAR WEEKDAY, how often did you use any type of screen, such as TV, mobile phone, computer games or tablet? (Only children who answered 'Almost every day' or 'Every day'). Base: All children 10–16.

Evening screen use is also comparatively widespread and more consistent between countries, ranging from 53% in Switzerland to 82% in Belgium. The narrower cross-national variation may partly reflect the fact that the evening is a relatively similar part of children's daily routines across the countries: school and organised activities have usually ended, children, especially older children and teenagers, might have greater discretion over their time, and personal devices provide readily available access to friends and communication, entertainment, gaming and school-related activities. The widespread availability of the same (social media) platforms and (streaming and entertainment) services across the countries may also contribute to greater convergence in evening use than during the school day, where national education systems, school rules and institutional practices differ more substantially.

Daily or almost daily screen use during class ranges from 9% in Portugal to 52% in Norway. Austria also reported a comparatively high level, at 43%, while the proportions were 14–18% in Switzerland, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Latvia, Malta, and Slovakia.

Differences during school breaks are also significant, ranging from 5% in Switzerland and Malta and 6% in Spain to 51% in Serbia, 46% in Estonia and 44% in Finland. Such variation is unlikely to only reflect children's preferences; it may also be associated with differences in access to devices, the digitalisation of teaching and school phone rules.

Screen use during dinner is relatively uncommon compared with most other parts of the day. Across our sample, 16% of children reported using a screen almost every day or every day while having dinner with family or others. **National differences are moderate, ranging from 8% in Switzerland and 9% in Norway to 29% in Malta.** Relatively higher levels were also reported in Croatia and Latvia (both 22%) and Estonia (21%) (note that the measure does not distinguish between individual use and shared activities such as watching TV together, so screen use during dinner should not automatically be interpreted as reducing family interaction).

Country differences may reflect cultural variation in family routines, bedtime norms, parental mediation, homework practices, participation in organised leisure activities and access to personal devices. We note again how our measure does not distinguish between a brief message, shared TV viewing with parents, homework or prolonged individual use. Evening use

should therefore not automatically be interpreted as problematic or as evidence that screens are displacing sleep.

Use of screens after bedtime and during the night

The timing of use appears to matter. Research increasingly suggests that screen use (in particular, heavy screen use) **after going to bed**, rather than evening use in itself, may be more relevant to sleep-related outcomes,²⁶ although this research field faces important methodological challenges such as measurement errors, limited data and insufficient evidence to confirm causal effects.²⁷ For this reason, the next section turns from the general pattern of screen use across the day to the last two more specific periods shown in Table 3: **after bedtime** and **during the night**. These time points are closer to the period normally reserved for sleep, and may therefore provide meaningful indication of potentially disruptive use than general 'screen time'.

Screens are embedded throughout children's daily routines, but their use during the night warrants particular attention. At the same time, researchers, including EUKO, caution against treating all evening screen use as equivalent: the type of activity, whether use continues after going to bed, and how long it lasts may matter more than screen use before bedtime in general. As discussed, night-time use may be relevant to sleep, but the relationship cannot be inferred from this measure alone. Children may remain awake because they are using a device or use a device because they cannot sleep or to help them sleep. Reverse and reciprocal relationships are also likely: children who have difficulty sleeping may turn to screens, while screen use may in some circumstances make it more difficult to stop an activity or return to sleep.

Across the sample, 29% report using a screen after bedtime almost every day or every day. The proportion ranged from 18% in Switzerland to 50% in Poland. Relatively high levels were also found in Austria (39%), Serbia (38%), Czechia (37%) and Latvia (36%) (see Table 3).

Daily use during the night is less common but still reported by 18% across the sample. National estimates ranged from 8% in Switzerland and 10% in Norway to 28% in Serbia, 26% in Romania and 25% in Croatia and Poland.

²⁶ See, for instance, Hisler et al. (2020); Scott et al. (2019); Smahel et al. (2025); Twenge et al. (2019).

²⁷ Hale & Guan (2015).

Looking into the usage during the night, we see how a further 29% reported doing so hardly ever or once or twice a week, while 53% said that they had never used a screen during the night on a regular weekday (see Figure 10). Thus, **while frequent night-time screen use is a minority practice, almost half of the children in the sample reported at least some such use during the previous month.**

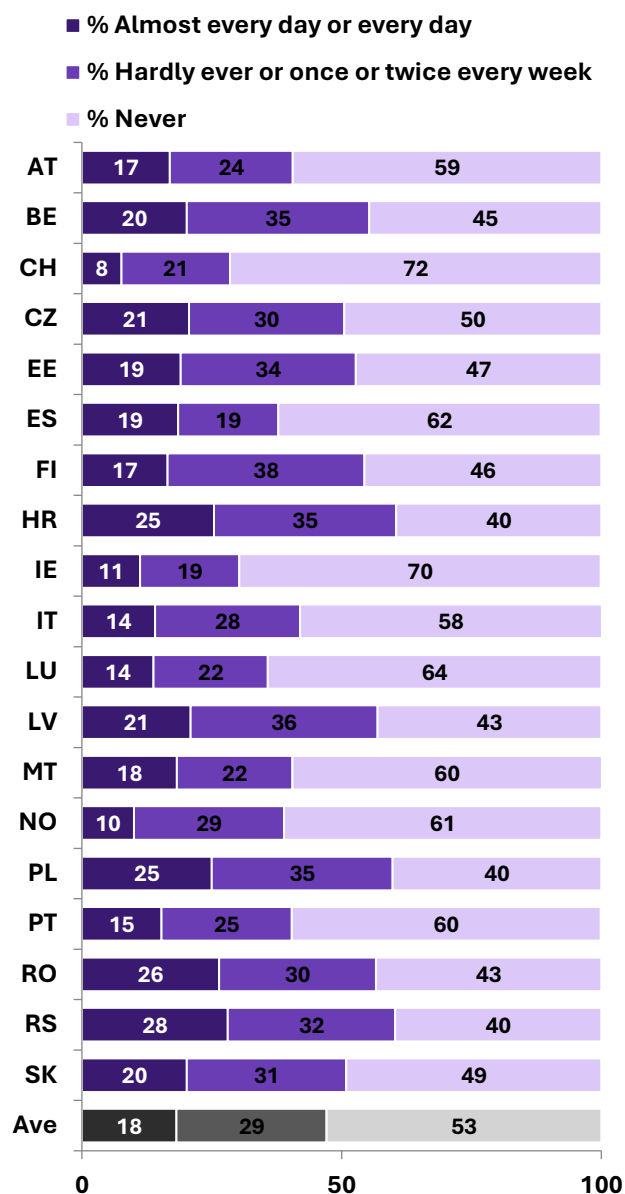
‘Never’ is the largest single response category in every participating country. Even in countries with comparatively high levels of night-time use, frequent use is not reported by a majority of children. Around seven in ten children in Switzerland (72%) and Ireland (70%) said that they never used screens during the night. This compares with 40% in Serbia, Poland and Croatia, and 43% in Romania and Latvia. Our findings therefore do not support a general characterisation of night-time screen use as universal or routine activity among European children. However, they do show that, in several countries, **a sizeable minority of children report regular screen use at a time normally reserved for sleep.** At the same time, they should still be interpreted cautiously: the survey cannot establish whether screen use delayed sleep, followed difficulties falling or staying asleep, or reflected other circumstances in children’s lives. Nor do the data distinguish briefly checking the time or a notification from extended gaming, viewing or communication.

In relation to gender, across the full sample, we find **no overall gender difference in daily night-time screen use**: 18% of both boys and girls reported using screens during the night.

This overall similarity is also reflected in most countries. In many countries, the difference between boys and girls is only 1–3 percentage points. Where somewhat larger gaps appeared, they are not consistently in the same direction. Girls reported more frequent night-time screen use than boys in Malta (23% vs 14%), Poland (27% vs 22%) and Slovakia (22% vs 18%), while boys reported higher levels in Austria (19% vs 14%) and, to a lesser extent, Belgium (21% vs 18%). In several countries, including Estonia, Switzerland and Finland, the gender differences are negligible.

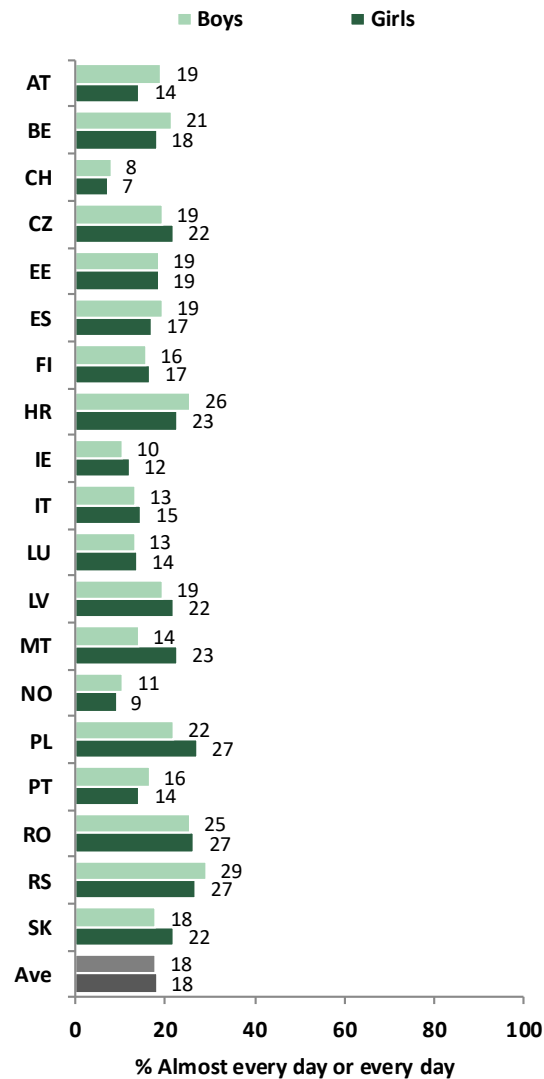
The absence of a consistent cross-national gender pattern suggests that **gender is not a major differentiating factor in night-time screen use at the aggregate level.** Rather, we see how country differences are considerably larger than gender differences within countries, and other factors than gender are potentially more relevant for understanding why some children use screens frequently during the night.

Figure 10: Use of any type of screens during the night, by country and frequency



QC8: In the PAST MONTH DURING A REGULAR WEEKDAY, how often did you use any type of screen, such as TV, mobile phone, computer games or tablet?
QC8h: During the night. Base: All children 10–16

Figure 11: Using any type of screens during the night, by country and gender



QC8: In the PAST MONTH DURING A REGULAR WEEKDAY, how often did you use any type of screen, such as TV, mobile phone, computer games or tablet?
QC8h: During the night. (Only children who answered 'Almost every day' or 'Every day'.) Base: All children 10–16.

In contrast to gender, and in line with this general pattern, we find that age differences are substantially larger and more consistent than the gender differences: **night-time screen use becomes considerably more common as children grow older**, and we find a **clear age gradient in most countries**.

Across the sample, frequent night-time screen use increased from 10% among 11- to 12-year-olds to 19% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 29% among 15- to 16-year-olds. The increase is particularly pronounced in Croatia, where frequent night-time use

risks from 11% among 11- to 12-year-olds to 43% among 15- to 16-year-olds; Estonia (9% to 35%); Spain (10% to 30%); Czechia (15% to 32%); and Serbia (19% to 35%). **By age 15–16, around a third or more report frequent night-time screen use in several countries**, including Croatia (43%), Malta (38%), Poland, Romania and Serbia (35% each), and Estonia (35%).

This age pattern is not surprising in light of children's increasing autonomy as they grow older. Older adolescents are more likely to have personal devices, greater control over bedtime routines and more independent communication with peers, and may face increasing schoolwork and social demands. However, as discussed, the present data cannot determine which of these factors accounts for the pattern, and nor can they establish whether screen use causes later or disrupted sleep: older children may use screens because they remain awake later for other reasons, while screen use itself may also contribute to extended wakefulness.

We also find that the pattern is not completely uniform. Switzerland shows comparatively low levels across all age groups. In Norway, reported night-time use remains low through ages 10–14 before increasing to 20% among 15- to 16-year-olds.

Finally, in Figure 13 we examine whether and how frequent screen use during the night varies according to children's subjective SES. Here we find that the overall difference is modest. **As discussed, across the full sample, 23% of children in the low SES group report using a screen during the night almost every day or every day, compared with 18% in both the medium and high SES groups.**

This finding is relatively consistent across the countries. In 15 of the 19 countries, the percentage reporting frequent night-time use is higher among children in the low SES group than among those in the high SES group. **The differences are particularly large in Belgium, Poland, Finland, Malta and Luxembourg.** For example, 54% of low SES children in Poland report daily or almost daily night-time screen use compared with 24% of those in the high SES group. In Finland, the corresponding estimates are 46% and 15%, and in Belgium, 63% and 18%.

However, our overall data show no uniform socioeconomic gradient. In most countries, differences between the high and medium SES groups are small. **Croatia and Switzerland showed virtually no SES differences, while Romania and Czechia displayed the reverse pattern**, with more frequent night-time use among children in the high SES group. Note here that these large country-specific differences should also be interpreted cautiously. The low-SES



category has comparatively few respondents in some national samples, making individual percentages more sensitive to sampling variation.

Several explanations may help account for this pattern. Night-time screen use may be connected to household routines, parental working hours, shared or crowded living arrangements, stress, difficulties sleeping, access to private bedrooms or differences in parental mediation. Digital media may also serve as an accessible form of entertainment, social connection or support where alternative activities and resources are more limited. In this report we do not test these and additional explanations, and cannot establish whether socioeconomic disadvantage increases the risk of night-time use, whether sleep or wellbeing difficulties contribute to both, or whether other family and individual circumstances account for the association.

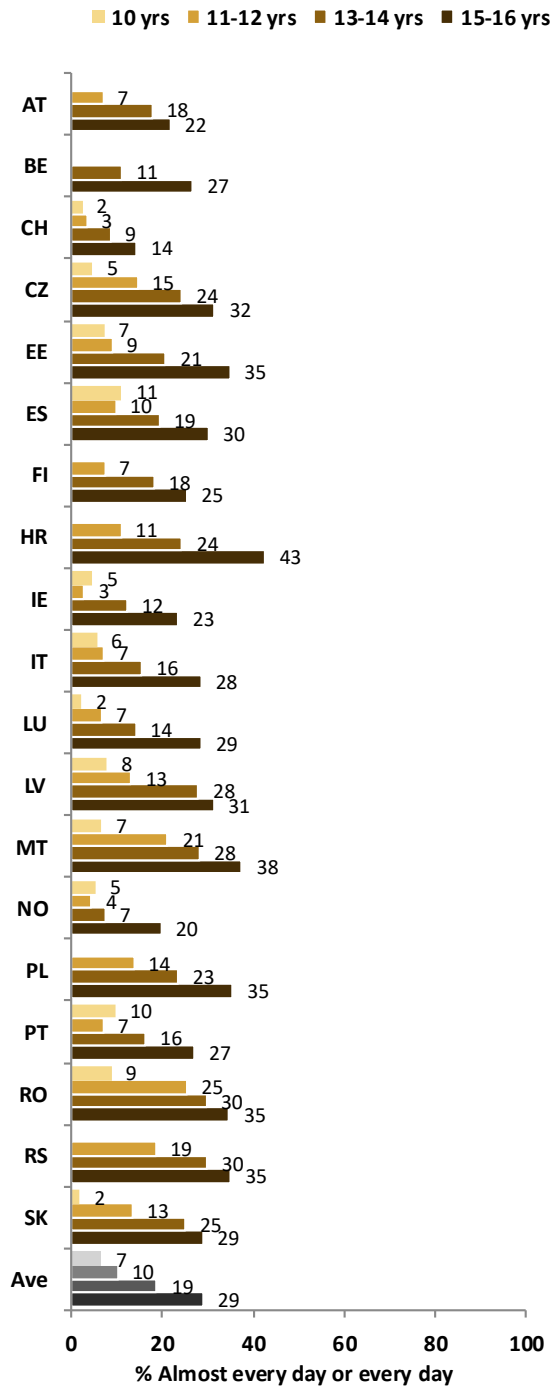
Rather, our findings suggest a possible socioeconomic inequality in the timing of screen use: children from low SES households appear more likely to report screen use at times normally reserved for sleep. Because the survey is cross-sectional, however, the data cannot establish a causal effect or determine whether socioeconomic circumstances directly shape this pattern. They also (again) underline why night-time screen use should not only be considered as an individual choice. Children's digital routines are embedded in the material, social and temporal conditions of family life.

Our EUKO country patterns illustrate why a single measure of total screen time would be inadequate. **Countries cannot, based on the EUKO findings, be placed on one simple continuum from 'low' to 'high' screen use: their profiles differ according to when use occurs.** Belgium, for example, combined the lowest reported afternoon use with the highest evening use. Norway had some of the highest reported levels of use before school, during class and after school, but among the lowest rates during dinner and the night. Switzerland reported comparatively low use at nearly every point in the day, while Poland and Serbia combined high afternoon use with relatively high use after bedtime and during the night.

We note again how our data are cross-sectional and based on children's own reports. They cannot establish that screen use at any point in the day causes particular educational, social, physical or psychological outcomes. In particular, percentages should not be interpreted as direct indicators of healthy or unhealthy national childhoods.

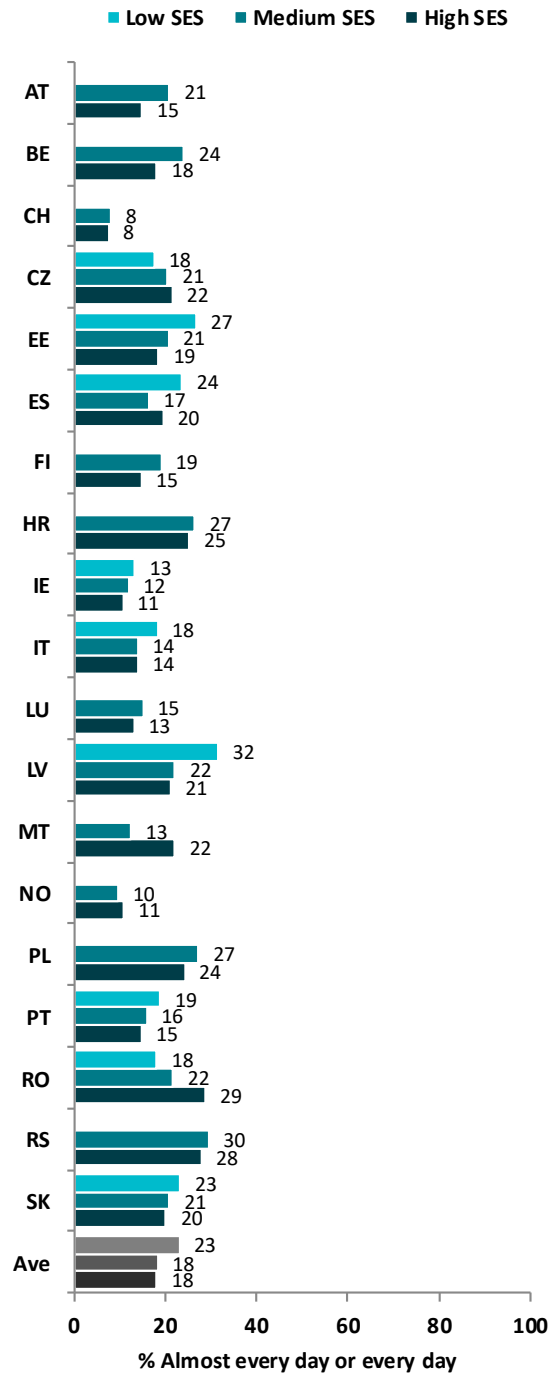
The value of the new EUKO measure lies in moving the analysis away from a single total. It enables screen use to be examined as part of children's temporal and social ecology: before school, within institutional settings, during family routines and at times normally reserved for sleep. Combined with information about activities, devices, bedtime, parental mediation, school policies and wellbeing, it provides a more useful basis for asking **what kinds of digital use occur, when, for whom, under which circumstances, and with what possible consequences.** This is a far more demanding question than 'How much screen time?', but it is also more consistent with the complexity of children's digital lives.

Figure 12: Using any type of screens during the night, by country and age group



QC8: In the PAST MONTH DURING A REGULAR WEEKDAY, how often did you use any type of screen, such as TV, mobile phone, computer games or tablet?
QC8h: During the night. (Only children who answered 'Almost every day' or 'Every day'). Base: All children 10-16.

Figure 13: Using any type of screens during the night, by socioeconomic status (SES)



QC8: In the PAST MONTH DURING A REGULAR WEEKDAY, how often did you use any type of screen, such as TV, mobile phone, computer games or tablet?
QC8h: During the night. (Only children who answered 'Almost every day' or 'Every day'). Base: All children 10-16.

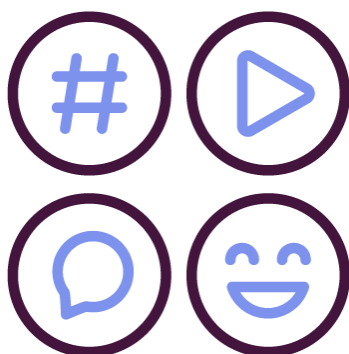


4. Communication, learning and citizenship

Online opportunities

Early adoption of the internet by European children at the start of the new millennium was met with understandable apprehension for its potential risks (by then dominated by such risks as stranger danger, pornography and, a few years later, cyberbullying), but also hope for its opportunities for children's learning, creativity, self-expression, sociality, play and citizenship.²⁸

Since our first EUKO survey in 2011,²⁹ the distribution of online activities among European children has supported the hypothesis of a 'ladder of opportunities':³⁰ namely, that basic online activities such as communication, entertainment and, in part, use of the internet for schoolwork, are undertaken by the majority of children on a daily basis, whereas more creative or participatory activities are undertaken less frequently and by fewer children. While the latter are usually considered more desirable by policymakers, educators and parents, popular activities at the bottom of the ladder help children gain important digital skills. In fact, a higher number of online activities has demonstrated a positive impact on information navigation and processing skills and communication and interaction skills.³¹



However, the fact that only a minority of children engage in participatory and creative online activities is a policy problem, as it suggests missed opportunities and inequalities based on age, self-efficacy, socioeconomic status (SES) and digital literacy.³² Activities related to online civic and political participation or content creation may, therefore, require explicit facilitation in formal and non-formal learning environments, especially if such participation is not to perpetuate inequalities.

Measuring online activities

Despite the fact the policy debate has historically been largely dominated by concerns for online risks rather than questions of digital inclusion and wellbeing, we decided to include measures of online activities in our 2011 survey for two reasons. First, mapping the range of online activities regularly undertaken by children provides a basis against which the examination of risks should be considered.³³ Second, we aimed to challenge the idea that opportunities and risks can be easily separated and isolated. In fact, online activities may be beneficial for most children but risky for some, as risks and opportunities are often closely interconnected.³⁴

The range of online activities we measured has expanded from 2011 to 2018 and further in 2025, as the internet became more pervasive in children's everyday lives. The list of activities currently measured in our questionnaire (QC9³⁵ and QC10³⁶: ranges from communication and entertainment to learning and schoolwork, information, participatory and creative activities.

²⁸ European Commission (2022).

²⁹ Livingstone et al. (2011).

³⁰ Livingstone & Helsper (2007).

³¹ Machackova et al. (2023).

³² Cino et al. (2022); Livingstone et al. (2019); Machackova et al. (2023).

³³ Livingstone et al. (2011).

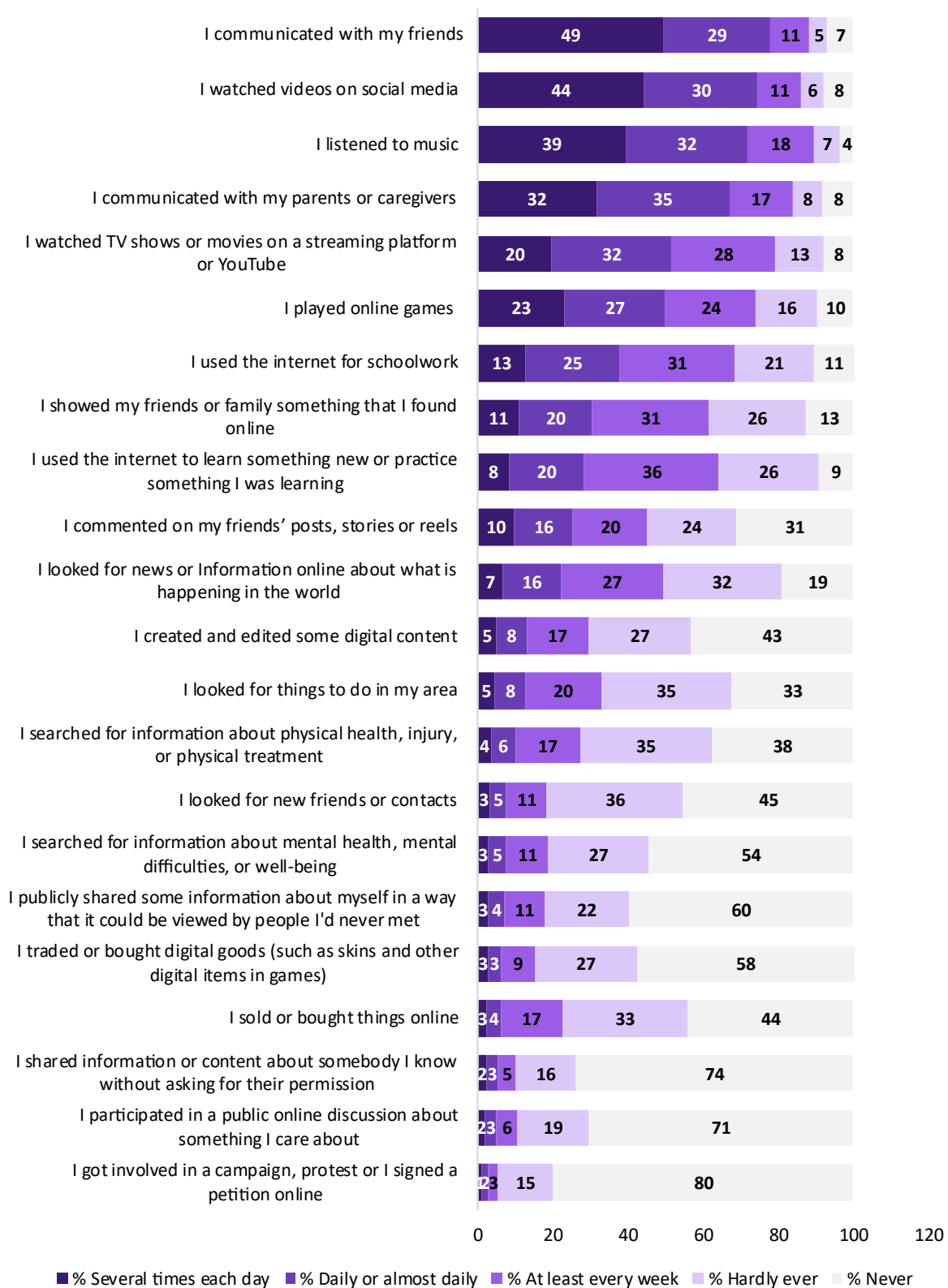
³⁴ Livingstone et al. (2018).

³⁵ In EUKO 2011, EUKO 2018 (QC3, core) and GKO 2020. EUKO 2011 and GKO 2020: different wording. EUKO 2011: Collapsed from two different questions. EUKO 2011 and GKO 2020:

different scale. GKO 2020 key measure. New items added from ySKILLS. Source: Adapted from EUKO (2011) survey; adapted from Helsper et al. (2015, 2021a). Changes from EUKO 2018: 'Almost all the time' removed from the scale for EUKO 2025; some items have been modified or removed for EUKO 2025.

³⁶ In EUKO 2018 (QC4, optional) and GKO 2020. GKO 2020: different wording, different scale. New items added from ySKILLS. Source: Adapted from Helsper et al. (2015). Changes from EUKO 2018: 'Almost all the time' removed from the scale for EUKO 2025; some items have been modified or removed for EUKO 2025.

Figure 14: Online activities



QC9 and QC10: How often have you done these things ONLINE in the PAST MONTH? Base: All children 10–16.



Daily online activities

Analysis of the online activities questions suggests that these fall on four broad dimensions. The first is **social interaction and communication** (Keeping in touch with friends and parents, looking for new friends/contacts, commenting on friends' posts, sharing personal information/photos publicly, sharing others' content without permission,). The second is **recreation and leisure** (listening to music, watching videos on social media, watching TV/streaming, communicating with friends, communicating with parents/caregivers, showing friends/family something found online). The third is **information and learning** (schoolwork, learning something new, looking for news, campaigning/petitioning, creating digital content, looking for things to do locally, searching for physical health information, searching for mental health information, participating in public online discussions). The fourth is **gaming** (playing online games). Four online activity scales were constructed for these dimensions by rescaling the mean of their constituent items to a 0–100 range.

Digital activities are embedded throughout children's daily routines (see Figure 14). Top activities include: **communicating with friends online** using social media or messaging apps (8 in 10 children do this every day, with nearly half doing so several times per day); **watching videos on social media** (7 in 10 children do this every day, and 44% watch videos on social media several times per day), followed by **listening to music** (7 in 10 children, 39% several times per day), **communicating with parents or caregivers** (67% every day, and 32% several times per day), watching or streaming TV shows and movies and playing games (5 in 10 children every day). **Doing schoolwork** (38%) is also common, although with wide variability across the countries.

Less frequent are some activities that are considered the most beneficial opportunities of internet use by policymakers and the public. These include: accessing news to keep up with what is happening in the world (23% overall, ranging from one in three children in Poland to 15% of Slovakian and Spanish children, and increasing from 19% in 2018); looking for information on physical health (10%, but higher in Malta and Portugal – 19% and 18% respectively – and lowest in Switzerland, at 5%) or mental health (8%, higher in Portugal and Malta and lowest in Ireland, at 4%) and creating digital content (13% on average) (see **Feil! Fant ikke referanse**kilden.).

Civic activities are also relatively uncommon: just 3% of children reported getting involved in a campaign or protest or signing a petition on a regular basis, ranging from 1% in Ireland, Italy and Switzerland to 6% in Malta and Portugal. Similarly, only 5% of children participated in public discussions about issues they cared for (including youth mental health and the climate crisis) every day or almost daily. Across the countries, this activity is more common in Portugal (9%) and Malta (8%), and less popular in Switzerland (1%).

Communication with friends is children's most frequent online activity (Figure 14). It is a daily activity for the vast majority, with **half (49%) saying they do this several times a day**. This finding is not surprising, as communication with peers has always been a large part of children's internet use. Country variations are substantial, with differences of over 30 percentage points. Higher than average engagement in online communication with friends is reported in Belgium (93%), Finland (87%), Croatia (86%), Romania (85%), Austria (84%), Latvia and Poland (82%), Czechia and Italy (80%). Conversely, the use of the internet for communication with friends is less regular in Spain (61%), Switzerland (63%), Malta (66%) and Ireland (68%).

Online communication with parents and caregivers is also common: across the sample, **two in three** children reported using the internet to keep in touch with their families. Although not substantial, countries differ in the extent to which family life is mediated.³⁷ Daily or almost daily online communication with parents is highest in Romania (80%), Belgium (79%), Latvia (78%) and Croatia (77%), while lowest in Switzerland (51%), Ireland, Luxembourg and Norway (55%), Slovakia and Spain (58%).

The mediatization of interpersonal relations is also suggested by the number of children for whom social media and the internet are a source of co-present interaction with friends and family. In fact, **one in three children reported showing their friends or family something they found online**. We can observe some cross-national variations in the number of children who are used to showing their friends or family content they saw online, with particularly high values in countries such as Romania, Serbia and Malta. Conversely, the proportion of children who reported this activity is lowest in Switzerland (17%).

Across the sample, **one in four children reported posting comments on their friends' posts, stories or reels every day or almost every day**. This number

³⁷ Mascheroni, Ponte & Jorge (2018).

risers to half of the children in Belgium. This finding, far from surprising, reflects the shift in the nature and use of social media platforms: while the feed is primarily used for entertainment, messaging tools are preferred to keep in touch with peers and family. Consistent with the use of social media and other platforms to maintain rather than expand social ties – as documented by research over the past two decades – only 8% of respondents reported looking for new friends and contacts online on a regular basis. Country differences are small but significant: up to 15% of Romanian children go online to make new contacts daily or almost daily, whereas only 3% of Irish and Swiss children and 4% of Belgian and Norwegian children do so.

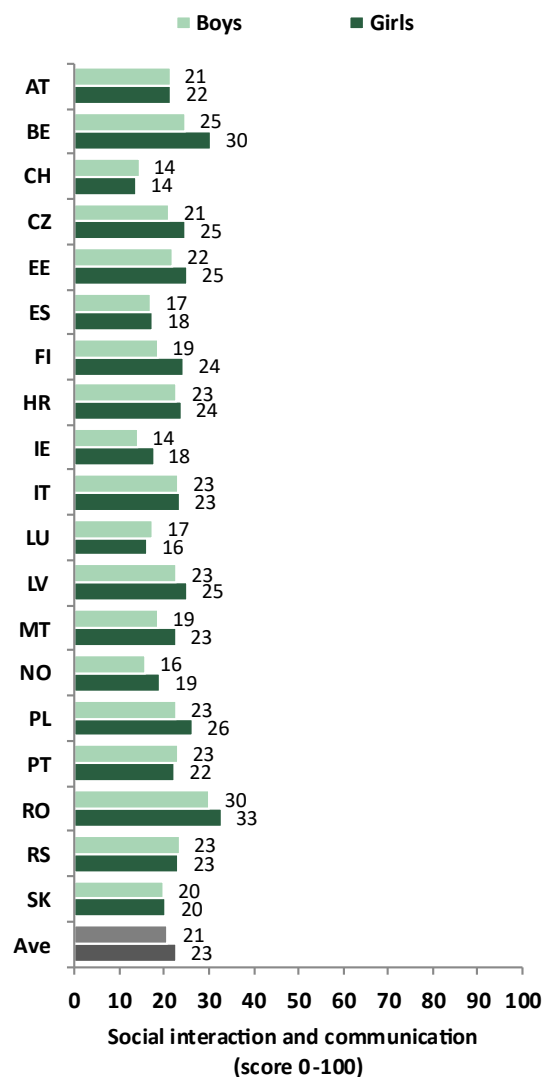
Two further indicators confirm that children are less likely to engage in risky online communication: only 7% reported sharing personal information online in ways that it could be visible to people they had never met before, and only 5% shared information about someone else without asking their permission. While country differences are modest, Romanian children score higher on both measures (12% and 10%, respectively). Buying and selling things online is also perhaps a relatively common activity: on average, 6% of children reported doing so every day or almost every day, rising to 11% in Romania and 9% in Croatia, Latvia, Malta and Poland, but only 2% in Switzerland, Finland and Ireland.

Table 4: Social interaction and communication engaged in every day or almost every day, by country

	Communi- cated with friends	Communi- cated with my parents or caregivers	I looked for new friends or contacts	I commented on my friends' posts, stories or reels	Looked for new friends or contacts	I publicly shared some information in a way that it could be viewed by people I'd never met before	I shared about myself information or content about somebody I know without asking for their permission
AT	84	66	10	23	10	9	7
BE	93	79	4	50	4	6	4
CH	63	51	3	16	3	3	3
CZ	80	67	7	22	7	9	6
EE	78	63	9	22	9	6	4
ES	61	58	6	20	6	6	4
FI	87	73	7	30	7	6	2
HR	86	77	10	22	10	8	8
IE	68	55	3	20	3	4	3
IT	80	72	10	30	10	9	5
LU	69	55	6	19	6	5	5
LV	82	78	7	23	7	8	8
MT	66	65	13	26	13	9	8
NO	73	55	4	17	4	5	3
PL	82	75	9	26	9	9	4
PT	79	68	12	27	12	9	8
RO	85	80	15	36	15	12	10
RS	82	74	7	33	7	5	7
SK	76	58	7	19	7	8	5
Ave	78	67	8	25	8	7	5

QC9 and QC10: How often in past month? Base: All children 10-16.

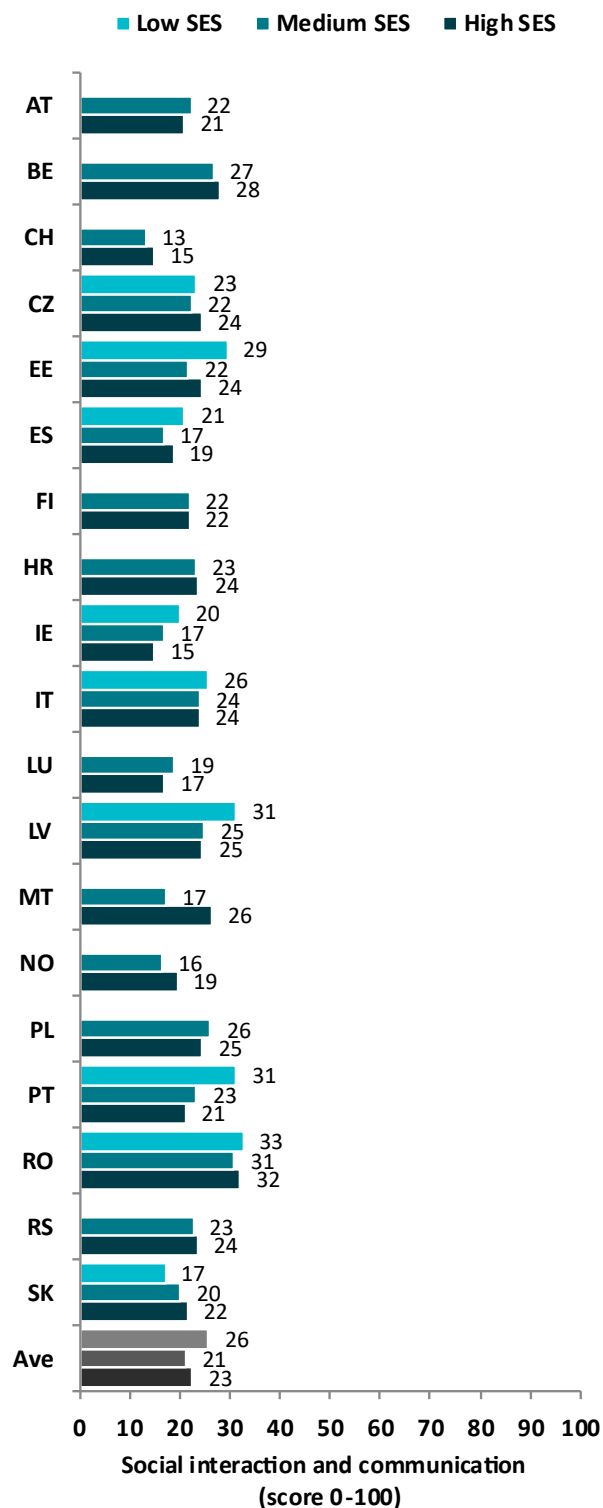
Figure 15: Overall engagement in social interaction and communication activities, by gender and country



Average score based on QC10. Base: All children 10–16

Looking at gender differences, engagement in all communication and social interaction activities is still gendered: girls are slightly more likely to engage in social interaction and communication activities on a daily basis (23% vs. 21% of boys), with a wider gender gap (five percentage points) in Belgium and Finland. Engagement in communication and social interaction is **higher among lower SES children** (26% vs. 23% of their higher SES peers), specifically in Estonia, Ireland, Latvia and Portugal, suggesting that children in these countries may turn online to compensate for lower social capital.

Figure 16: Overall engagement in social interaction and communication activities, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country

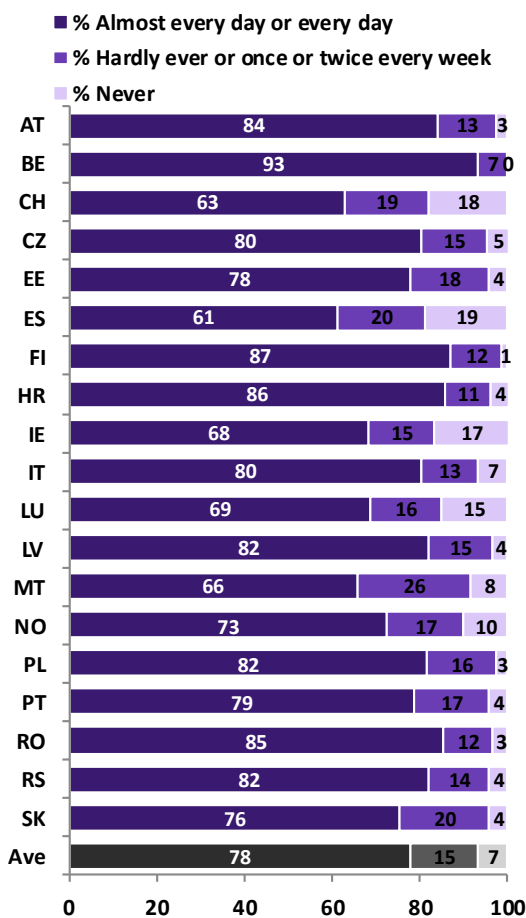


Average score based on QC10. Base: All children 10–16

Communication with friends

Alongside entertainment, communication with friends tops the list of online activities children engage in daily or almost daily. Across the sample, 78% reported using the internet daily or almost daily to keep in touch with their friends. The proportion **ranged from 93% of 10- to 16-year-old children in Belgium to 61% in Spain** (see Figure 17). Higher than average levels were also found in Finland (87%), Croatia (86%), Romania (85%), Austria (84%), Latvia and Poland (82%), Czechia and Italy (80%).

Figure 17: Communication with friends, by country and frequency

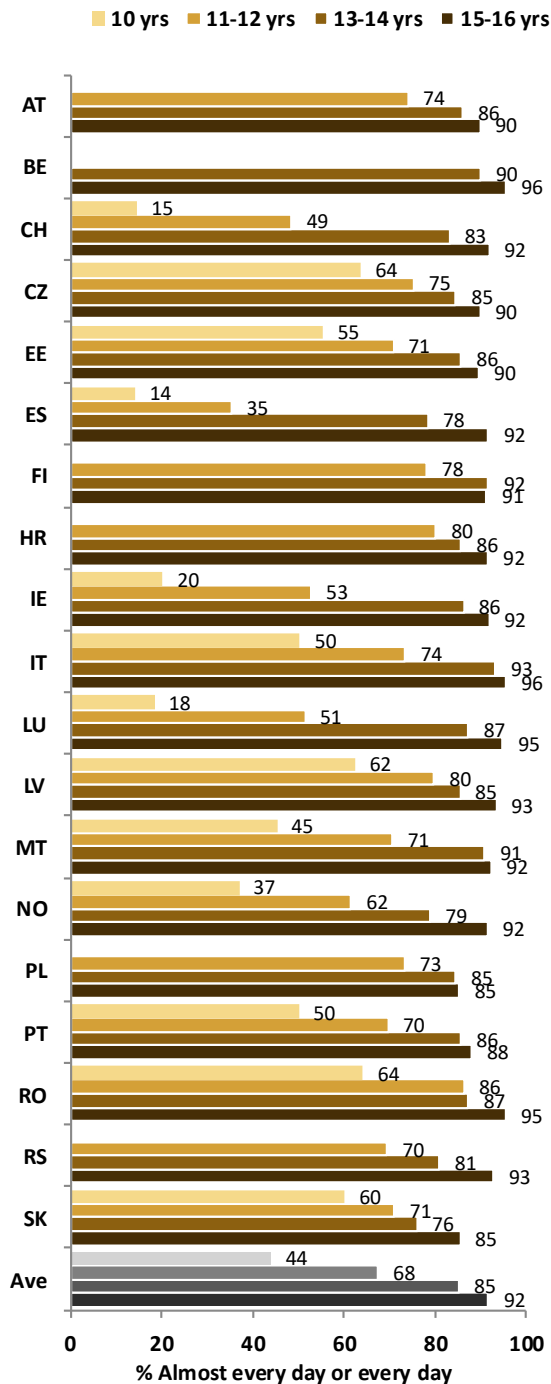


QC10: How often have you done these things ONLINE in the PAST MONTH? QC10a: I communicated with my friends. Base: All children 10–16

In some countries, a sizeable minority never use the internet to keep in touch with their friends: most notably in Spain (19%), Switzerland (18%) and Ireland (17%). Age differences are pronounced and consistent across the countries (see Figure 18), reflecting a combination of internet usage patterns – with all online activities increasing with age – and developmental

factors – notably, communication with peers increases during adolescence.

Figure 18: Communication with friends, by country and age group

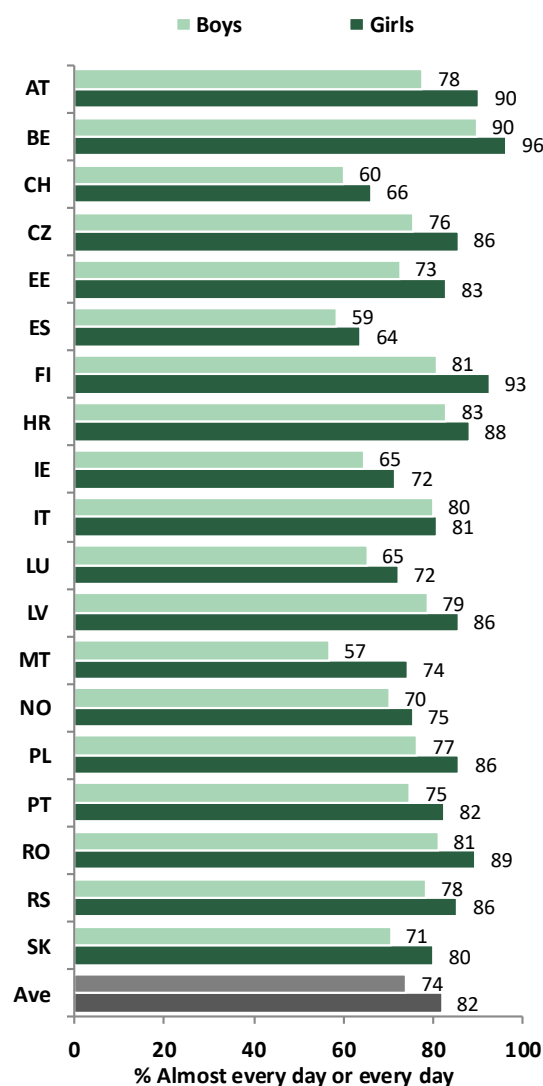


QC10: How often have you done these things in the PAST MONTH? QC10a: I communicated with my friends. Base: All children 10–16

On average, **daily use of the internet for communication with friends increased from 44% among 10-year-olds to 92% among 15- to 16-year-**

olds. The age difference is particularly marked in Ireland, Luxembourg, Spain and Switzerland, and in Norway, where communicating with friends rises from 37% among 10-year-olds to 92% among 15- to 16-year-olds. The proportion of 15- to 16-year-olds who regularly communicate online with their peers is higher than average in Belgium (96%), Italy (96%), Luxembourg (95%) and Romania (95%).

Figure 19: Communication with friends, by country and gender

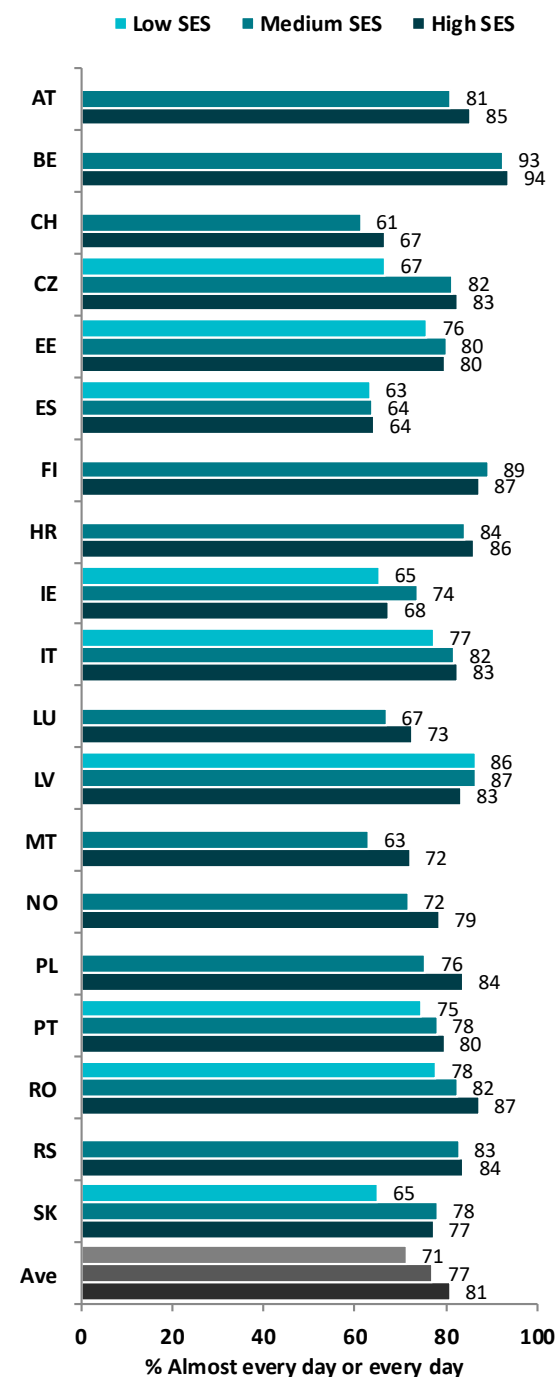


QC10: How often have you done these things ONLINE in the PAST MONTH? QC10a: I communicated with my friends. Base: All children 10–16

Gender differences in the daily use of the internet for communicating with friends follow similar patterns across the countries (see Figure 19), with **girls more likely to engage in online communication with friends every day** or almost every day. Across the sample, the difference between girls and boys consists

of 8 percentage points (82% girls vs 74% boys), ranging from 17 percentage points among 9-to 16-year-olds in Malta to only 1% among their peers in Italy.

Figure 20: Communication with friends, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC10: How often have you done these things ONLINE in the PAST MONTH? QC10a: I communicated with my friends. Base: All children 10–16

Looking at socioeconomic differences in the daily use of the internet to keep in touch with friends, across the sample **the gap between children in the lower SES (71%)** group and those in the **higher SES (81%)** group amounts to 10 percentage points (see Figure 20). However, this socioeconomic pattern, while dominant, is far from consistent across the countries, thus making its interpretation difficult. In countries where children from more advantaged backgrounds tend to communicate more with their friends, this may point to the intersectionality of inequalities, whereby children with lower self-perceived economic wellbeing also have lower social capital. At the same time, however, one could argue that the greater use of the internet to communicate with friends among lower or medium SES children compared to higher SES – as in Finland, Ireland and Latvia could represent a tangible online opportunity to compensate for existing offline inequalities.

Recreation and leisure

Watching videos on social media is the most popular online entertainment activity (75% on average), ranging from 90% in Belgium to 59% in Spain.

Listening to music is also one of the most common daily activities, engaged in by 72% of children on average, ranging from 80% in Romania to 56% in Ireland. Watching TV shows or films on a streaming platform or YouTube is somewhat less frequent (52% on average), ranging from 70% in Norway to 35% in Croatia.

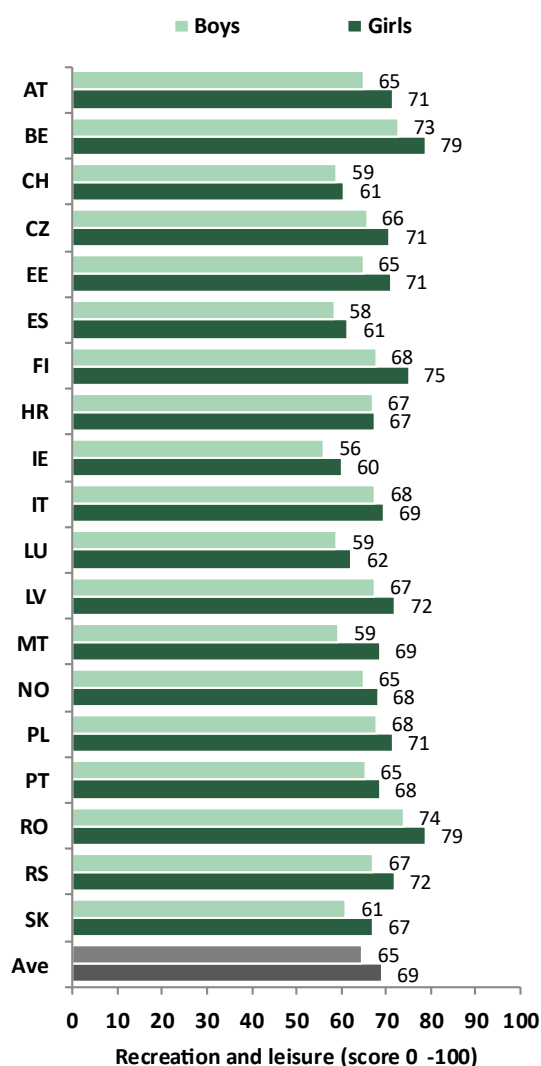
Table 5: Recreation and leisure activities engaged in every day or almost every day, by country

	I listened to music (e.g. on Spotify or YouTube)	I watched videos on social media	I watched TV shows or movies on a streaming platform or YouTube	I communicated with my friends	I communicated with my parents or caregivers	I showed my friends or family something that I found online
AT	74	83	48	84	66	26
BE	78	90	63	93	79	30
CH	64	64	38	63	51	17
CZ	73	79	47	80	67	26
EE	70	77	51	78	63	33
ES	71	59	54	61	58	27
FI	69	83	56	87	73	34
HR	78	76	35	86	77	36
IE	56	64	50	68	55	23
IT	76	77	55	80	72	32
LU	71	68	44	69	55	22
LV	74	76	53	82	78	32
MT	65	64	57	66	65	40
NO	70	78	70	73	55	26
PL	75	68	57	82	75	31
PT	71	78	54	79	68	30
RO	80	77	55	85	80	48
RS	79	79	43	82	74	43
SK	65	71	47	76	58	25
Ave	72	75	52	78	67	30

QC9 and QC10: How often in past month? Base: All children 10-16.

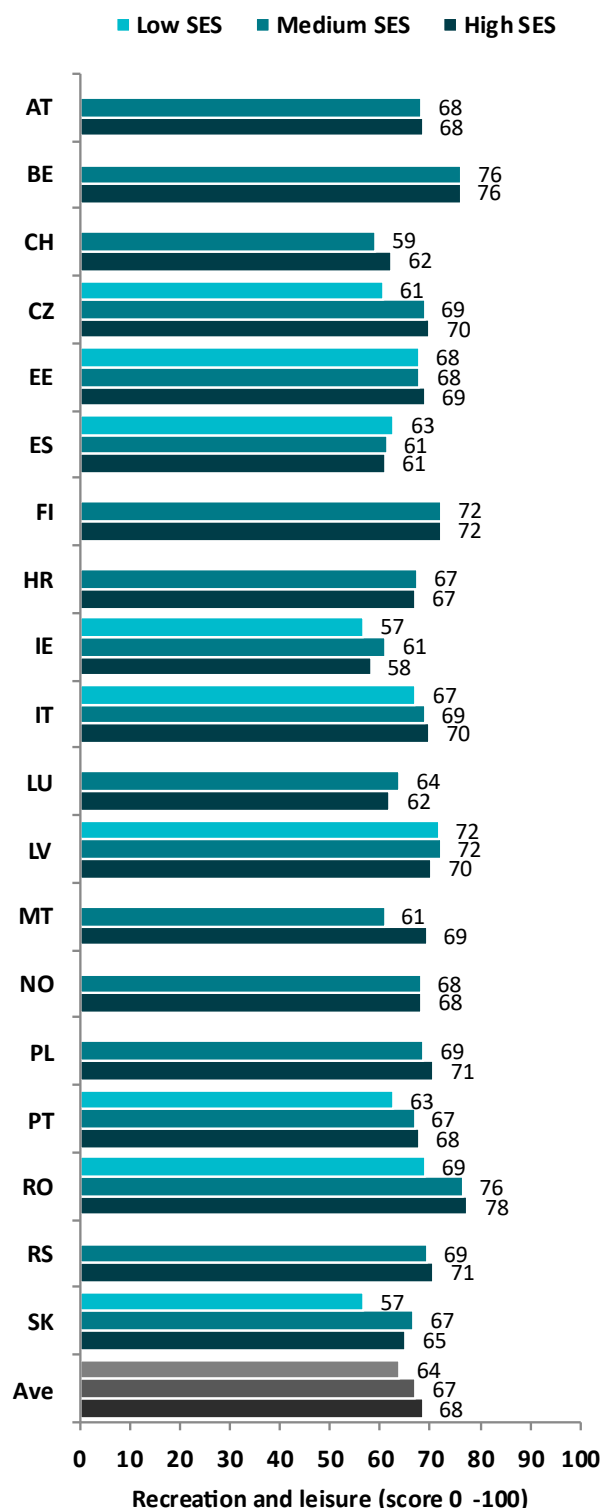
Gender differences show how girls are more likely to engage in entertainment activities on a daily basis (69% vs. 65% of boys). the proportion of girls who engage in entertainment and leisure activities is highest in Malta (10 percentage points) and higher than the average in Finland (7 percentage points), Austria, Belgium Estonia and Slovakia (6 percentage points), while very small in Italy (1 percentage point).

Figure 21: Overall engagement in recreation and leisure activities, by gender and country



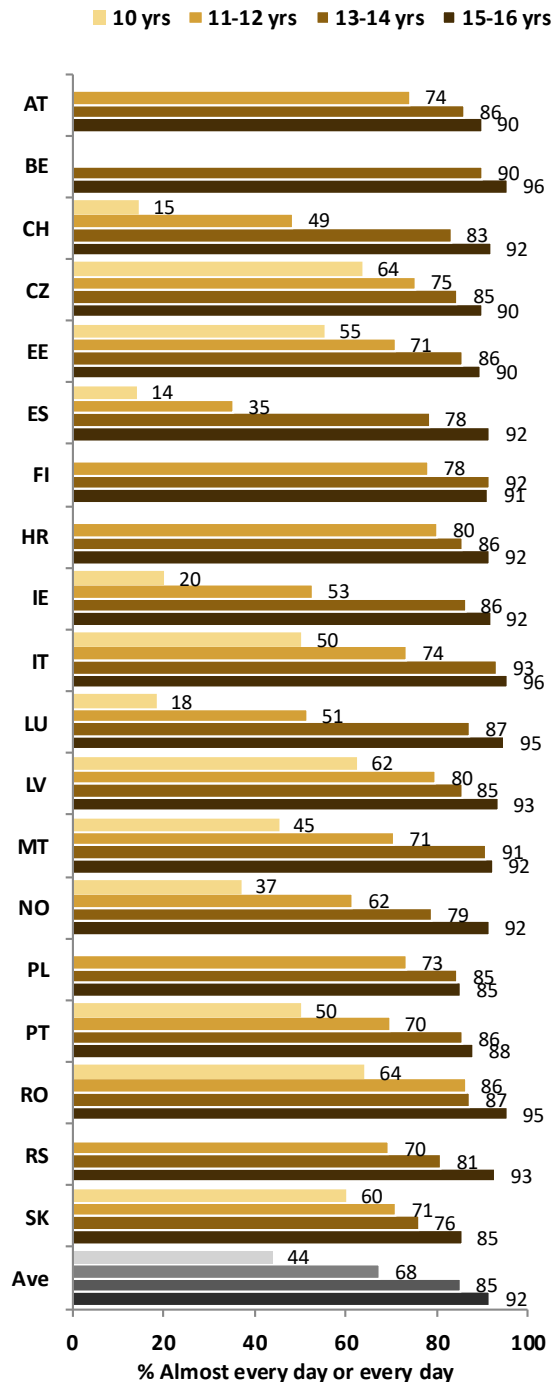
Average score based on QC9 and QC10. Base: All children 10–16

Figure 22: Overall engagement in recreation and leisure activities, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



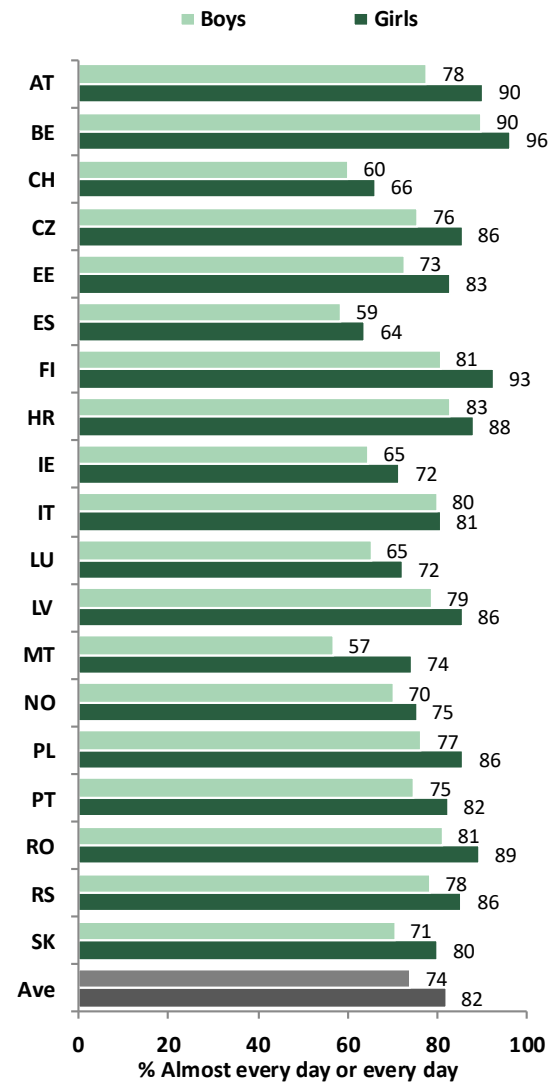
Average score based on QC9 and QC10. Base: All children 10–16

Figure 23: Communication with friends, by country and age group



QC10: How often have you done these things in the PAST MONTH? QC10a: I communicated with my friends. Base: All children 10–16

Figure 24: Communication with friends, by country and gender



QC10: How often have you done these things ONLINE in the PAST MONTH? QC10a: I communicated with my friends. Base: All children 10–16

Engagement in entertainment and leisure activities is more frequent among higher SES children (68% vs. 64% of children from lower SES background), suggesting that socioeconomic inequalities still matter in the quality of internet access, including the availability of devices for personal use and the subscription to premium services for video and music streaming. This pattern is consistent across most countries, and the socioeconomic difference higher than average in Czechia, Malta, Romania, and Slovakia. A reversed socioeconomic pattern can be observed in Latvia, Luxembourg and Spain, although with modest differences between lower SES and higher SES children.

Gender differences in the daily use of the internet for communicating with friends follow similar patterns across the countries (see Figure 24), with **girls more likely to engage in online communication with friends every day** or almost every day. Across the sample, the difference between girls and boys consists of 8 percentage points (82% girls vs. 74% boys), ranging from 17 percentage points among 9-16-years-old in Malta to only 1% among their peers in Italy.

Information and learning

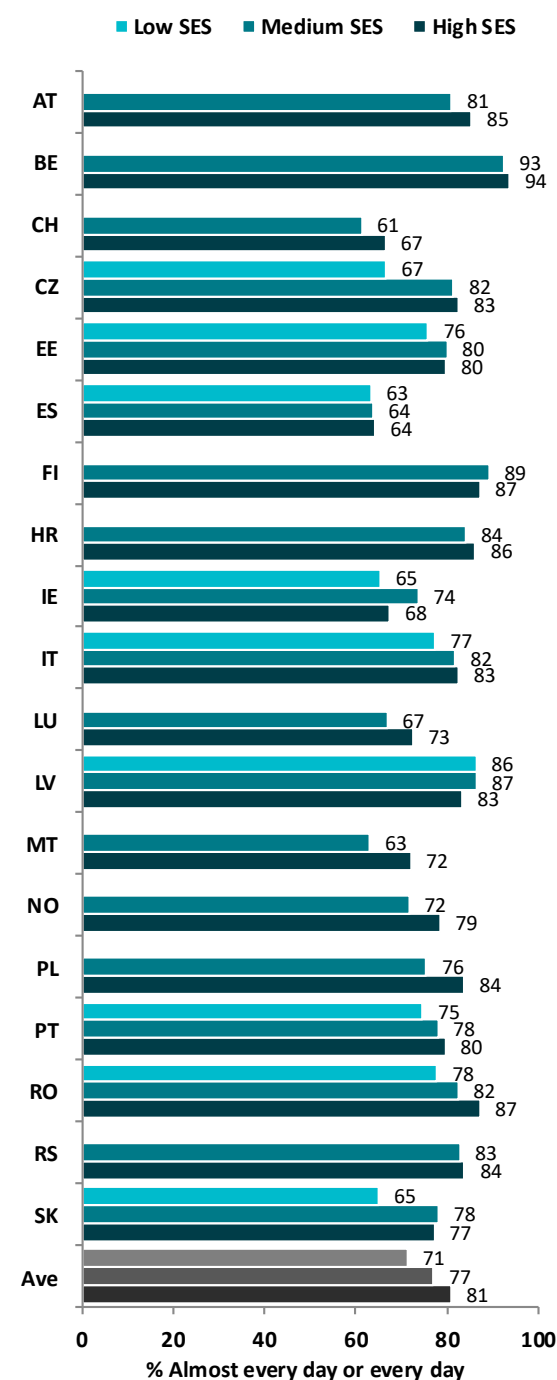
Beyond schoolwork, children also use the internet to learn something new or practise something they were already learning — for example by watching tutorials — a common activity reported by 28% of children on average, highest in Romania and Malta (39%) and lowest in Finland (17%). A further, more practical use is looking for things to do in one's local area, reported by 13% on average, though this rises to 21–23% in Estonia and Latvia and falls to just 6% in Finland. Country-level detail on the remaining information and learning activities — including looking for news, health information, and civic participation — is presented above (see Figure 14) and in Table 6.

Use of the internet for schoolwork

Using the internet for schoolwork was the most basic online activity recorded in 2011: at the time children started going online to perform basic searches related to schoolwork.³⁸ Since then, using the internet for schoolwork has remained a significant daily activity for one in four children, but has only slightly increased from 2018 (31%).

In our 2025/2026 survey, across the sample, 38% reported using the internet daily or almost daily for schoolwork. The proportion ranged from 76% in Belgium to 18% in Finland (see Figure 26). Higher than average levels were also found in Norway (63%), Spain (51%), Latvia and Malta (46%), and Estonia (45%). In some countries, a sizeable minority never use the internet for schoolwork: most notably in Ireland (21%), Italy and Luxembourg (17%).

Figure 25: Communication with friends, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC10: How often have you done these things ONLINE in the PAST MONTH? QC10a: I communicated with my friends. Base: All children 10–16

³⁸ Livingstone et al. (2011).

Table 6: Information and learning activities engaged in every day or almost every day, by country

	I used the internet to learn something new or practice I used the internet for schoolwork	I looked for news or information online about what is happening in the world something I was learning	I got involved in a campaign, protest or signed a petition online	I created and edited some digital content	I looked for things to do in my area	I searched for info about physical health, injury, or physical treatment	I searched for info about mental health, mental difficulties, or well-being	I participated in a public online discussion about something I care about	
AT	33	24	23	3	12	12	10	7	4
BE	76	26	18	2	14	9	8	7	3
CH	27	21	16	1	9	8	5	5	1
CZ	27	24	20	3	14	9	8	8	5
EE	45	27	22	4	20	21	9	8	7
ES	51	32	15	2	12	12	11	8	4
FI	18	17	22	2	10	6	6	6	3
HR	35	26	25	4	16	14	11	7	6
IE	36	29	19	1	8	11	6	4	2
IT	32	29	23	1	12	11	10	7	7
LU	31	23	24	2	12	12	8	6	4
LV	46	29	24	4	19	23	13	10	6
MT	46	39	28	6	18	19	19	13	8
NO	63	37	24	2	10	15	8	6	4
PL	25	31	34	5	13	12	12	10	7
PT	33	37	29	6	15	13	18	14	9
RO	34	39	26	5	19	20	15	12	7
RS	32	36	20	3	12	12	10	8	5
SK	27	22	15	2	8	10	7	6	3
Ave	38	28	22	3	13	13	10	8	5

QC9 and QC10: How often in past month? Base: All children 10-16.

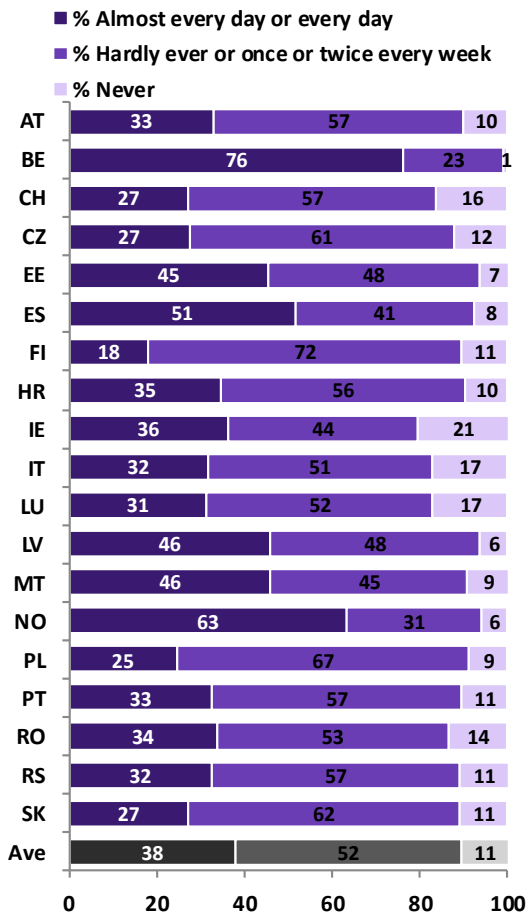
Age differences are generally significant and consistent across the countries (see Figure 27). Across the sample, **daily use of the internet for schoolwork increased from 18% among 10-year-olds to 54% among 15- to 16-year-olds**. This age pattern is not surprising, considering that engagement in all online activities increases with age. The shift from primary to secondary education is also likely to extend the relevance of the internet for schoolwork. Despite this general pattern, however, variations across the countries persist. The increase is particularly pronounced in Malta where online activities related to schoolwork rise from 27% among 10-year-olds to 83% among 15- to 16-year-olds, and Ireland (7% among 10-year-olds to 57% among 15- to 16-year-olds).

A steep increase by age can also be observed in Latvia (from 10% to 59%), Italy (from 10% to 50%) and Portugal (from 13% to 52%). The proportion of 15- to 16-year-olds who regularly use the internet for schoolwork is higher than average in Malta (83%), Norway (81%) and Belgium (76%). Conversely, it is lowest in Finland (32%), Austria (39%), Poland and Slovakia (40%).

In relation to gender (see Figure 28), across the full sample the difference between boys and girls is five percentage points, with **girls more likely to use the internet for schoolwork every day or almost every day (40% vs 35% boys)**. This gender pattern is reflected in most countries. However, in some countries larger gaps appeared, specifically in Malta (18 percentage points), Latvia (10 percentage points),

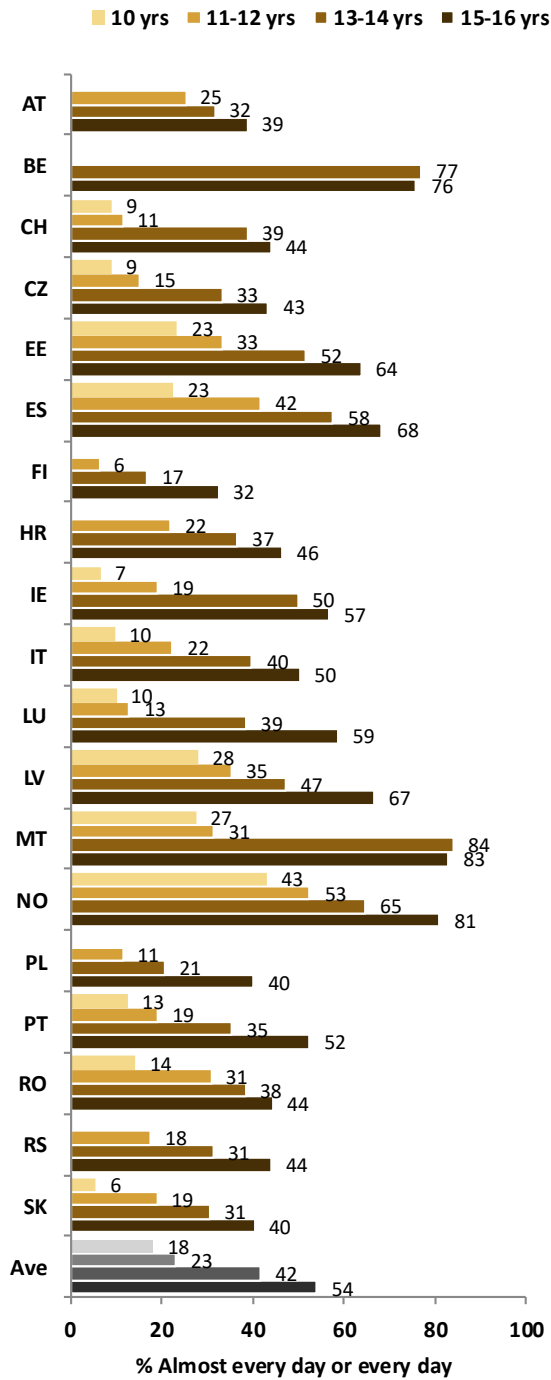
and Austria and Serbia (9 percentage points). The gender difference is negligible in Norway, where boys (64%) are only slightly more likely than girls (63%) to go online for schoolwork.

Figure 26: Use of the internet for schoolwork, by country and frequency



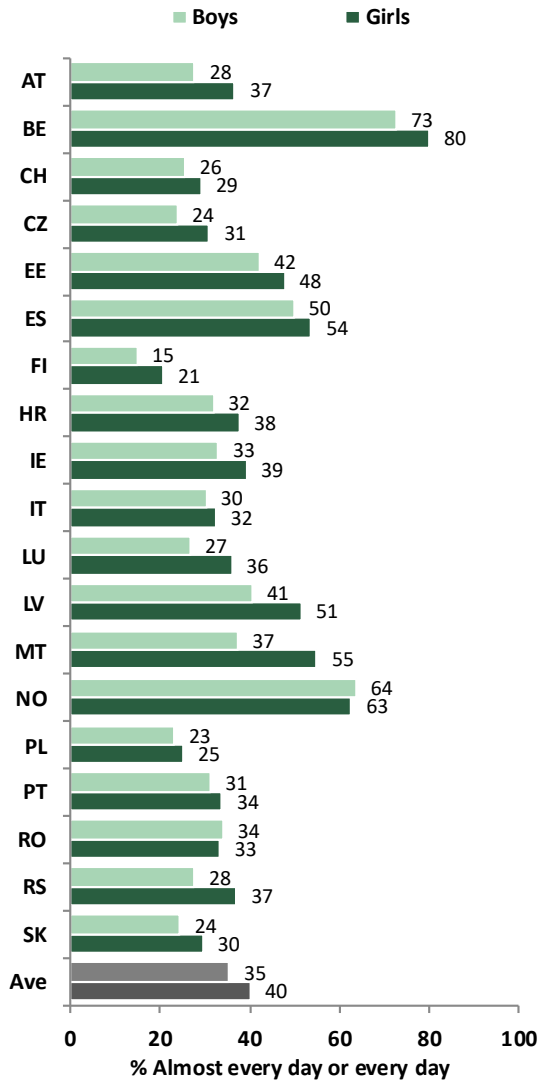
QC9: How often have you done these things ONLINE in the PAST MONTH? QC9a: Used the internet for schoolwork. Base: All children 10–16

Figure 27: Use of the internet for schoolwork, by country and age group



QC9: How often have you done these things ONLINE in the PAST MONTH? QC9a: Used the internet for schoolwork. Base: All children 10–16

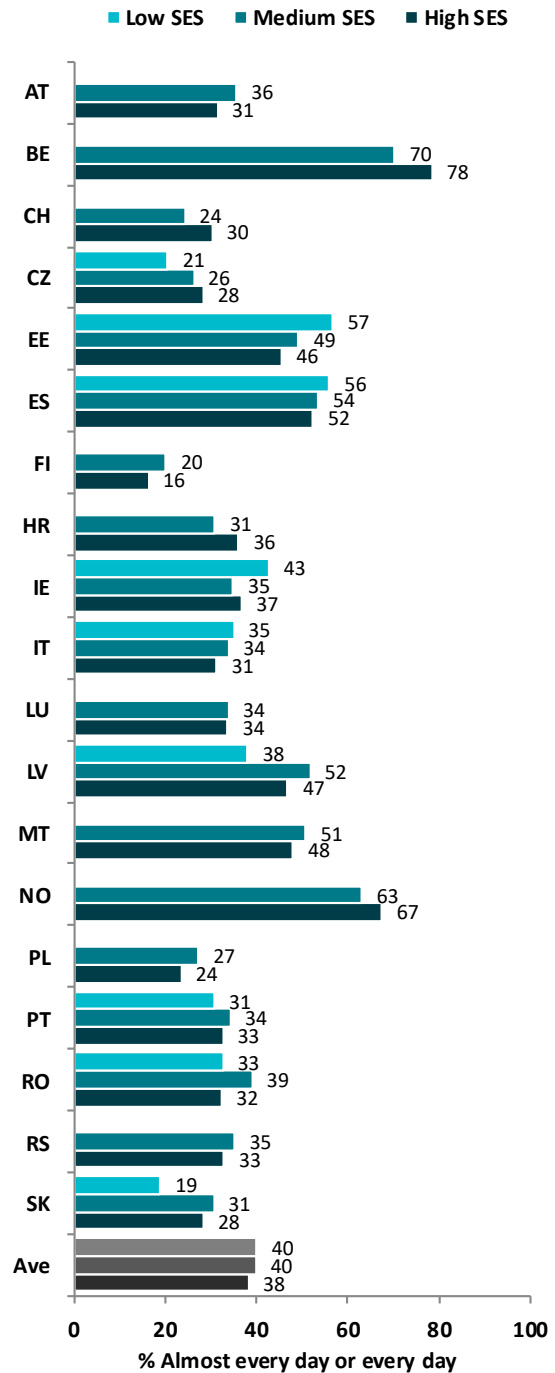
Figure 28: Use of the internet for schoolwork, by country and gender



QC9: How often have you done these things ONLINE in the PAST MONTH? QC9a: Used the internet for schoolwork. Base: All children 10–16

Finally, Figure 29 shows variation across the countries in children's daily internet use for schoolwork by self-reported SES. In contrast with differences by age, the overall socioeconomic difference is very small: across the full sample, **40% of children in the low and medium SES groups reported using the internet for schoolwork every day or almost every day, compared to 38% of children from higher SES groups.**

Figure 29: Use of the internet for schoolwork, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC9: How often have you done these things ONLINE in the PAST MONTH? QC9a: Used the internet for schoolwork. Base: All children 10–16

Moreover, the socioeconomic pattern is not consistent across the countries. Consistent with the overall pattern, but with greater differences, in Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Poland, Serbia and Spain, the percentage of children reporting use of the internet for schoolwork is higher among the low SES group. Conversely, in Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Norway and Switzerland a higher proportion of high-SES children report daily or almost daily use of the internet for schoolwork. Finally, in a few countries including Austria, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia, online activities related to schoolwork are more commonly practised by children in the middle SES group.

Our data do not show a uniform socioeconomic gradient. Although there are no consistent socioeconomic patterns and the percentage point differences in most countries are small, socioeconomic variations in the use of the internet to support learning should not be underestimated, as they suggest possible social inequalities. In fact, in countries where the use of the internet for schoolwork is higher among the low SES group, this may indicate unequal literacy and numeracy competences among the student population, with those from lower-educated backgrounds compensating by turning to the internet. Conversely, more regular use of the internet for schoolwork among high or medium SES children may reflect inequalities in access and digital skills

Therefore, we suggest that our overall findings provide evidence of possible socioeconomic inequalities in internet use in relation to learning and education, which merit further investigation and contextualisation at the country level.

Gaming

Playing online games is a daily activity for half of all children (50% on average), ranging from 63% in Romania to 38% in Switzerland. Trading or buying digital goods, such as in-game skins or items, is far less common (6% on average), though it rises to 12% in Malta compared with just 2% in Ireland.

Gaming is still predominantly a male activity, with 48% of boys vs 29% of girls playing games every day.

This gender pattern is consistent across the countries but with some differences: the gender gap in gaming (19 percentage points overall) is slightly wider in Austria (22 percentage points), Belgium and Spain (21 percentage points), and Latvia, Serbia and Norway (20 percentage points).

Table 7: Gaming activities engaged in every day or almost every day, by country

	I played online games	I traded or bought digital goods (such as skins and other digital items in games)
AT	40	6
BE	52	5
CH	38	4
CZ	54	6
EE	61	8
ES	39	7
FI	53	4
HR	53	9
IE	45	2
IT	48	4
LU	41	6
LV	55	7
MT	58	12
NO	56	3
PL	51	6
PT	47	9
RO	63	10
RS	55	7
SK	50	5
Ave	50	6

QC9 and QC10: How often in past month? Base: All children 10-16.

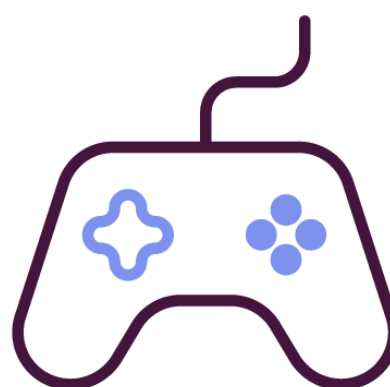
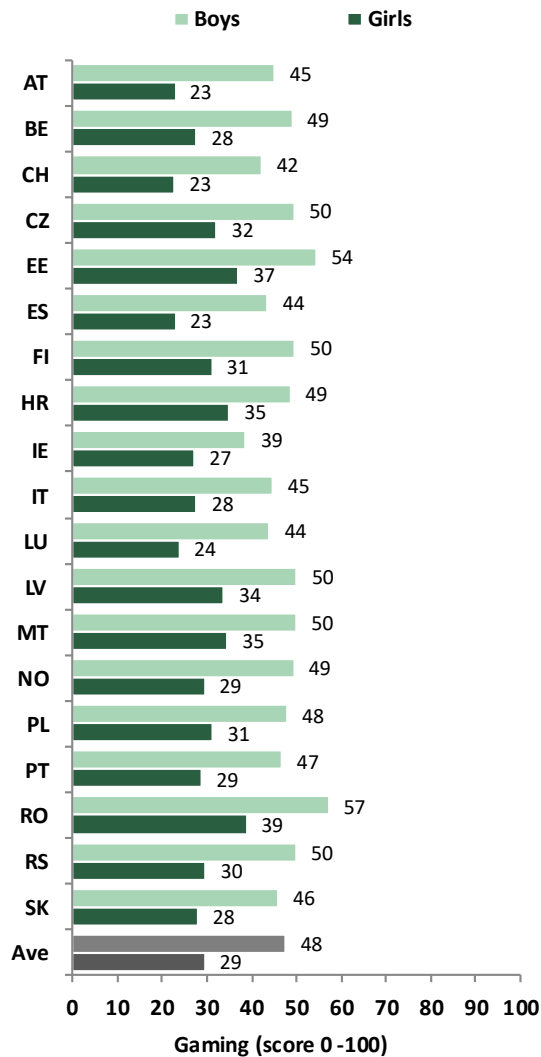


Figure 30: Playing games, by gender and country

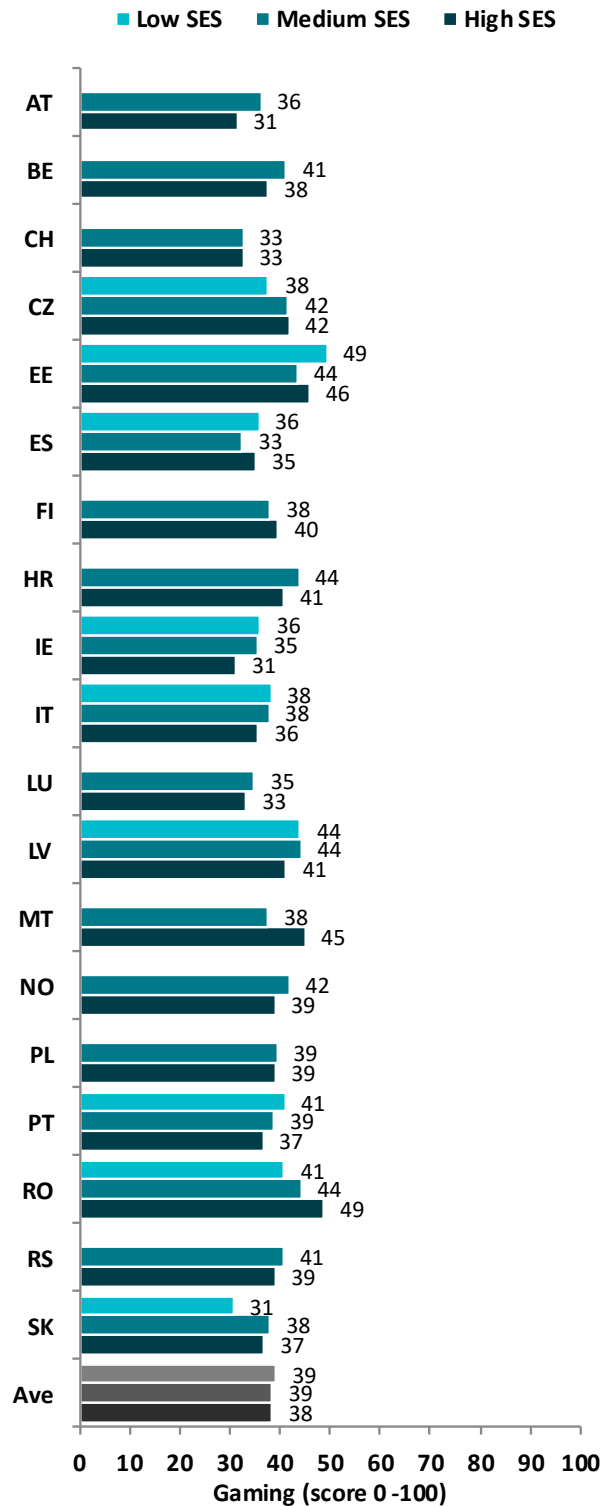


QC9: How often have you done these things ONLINE in the PAST MONTH? Base: All children 10-16

Socioeconomic variations in the number of children who play online games every day or almost daily are modest in the overall sample, with lower SES children only slightly more likely to engage in gaming on a regular basis than their peers from higher SES background. However, although it can be observed in most countries, this pattern is not consistent. In Czechia, Malta, Romania and Slovakia a reversed pattern can be observed, whereby the proportion of gamers is higher among children from a higher socioeconomic background. Therefore, while in most countries we may speculate that children from wealthier households engage in a wider variety of offline activities such as sports and extracurricular activities – and this contributes to limit the time spent with online games – in a few countries, online gaming

is still dependent on the quality of internet access; it is therefore less frequent in lower SES households that may not have specific devices such as game consoles.

Figure 31: Playing games, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



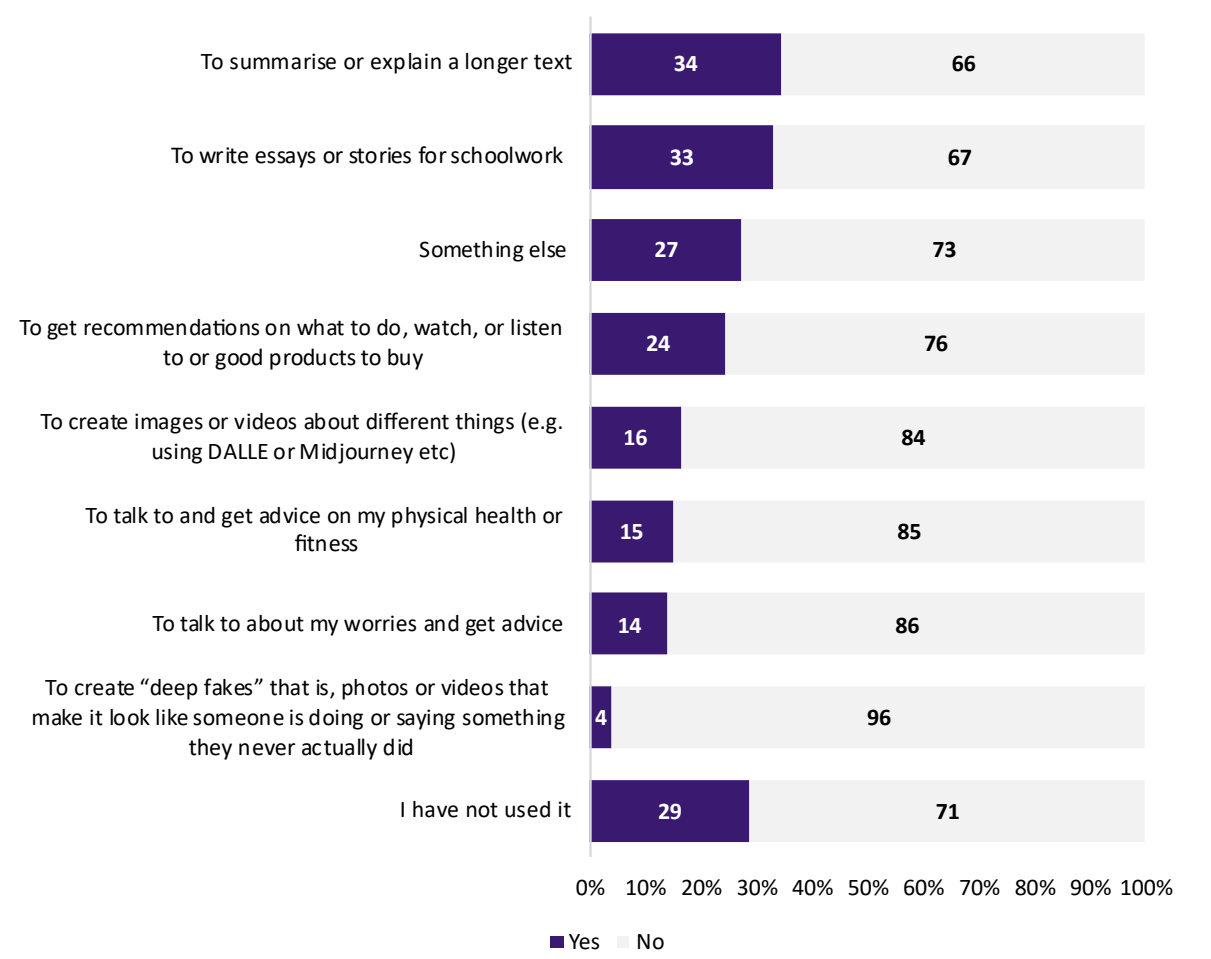
QC9: How often have you done these things ONLINE in the PAST MONTH? Base: All children 10-16

Using AI

Among the new measures for online activities used in the 2025 survey, we included questions on the use of GenAI tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Notebook and CoPilot. The full findings on GenAI use among European children have already been published in Staksrud et al.³⁹ Here, we briefly report the findings related to the number of children using AI and the main activities that are now often AI-based. Since our data were collected in 2025, and the domestication of AI is progressing fast, the picture may have already evolved, with more children using AI in a wider range of daily activities.

One in three children have not used any AI tool in the month before the interview (see Figure 32), ranging from 57% in Ireland to 11% in Italy (see Table 8). This finding suggests AI is now fully embedded in the digital lives of most European children, yet with significant age, SES and country variations.⁴⁰ If cross-country variations reflect differences in children’s engagement in overall digital activities already examined (with Irish and Spanish children scoring lower than average on other online activities), socioeconomic differences – with 70% of lower SES children included in the AI users group compared to 75% of higher SES children – this may be a sign of persisting sociodigital inequalities,⁴¹ namely, unequal access to digital devices with internet connection, diverse digital literacies and differences in usage practices.⁴²

Figure 32: AI-based online activities in the past month



QC11⁴³: Which of the following purposes, if any, have you used GenAI for during the past month? Base: All children 10–16

³⁹ Staksrud et al. (2026b).

⁴⁰ Staksrud et al. (2026b).

⁴¹ Helsper (2021).

⁴² Staksrud et al. (2026b).

⁴³ New question in EUKO 2025. Source: Adapted from Hopelab et al. (2024).

Children use AI for a wide range of activities, including support in schoolwork, creative activities, practical and everyday support, and advice seeking. Overall, **school-related uses are the most common. Across the total sample, around one in three children reported using GenAI to summarise or explain longer texts (34%), or to write essays for schoolwork (33%)** (see Figure 32). However, the use of AI as a support in educational activities varies considerably across the countries, ranging from 48% in Belgium to 14% in Finland (see Table 8).

Practical and everyday uses are also widespread. **One in four children (24%) reported using GenAI to get**

recommendations on what to do, watch, listen to or buy (see Figure 32), with higher values observed in Serbia (40%), Croatia (35%), Italy (34%) and Latvia (33%) (see Table 8).

Use of AI to support creativity, such as creating images or videos, is low (16% overall), but higher than average in Romania (26%), Portugal (24%), Czechia and Slovakia (23%) (see Table 8). However, **deepfake creation is rare across all countries** (4% overall). This is consistent with the finding that, in most countries, children express concern about the risks associated with AI-manipulated images and stories,⁴⁴ including cyberbullying, misinformation, hate, and polarisation.

Table 8: Use of AI, by country

	To write essays or stories for schoolwork	To summarise or explain a longer text	To create images or videos about different things	To create “deep fakes”	To get recommendations on what to do, watch, or listen to or good products to buy	To talk to and get advice on my physical health or fitness	To talk to about my worries and get advice	Something else	I have not used it
AT	38	45	19	3	31	22	14	45	n.a.
BE	48	59	15	3	19	13	10	34	n.a.
CH	23	27	8	2	15	8	5	21	n.a.
CZ	40	33	23	5	27	18	19	53	n.a.
EE	29	34	13	3	26	9	11	25	36
ES	23	29	10	3	15	9	9	12	41
FI	14	15	11	2	13	10	8	39	39
HR	42	36	21	9	35	15	14	19	22
IE	19	19	6	1	11	6	4	6	57
IT	26	45	19	5	34	20	24	28	11
LU	28	35	17	3	22	17	12	25	32
LV	37	41	18	5	33	20	18	33	20
MT	15	16	6	2	10	5	4	12	31
NO	35	25	10	1	17	9	7	19	41
PL	23	26	15	4	16	13	16	43	n.a.
PT	47	48	24	4	30	23	23	23	15
RO	46	38	26	6	32	24	23	13	13
RS	43	30	21	6	40	20	23	38	n.a.
SK	45	41	23	6	30	17	17	28	16
Ave	33	34	16	4	24	15	14	27	29

QC11: Which of the following purposes, if any, have you used Gen AI for during the PAST MONTH? Base: All children 10–16

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Use of AI for advice on physical or mental health and personal matters is reported by a smaller but still notable proportion of children. Around 15% report using GenAI to talk about physical health or fitness, and 14% report talking to an AI chatbot about what worries them (see Figure 32). A higher proportion of children using AI as a source of medical and emotional support is found in Romania, Portugal, Serbia, Italy, Czechia and Austria.

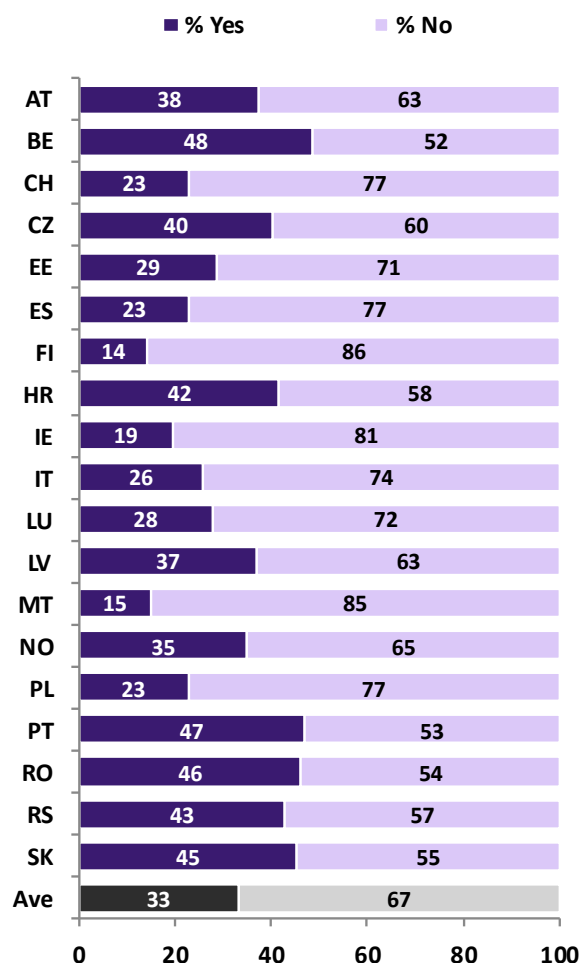
Most notably, a substantial share of children selected ‘Something else’ (27% overall) (see Figure 32) to describe their use of AI. This indicates that children, especially those living in Czechia (53%), Austria (45 %), Poland (43%) and Finland (39%), are using AI in ways that go beyond those initially envisioned in research, including our own. GenAI’s seamless integration in services and platforms children use, such as Google searches and My AI in Snapchat, has been widespread, which may account for some of the answers in the large ‘Something else’ category.⁴⁵

Use of AI for schoolwork

As shown in Table 5, use of AI for educational task tops the list of AI-based activities in most countries, although with considerable variations (see Figure 33). In fact, **nearly half of the children in Belgium, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia reported using AI to write essays or stories for schoolwork.** By contrast, the proportion of children who did not use AI in school-related tasks is highest in Finland, Malta and Ireland.

Consistent with the age patterns observed in relation to digital activities more generally, **age differences in the use of AI to support children’s schoolwork are considerable and consistent across the countries, ranging from 13% of 10-year-olds to 48% of 15- to 16-year-olds** (see Figure 34). Younger children are less likely to turn to AI to write essays or stories in Ireland (6%), Finland and Norway (7%) and Luxembourg (11%). Conversely, in other countries such as Portugal (25%), Romania (22%) and Latvia (22%), the share of 10-year-olds who use AI to write essays or other texts is higher than average. An interesting pattern can be observed in Malta and Switzerland, where children aged 10 are more likely to engage in educational uses of AI than 11- to 12-year-olds. Finally, **the proportion of 15- to 16-year-olds who use AI in school-related tasks is higher than average in Romania (66%), Portugal (64%), Slovakia (60%), Belgium and Croatia (59%).**

Figure 33: Use of AI for schoolwork, by country

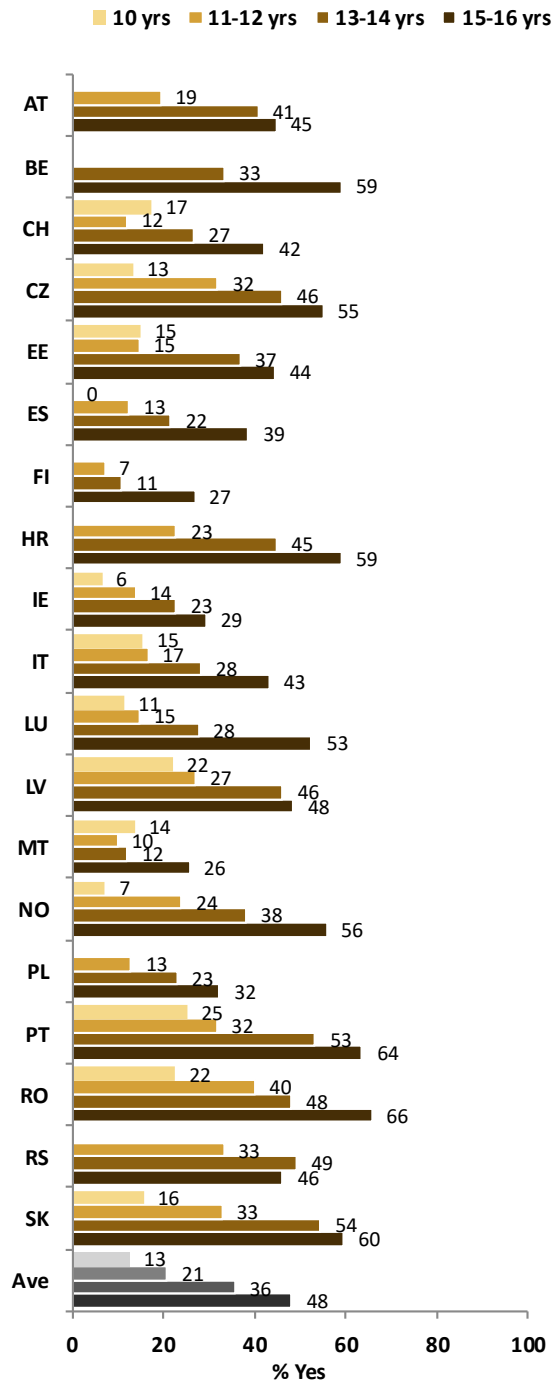


QC11: Which of the following purposes, if any, have you used Gen AI for during the PAST MONTH? QC11a: To write essays or stories for schoolwork. Base: All children 10–16

Contrary to age differences, **gender differences** in the use of AI to write essays or other texts for school **are modest or null** (see Figure 35) in most countries and across the whole sample. In the few countries where the gender gap is at or above 4 percentage points, a gender pattern can be observed: in Estonia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway and Switzerland, girls are more likely to engage in AI-based educational activities than boys. The only exception is represented by Italy, where boys are more likely to use AI to write essays or texts for school (27% vs 23% among girls).

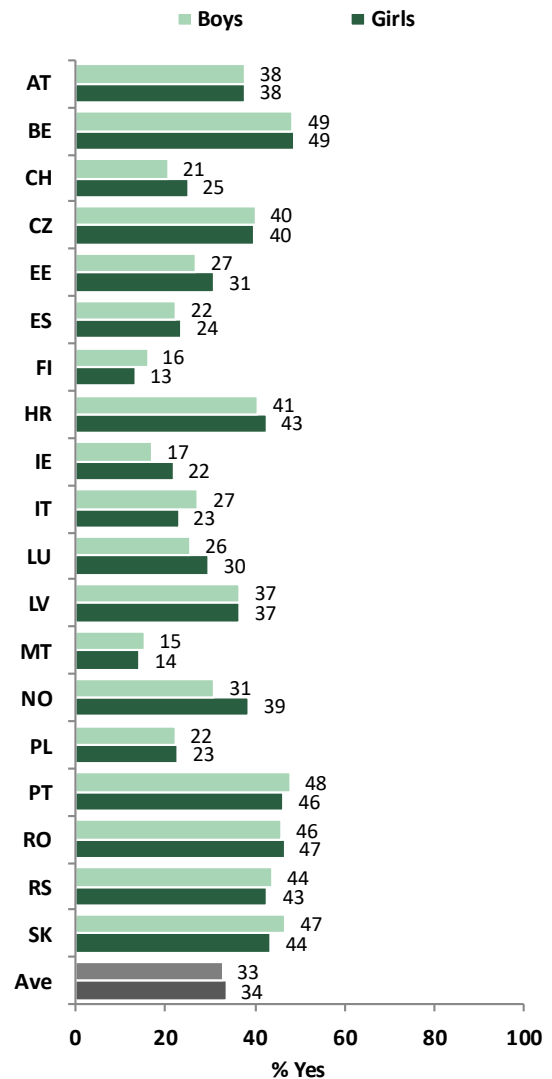
⁴⁵ Staksrud et al. (2026b).

Figure 34: Use of AI for schoolwork, by country and age group



QC11: Which of the following purposes, if any, have you used Gen AI for during the PAST MONTH? QC11a: To write essays or stories for schoolwork. Base: All children 10–16

Figure 35: Use of AI for schoolwork, by country and gender

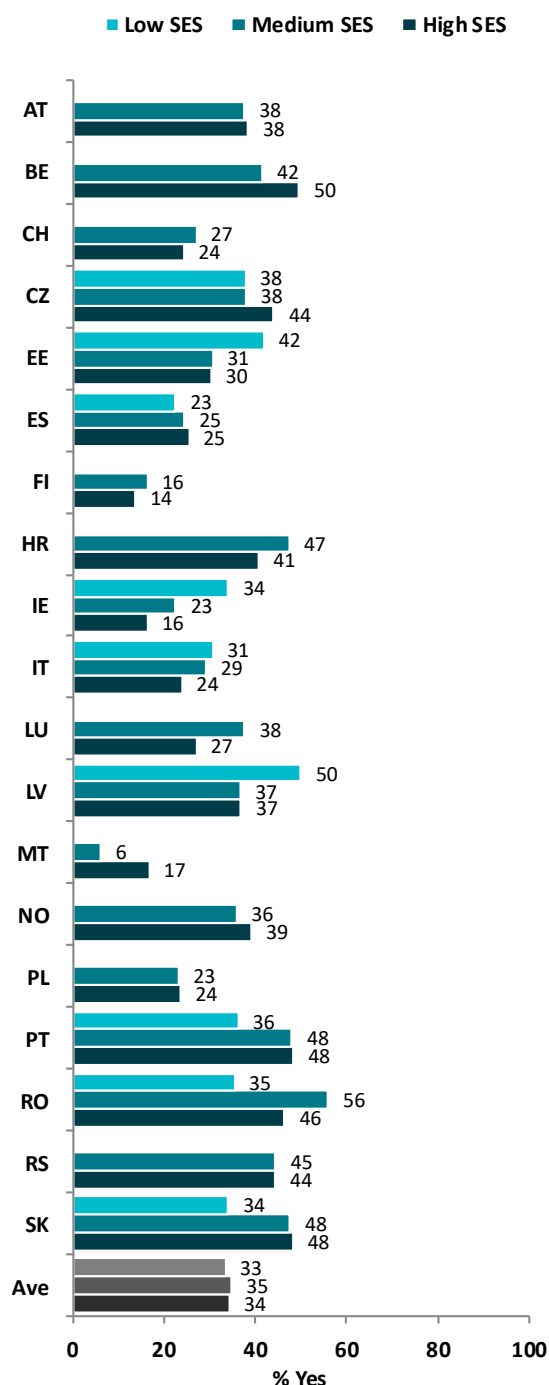


QC11: Which of the following purposes, if any, have you used Gen AI for During the PAST MONTH? QC11a: To write essays or stories for schoolwork. Base: All children 10–16

While modest in the overall sample (see Figure 16), socioeconomic differences emerge at the country level, with no clear pattern. In some countries, including Belgium, Czechia, Portugal, Norway and Slovakia, the use of AI for schoolwork is more common among higher SES children. In other countries, most notably Estonia, Ireland, Italy and Latvia, a reverse pattern can be observed, whereby educational use of AI is higher among lower SES children. In Romania, higher values are reported among children from medium-SES backgrounds (56%) (see Table 5).



Figure 36: Use of AI for schoolwork, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC11: Which of the following purposes, if any, have you used Gen AI for During the PAST MONTH? QC11a: To write essays or stories for schoolwork. Base: All children 10–16

Interpreting these socioeconomic differences as indicative of sociodigital inequalities is difficult at this stage, especially given that the understanding of AI tools as beneficial for learning is controversial among children, as our qualitative data suggest.⁴⁶ At first glance, we might be inclined to conclude that higher SES children benefit from better internet access and higher digital skills that help them adopt AI tools for educational tasks. Yet, children's own observation that reliance on AI is associated with de-skilling and disempowerment⁴⁷ mean that in countries where lower SES children are more likely to use AI to write essays and stories for schoolwork, a third-level digital divide is emerging that accounts for the reproduction of inequalities in cultural capital among children of different backgrounds.

Internet and everyday communication and engagement

The EUKO 2025 survey findings confirm a trend already observed in our 2018 data: **the vast majority of European children have come to rely on the internet for their everyday communication with friends and family, and for their entertainment. Conversely, engagement in civic, participatory and creative online activities remains low.** This finding has implications for policy, especially for the BIK+ strategy,⁴⁸ whose aim is not limited to ensuring safer digital environments, but to actively promote children's digital inclusion and participation through both digital literacy initiatives and the provision of age-appropriate content and environments.

Along with the persistently low number of children engaging in civic and participatory uses of the internet, the increase in children who use the internet daily for schoolwork, albeit small, is also noteworthy. Educational, civic and participatory activities are usually considered clear opportunities for social inclusion. In this light, our findings suggest that more can be done to promote children's engagement in these practices. At the same time, considering that younger children are overall less likely to engage in the activities most valued by policymakers and the public, and that social media support civic, participatory and educational uses, this represents a further caution against blanket age bans, as already argued by Staksrud, Livingstone and Ólafsson.⁴⁹

Differences by age, gender and country further illustrate patterns identified in our prior research, and more specifically: children's engagement with the

⁴⁶ Staksrud et al. (2026b).

⁴⁷ Staksrud et al. (2026b).

⁴⁸ European Commission (2022).

⁴⁹ Staksrud et al. (2026a).

digital environment increases with age; some activities such as communication, playing digital games and schoolwork remains gendered, although no consistent patterns emerge across the countries; finally, while the internet is clearly embedded in children's everyday lives, we can still identify lower-use (especially in Ireland and Malta) and higher-use countries (Belgium and Eastern European countries) limited to specific online activities (use of the internet for schoolwork and communication with friends). The differences between countries highlight once more the importance of considering national contexts when developing policy responses, educational strategies and child-focused guidance related to maximise online opportunities.

In relation to AI use, these initial findings warn of the possibility of new AI inequalities emerging among European children based on age, gender, socioeconomic and country differences. However, it is difficult to interpret our survey data, given that the consequences of AI for children remain unclear, and we cannot conclude whether it is beneficial or detrimental to children's learning, cognitive and psychological development, wellbeing and rights. Additional research, including qualitative and quantitative studies, is needed to understand **when, for whom, and under which circumstances** educational or prosocial uses of AI (such as seeking advice on mental health and interpersonal relations) are beneficial for children and young people.



5. Children's digital literacy and skills for participation

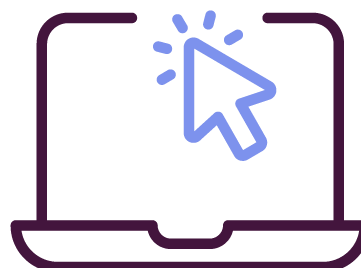
Digital literacy is important in shaping children's engagement with the internet and other technologies. They are a key determinant in whether children are able to take up the opportunities and navigate the risks they might encounter online. Young people who are more confident and skilled engage in broader ways with the digital world and have more positive experiences online. Due to their broader exposure, they are also more likely to encounter risks; however, they may also be better equipped to manage or cope with risks, particularly when supported by parents or caregivers, schools or peers.⁵⁰

Digital literacy is important beyond the impact it has on experiences in the digital **environment. It has become key to participation in formal education and in securing employment opportunities.** Children (and their parents or caregivers and teachers) must now navigate a profusion of educational technologies to be able to access online materials, to do and submit homework, and to keep up to date with school activities.⁵¹ Digital skills have become one of the key features that employers look for and influence how people manage online job searches using a variety of platforms.⁵² This means that there is a lot of attention in policymaking on closing the 'digital skills gap' between market needs and the skills young people are taught, and subsequently, a lot of pressure on schools to teach and on children to acquire these skills.

Importantly, digital literacy is also linked to social and civic participation. Abilities to navigate and evaluate information, to judge how to interact with others and how to create content help young people to assess which information, content creators and platforms can be trusted, and to decide what are the most constructive ways of creating and sharing their own content. This creates opportunities for their voices and experiences to be heard, establish positive relationships with others and themselves, and for them to engage actively in issues that matter to them. Digital literacy is therefore fundamental to guaranteeing child rights in the digital environment, such as the right to education, freedom of expression, taking part in decisions on matters that affect them, and feeling safe and protected.

While digital literacy has always been considered important, what children need and how this is measured has developed considerably since the first iteration of EUKO in 2011.

Participation in modern societies requires at least a basic level of operational or functional skills: knowing which buttons to click, how to manipulate the settings of different platforms and apps, how to upload and share materials with peers, teachers and potential future employers. Often these skills are assumed to be innate, part of the persistent myth of the 'digital native', but previous EUKO surveys and related work have shown that there are many children who struggle to do even basic tasks, and that who manages to navigate the digital world comfortably and expertly is related to historical inequalities.⁵³



Recent developments around disinformation and AI have sparked concern that these digital skills are not enough, and that critical digital literacy is becoming more important. Critical digital literacy goes beyond button knowledge and knowing how to operate a device or manage an app or platform or even how to program. Critical knowledge refers to an understanding of how platforms (and the algorithms behind them) work, how technical features can be designed in manipulative ways, how others can try to manipulate children, and also how use of the internet can impact their own and others' wellbeing. This is especially important considering current concerns about recommender systems, AI-generated content, influencer marketing, dark patterns and platform design.

⁵⁰ Vissenberg et al. (2022).

⁵¹ Pothong et al. (2026).

⁵² De Marco et al. (2026).

⁵³ d'Haenens et al. (2023).

In line with developments on best practice in digital skills measurement, the EUKO survey adopted the short version of the internationally validated youth Digital Skills Indicator (yDSI) developed by the ySKILLS project.⁵⁴ The yDSI classifies literacy in four skill dimensions and a knowledge dimension:

- **Technical and operational skills** consist of the ability to manage and operate ICTs and the technical affordances of devices, platforms and apps, from 'button' knowledge to settings management to programming.
- **Information navigation and processing skills** consist of the ability to find, select and critically evaluate digital sources of information.
- **Communication and interaction skills** consist of the ability to use different digital media and technological features to interact with others and build networks as well as to critically evaluate the impact of interpersonal mediated communication and interactions on others.
- **Content creation and production skills** refer to the ability to create (quality) digital content and understand how it is produced and published and how it generates impact.
- **Critical digital knowledge** refers to an understanding of the social, political, economic and other forces that shape the way things are presented online and the impact they have on others. This includes understanding how the algorithms behind them work and how our interactions with ICTs and the way we use them can impact our own and others' experiences and wellbeing.

Of the four subdomains of skills measured, technical and operational skills and information navigation and processing skills are the most researched skills, and they are often the focus of policymaking, digital literacy interventions and curriculum design. Communication and interaction and content creation and production skills are less frequently measured in research, and less often the focus of digital literacy interventions and curricula. Even less frequently measured in research and narrow in its consideration in policymaking or interventions is children's *critical digital literacy*.

These dimensions were captured by two different types of questions:

Digital skills-related questions were formulated as follows:

Please indicate how true the following things are of you when thinking about how you use technologies such as mobile phones and the internet.

Not true of me

Partially true of me

Mostly true of me

Very true of me

I do not understand what you mean by this

Critical knowledge-related questions were formulated as follows:

To what extent are the following general statements about technologies such as the internet and mobile phones true or not true? If you are not sure, please let us know.

Definitely not true

Definitely true

Not sure

I do not understand

The distinction between digital skills and critical digital knowledge is important: children may know how to use digital technologies while still lacking insight into how platforms, algorithms, visibility and commercial promotion work.

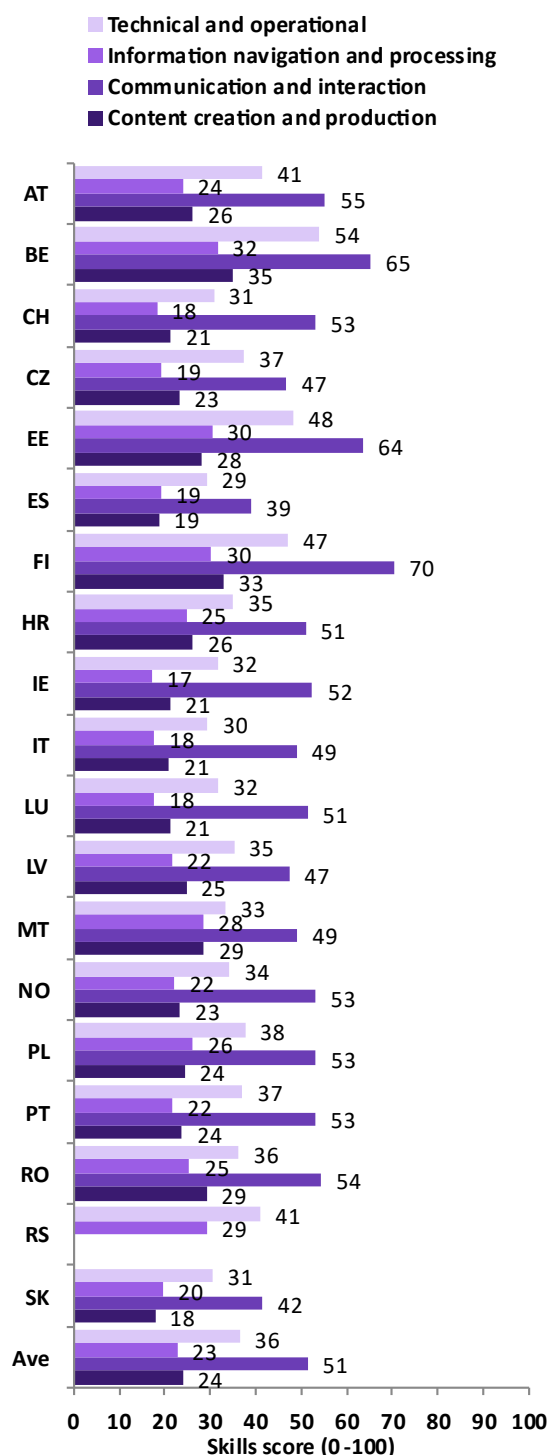
Using truth claims and 'I do not understand' options as part of the answer scale partially overcomes the issues with social desirability and estimation biases common in self-report measures.

While the way in which the question was asked was very similar to the EUKO 2020 survey, the items were different, and thus direct comparisons between the different waves of the survey on specific dimensions of digital literacy needs to be done with extreme caution. In addition, the digital environment and relevant affordances have changed considerably, and the yDSI-based measure better captures the skills needed for today's platformised and AI-mediated internet.

⁵⁴ Helsper et al. (2021b).



Figure 37: High levels of digital skills for different types of skills, by country



QC12⁵⁵ & QC13⁵⁶: Please indicate how true the following statements are of you when thinking about how you use the internet and technologies such as

mobile phones. Note I: Scores represent the average proportion of skills that children have at a high level (5. 'Very true of me') from the three skills measured on each dimension (for individual items, see Tables 6 and 7). Note II: Serbia (RS) did not collect data on communication and interaction and content creation and production skills. Base: All children 10-16.

Overall skills and knowledge and their distribution in different countries

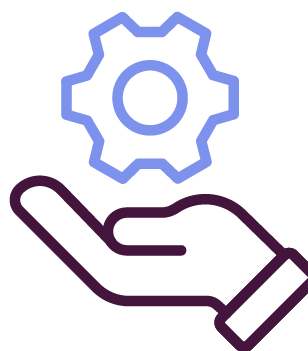
Previous EUKO studies have shown differences between countries in skill levels, which is confirmed in this analysis.

From Figure 37 it is clear that **communication and interaction skills are present at the highest level across Europe**, with children indicating having on average around half (51%) of these skills at a high level. In all countries technical and operational skills are the subsequent type of skill that children had the most of at a high level (across Europe around a third, 36%).

Children indicate having the fewest skills at a high level in relation to both information navigation and processing and content creation and production skills – less than a quarter of these skills (23/24%) at a high level.

There are clear variations within Europe. Children in Belgium, Finland and Estonia invariably have the most skills at a high level, although for content creation and production skills Romanian and Maltese children (29%) are on a par with Estonia (28%).

These skill levels for subdomains reflect differences on different elements within each of these categories (see Tables 8 and 9).



⁵⁵ New question in EUKO2025. All digital literacy and skills items are from ySKILLS. For validation and scale creation see: Helsper et al. (2021b). Midpoint of the scale for skills items

changed after pilot studies. A version of the scales used in Net Children Go Mobile and Kids Online Latin America.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Table 9: Technical and operational and information navigation and processing skills, by country

	TECHNICAL AND OPERATIONAL SKILLS			INFORMATION NAVIGATION AND PROCESSING SKILLS		
	I know how to protect a device (e.g., with a PIN, a screen pattern, a fingerprint, facial recognition)	I know how to store photos, documents or other files in the cloud (e.g., Google Drive, iCloud)	I know how to use private browsing (e.g., incognito mode)	I know how to use advanced search functions in search engines	I know how to check if the information I find online is true	I know how to figure out if a website can be trusted
AT	85	63	42	54	50	47
BE	89	80	58	60	62	63
CH	73	48	31	36	42	36
CZ	79	57	43	44	54	45
EE	94	76	60	69	73	68
ES	69	52	37	48	37	37
FI	86	66	39	45	67	59
HR	68	52	44	54	51	46
IE	75	51	31	29	44	45
IT	70	52	42	36	44	49
LU	70	49	34	41	42	35
LV	76	56	37	44	49	45
MT	71	54	31	39	57	47
NO	82	67	41	34	64	61
PL	82	52	45	44	52	52
PT	76	57	49	43	49	46
RO	78	55	49	45	58	54
RS	72	63	37	47	60	53
SK	71	50	37	45	45	39
Ave	77	58	42	45	52	49

Q12: Please indicate how true the following statements are of you when thinking about how you use the internet and technologies such as mobile phones (% 'Very true' or 'Mostly true' of me). Base: All children 10–16.

On average across Europe, children show higher level of technical and operational skills than information navigation and evaluation skills. While 77% have the basic technical skill of knowing how to secure a device through a variety of methods, only 45% indicate that they know how to use advanced functions in search engines, and only 42% indicate that they know how to use private browsing. The latter is important because it allows children to avoid data being collected and privacy being protected, not only vis-à-vis companies and advertisers, but also vis-à-vis the monitoring of others such as adults, peers and partners. Only half of the children indicate being skilled when it comes to judging the reliability of information online (52%) and providers of content (49%). Private

browsing, advanced search and source evaluation are not merely technical skills; they are linked to privacy, autonomy and children's ability to navigate commercial and algorithmically shaped information environments.

The combination of these low levels of information navigation and processing skills is especially worrying because these will become increasingly important now that many of the more practical functions have been automated or moved to AI. **The section on AI shows that children increasingly experience AI tools as an 'answer engine' or 'the new Google', reducing the need to search, compare and integrate sources themselves.** There is insufficient knowledge

about how to prompt the platforms to get reliable answers, and less clarity over how information and advice are produced – children now need to evaluate AI-generated answers, and not just websites.

These skills are not equally distributed between the different countries. Children in Estonia and Belgium invariably are the two countries where children score the highest on digital skills, ranging from 94% and 89% being skilled in protecting devices and apps, to 68% and 63% being skilled at understanding whether platforms are trustworthy. The largest difference between higher and lower skill levels can be found for using advanced functions in search engines (69% in Estonia and 29% in Ireland). For other technical and

information navigation and processing skills, the difference between the country with the highest skills and that with the lowest skills is around 30 percentage points, with the smallest difference between countries existing for protecting devices (26%).

Among countries with lower digital skills levels there is less consistency in terms of how they compare to other countries. For example, while children in Ireland score just under average on functional technical skills, such as protecting a device (75%) or uploading documents to the cloud (51%), they are among the least skilled when it comes to using search engines' more advanced functions (29%) and private browsing (31%).

Table 10: Communication and interaction and content creation and production skills, by country

	COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION			CONTENT CREATION AND PRODUCTION		
	Depending on the situation, I know which medium or tool to use to communicate with someone	I know which images of me and information about me it is okay to share online	I know when it is appropriate and when it is not appropriate to use emoticons, capital letters and text speak	I know how to create something new that combines different digital media	I know how to edit	I know how to ensure that many people will see what I put online
AT	76	81	79	49	55	49
BE	91	91	91	59	72	56
CH	74	76	74	41	47	33
CZ	74	70	74	56	59	30
EE	92	91	88	63	62	44
ES	71	56	68	41	46	28
FI	83	89	88	54	55	58
HR	70	72	69	50	52	43
IE	74	77	77	44	40	38
IT	76	75	79	47	41	41
LU	78	75	78	42	42	37
LV	74	67	72	49	51	40
MT	70	72	74	53	49	47
NO	84	90	88	52	56	42
PL	82	77	80	46	47	41
PT	81	83	75	52	46	41
RO	80	74	79	57	55	53
SK	67	63	68	40	36	31
Overall	78	77	78	49	50	42

Q13: Please indicate how true the following statements are of you when thinking about how you use the internet and technologies such as mobile phones (% 'Very true' or 'Mostly true' of me). Note: Serbia (RS) did not measure these skills. Base: All children 10–16

Children appear much more skilled when it comes to communication and Interaction skills (see Table 10). On average, about four out of five children indicate having these skills, with 78% indicating that they know which medium to choose to communicate with someone or when it is appropriate to use captions or emoticons, and 77% knowing which images of themselves it is okay to share or not to share online. This number does seem to have gone down since 2020, when EUKO asked a similar although not comparative question, and on average 86% indicated having this skill.

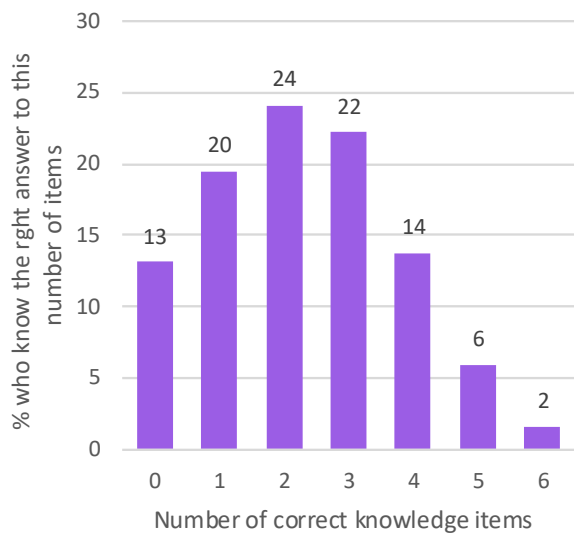
When it comes to content creation and production skills, levels are much lower, with around half of children indicating that they know how to combine different media (49%) or edit existing images, music or videos (50%), and only 42% indicate knowing how to ensure that content they produce will be seen by a broad audience. This shows little change since 2020, when a somewhat similar question was asked.

These skills are also not equally distributed between the different countries, with children in Belgium and Estonia again, the most skilled, although Estonia scores lower on the ability to create content that is visible to others online with average levels of skills (44%). When it comes to creating this type of viral content, Finland (58%) and Romania (53%) show comparatively much higher levels of skill. Spanish children are lagging a bit in this aspect – less than a third (28%) know how to create popular content. When it comes to both communication and content creation skills they are generally less skilled than children from other countries, with only 41% knowing how to combine different digital media and 56% knowing which images or information it is okay to share online. There is again less consistency in which children show low skill levels. Slovakia tends to not do that well, but other countries (e.g., Malta) show higher than average skill scores or average skill scores on some measures and low ones on others.



The biggest gap can be found in knowing which information it is okay to share online (36 percentage points), even if overall the levels are still high for this indicator. In Slovakia two-thirds of children (63%) know how to do this vis-à-vis nine out of ten (91%) children in Belgium and Estonia. The smallest differences between countries (23 percentage points) for knowing how to use emoticons, and capital letters are found between Belgium (91%) and Slovakia (68%), and for combining different media, between Estonia (63%) and Slovakia (40%).

Figure 38: Critical digital knowledge distribution among European children



Q14: To what extent are the following general statements about technologies such as the internet and mobile phones true or not true? If you are not sure, please let us know. Note. The knowledge score is created by calculating the proportion of the items correctly identified as being true or not true. Base: All children 11–16

Figure 38 shows that only a quarter of children (22%) can identify the correct answer for more than half the questions (for between four and six statements). More than half of the children (57%) got the answers correct for less than three of these statements, and 13% did not get any correct. This shows that there still is a considerable knowledge gap that needs to be bridged before European children can be called truly digitally literate. Table 11 shows that some aspects are easier to grasp than others.

Table 11: Critical Digital Knowledge (% of children correctly identifying statements as true+ or false*), by country

	Average number of times correct answer given (0–6)	The first search result presented by search engines is always the best information source*	Everyone gets the same information when they search for things online*	Whether someone likes or shares a post can have a negative impact on others+	The first post a person sees on social media is the last thing that was posted by one of their contacts*	Using hashtags (#) increases the visibility of a post+	Companies pay ordinary people to use their products in videos and content they create+
AT	2.6	48	54	37	33	51	41
BE	2.7	44	50	59	36	51	33
CH	2.1	37	47	35	25	39	36
CZ	2.6	37	50	50	35	52	52
EE	2.1	30	43	30	33	47	44
ES	2.1	35	42	45	25	42	33
FI	2.2	36	48	35	28	55	26
HR	2.4	38	46	37	26	58	45
IE	2.8	39	49	70	32	53	43
IT	2.0	30	39	24	29	44	43
LU	2.3	40	48	40	26	47	40
LV	2.1	30	43	19	31	56	38
MT	3.0	36	56	71	30	65	44
NO	2.3	31	48	56	24	46	40
PL	2.1	32	43	30	25	54	34
PT	2.5	38	53	50	30	51	36
RO	2.1	24	35	43	24	56	39
RS	2.3	27	35	49	23	57	48
SK	2.1	29	42	33	27	49	37
Ave	2.3	35*	45*	42+	28*	51+	39+

Q14: To what extent are the following general statements about technologies such as the internet and mobile phones true or not true? If you are not sure, please let us know. (% that gave correct answer). Note. The knowledge score is created by calculating the proportion of the items that was correctly identified as being true or not true. 'Average number of correct answers given' only calculated for those who answered more than 4 of the 6 items. * Definitely not true was the correct answer, +Definitely true is the correct answer. Base: All children 11 - 16.

It is noteworthy that critical knowledge still leaves much room for improvement – out of the six questions, children identify the correct answer on average 2.3 times. Children in Ireland identify the correct answer 2.8 times, and children in Italy 2 times on average.

At the country level, the average number of correct answers remains below half of the six items in every participating country. This does not mean that no individual children answered half or more items

correctly; rather, it shows that the overall country averages remain low.

There are considerable differences in how countries rank depending on whether this is related to a more technical or a more critical understanding of how ICTs work (see Table 11).

Children do not do well when asked to identify how algorithms function between a third and half of the children identify, correctly, that the three statements related to the neutral presentation of information on a

variety of platforms are incorrect. That is, only 28% knows that what they see on their feed does not represent the time at which it was posted, 35% of children correctly indicates that the first result presented by a search engine is not always the best information source, and 45% of children reports correctly that it is not true that everyone gets the same information when they search for things online.

Their evaluations of the **three statements related to the impact of certain uses of technologies on others show only slightly better but still low levels of competency**; 39% knows that companies pay ordinary people to use their products in videos, 42% understands that whether someone likes or shares a post can have a negative impact on others, and half (51%) that hashtags increase the visibility of a post. This indicates that while algorithmic literacy and an understanding the social impact and political economy of internet use and platform management are still insufficient.

In terms of the critical digital knowledge levels of children in different countries, there is no consistency in who does well across all indicators.⁵⁷ A few indicators where countries stand out are: Ireland and Malta⁵⁸ where around 70% correctly believe that sharing or liking a post can have a negative impact, compared to Latvia where only 19% gave this correct answer; Malta also had the highest percentage correct (65%), followed by Croatia and Serbia (58%), for the statement that hashtags increase visibility, compared to 39% of children in Switzerland who knew this was the case; Czechia where 52% understood that ordinary people get paid to use their products in videos and content that they create 26% in Finland; Austria where 48% correctly indicated that the first search result is not always the best information source, twice as much as in Romania where only 24% answered this question correctly.

The statement that shows the smallest percentage point difference between countries is the one that the fewest children in Europe answered correctly: That the first they see on a feed is the last thing that a contacted posted: 12 percentage points difference between Belgium (36% correctly answered) and Norway (24% correctly answered). The largest difference (52 percentage points) can be found for identifying that

how we react to a post can have an impact on others' wellbeing, though this might be partly caused by Latvian children not recognising this to be true (19%), the next country up is Italy where only 24% recognised this to be true (compared to 59% in Belgium).

Age-related skills differentials

Research has shown that older children, unsurprisingly, have higher levels of digital literacy than younger children. These developmental differences are not surprising.

As expected, differences between age groups are considerable, with consistently older children having more skills at a high level than younger children.

This difference is most pronounced for the technical and operational skills – 15- to 16-year-olds have about 50% of these skills at a high level compared to 17% of skills at a high level for 10-year-olds (in the countries where these children were included), and 26% of skills at a high level for 11- to 12-year-olds, which is a difference of 33% and 24% of skills between the oldest and youngest children included in the study. In Serbia the differences were the largest: 10-year-olds had 18% of skills at a high level compared to 53%, a difference of 35 percentage points, while in Slovakia the difference was only 17 percentage points between 15- to 16- and 11- to 12-year-olds and 18 percentage points between 15- to 16- and 10-year-olds.

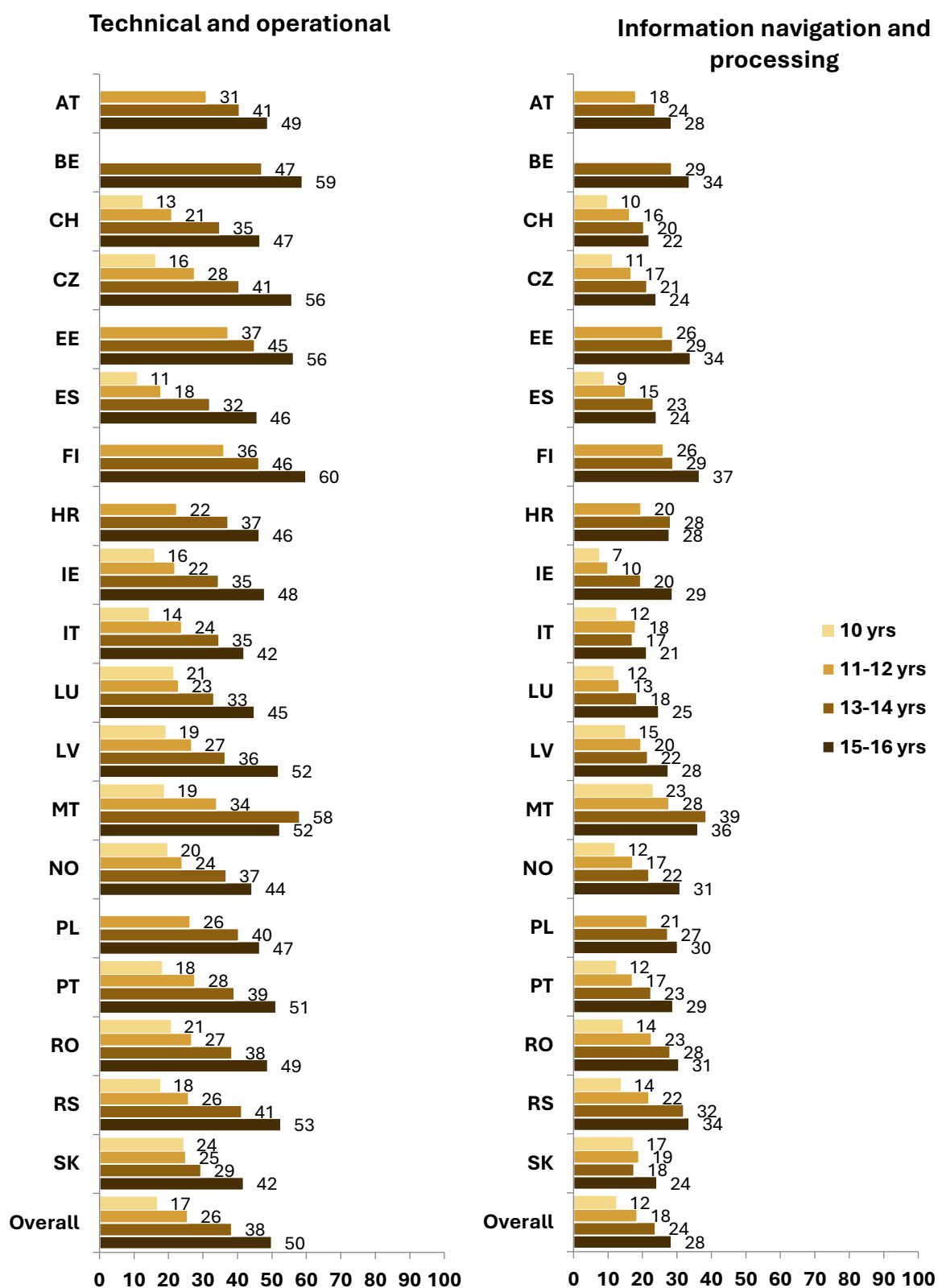
The next largest difference can be found for communication and interaction skills: 20 percentage points more skills at a high level between 15- to 16-year-olds and 11- to 12-year-olds and 36 percentage points with 10- to 11-year-olds. The age differences vary even more between countries for these skills than for technical and operational skills. In Ireland and Switzerland, the age difference was the largest, with almost 50 percentage point difference between the 10- and 15- to 16-year-olds; the youngest in Switzerland had 21% of communication and interaction skills at a high level and the oldest group 70%. In Poland there is only a very small difference between the age cohorts to the extent that they are negligible between older and younger teens, but still considerable (10%) with the 11- to 12-year-olds.

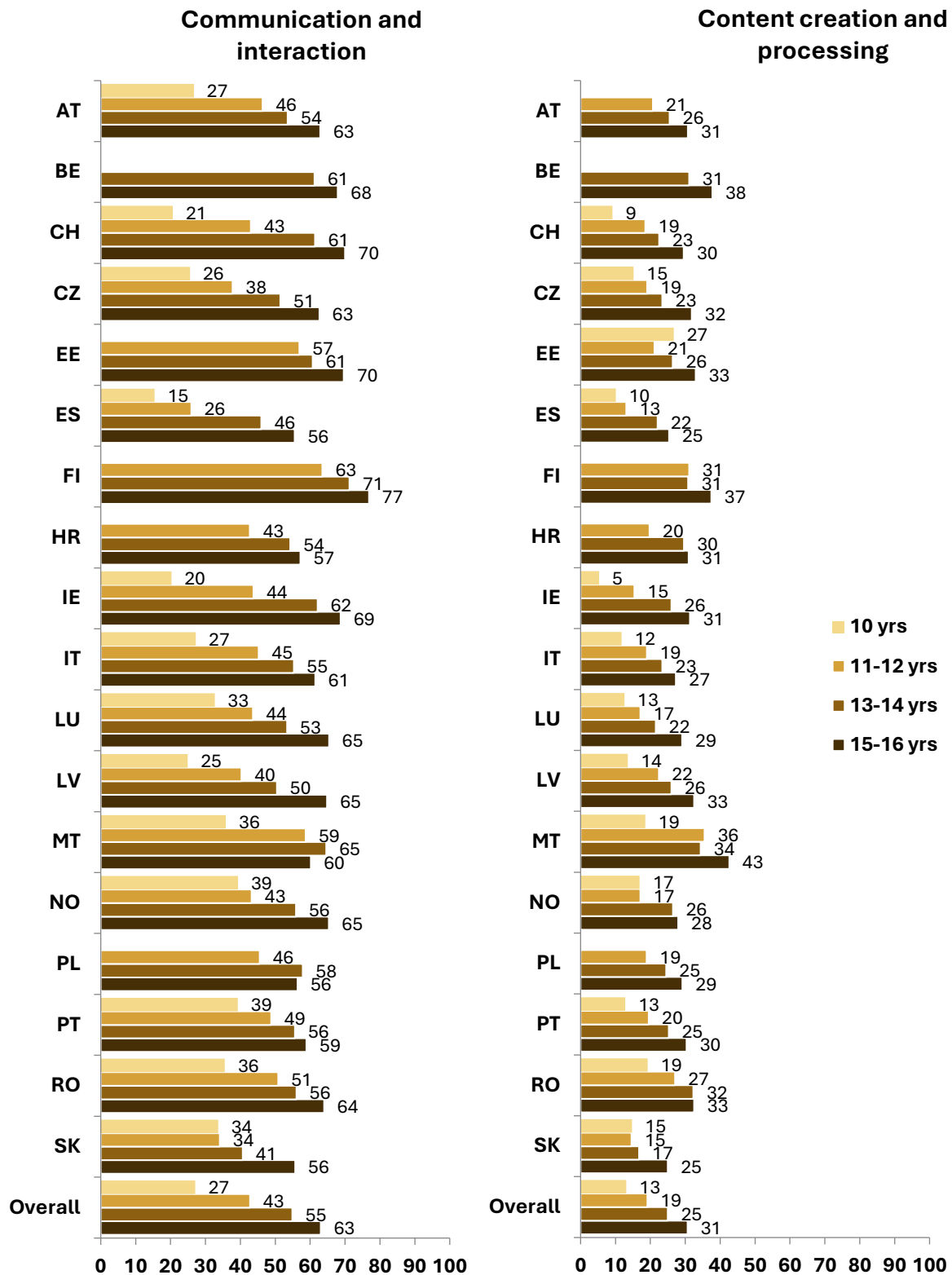
⁵⁷ This is not to do with response patterns to differently worded questions in different countries (i.e. statements that are true vis a vis statements that are wrong) which could have been due to children in certain countries being less comfortable with saying something is true or not true, since

on average all countries have a 30-35% thinking that a statement is true.

⁵⁸ Malta had a relatively small sample and the data needs to be interpreted with caution.

Figure 39: Skills at a high level for different subdomains, by age group





QC12 & QC13: Please indicate how true the following statements are of you when thinking about how you use the internet and technologies such as mobile phones. Note I: Scores represent the proportion of skills at a high level ("Very true of me") from the three skills measured on each dimension (for individual items, see Table 9 and Table 10). Note II: Serbia (RS) did not collect data on Communication and interaction and Content creation and production skills. Base: All children 10–16

Differences between age groups are smaller for information navigation and processing skills – 10 percentage points between 15- to 16-year-olds (28%) and 11- to 12-year-olds (18%) – with less variation in these differences between countries, although large differences were found in Ireland between 11- to 12-year-olds (10% of skills at a high level) and 15- to 16-year-olds (29%). In Serbia and Norway differences between 10-year-olds and 15- to 16-year-olds are also close to 20%.

Differences based on age were lowest for content creation and production skills: 10-year-olds had 13% of these skills at a high level compared to 19% for 11- to 12-year-olds, 13- to 14-year-olds had a quarter (25%) of skills at a high level, and 15- to 16-year-olds just under a third (31%). This indicates a floor effect – low content creation and production skill levels even for the oldest children means there is less room for variation between age groups.

Here, the variation in age differences between countries was also low, ranging from 31% of skills at a high level for 11- to 12-year-olds and 37% for 15- to 16-year-olds in Finland to 32% of skills at a high level for 15- to 16-year-olds and 19% for 11- to 12-year-olds in Czechia. This indicates that there may be fewer country-specific factors for this skill type that influence whether older children have more skills than younger children.

There is little consistency in terms of which countries show the largest and smallest differences between age groups for the different dimensions.

Overall, the difference between age cohorts is larger for those skills that children possess more of, with the oldest teenagers running far ahead of the younger age cohorts, especially 10-year-olds, but also 11- to 12-year-olds.

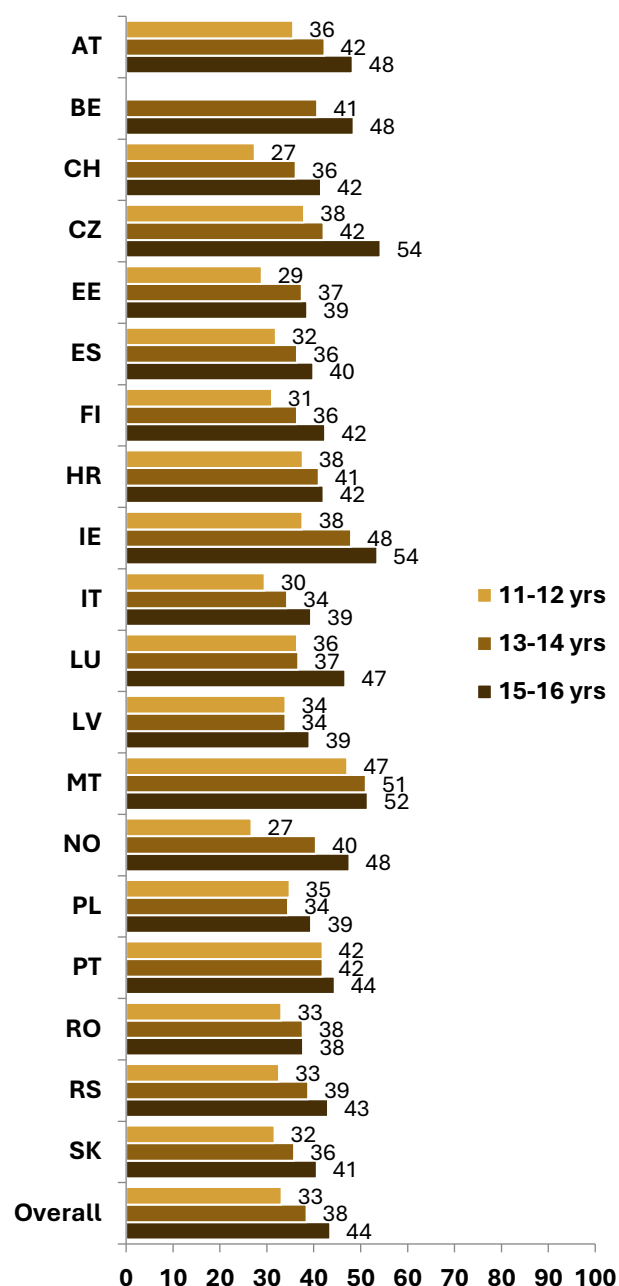
The differences between older and younger teens tend to be smaller, but there is also considerable difference between countries.

While there are differences in critical knowledge these might not be as large as expected: 15- to 16-year-olds on average had 44% of the answers correct, 13- to 14-year-olds %, and 11- to 12-year-olds 33%.

Age differences in critical knowledge varied considerably between countries. In Norway, 15- to 16-year-olds answer 48% of the questions correctly while only 40% of 13- to 14-year-olds and 27% of 11- to 12-year-olds do so. In Portugal these differences are negligible, with only a 2% difference in correct answers between both 15- to 16-year-olds (44% correct) and 13- to 14-year-olds (as well as between 11- to 12-year-

olds (both 42% correct). While age differences in critical knowledge are considerable, they are less striking than for the different skills.

Figure 40: Critical digital knowledge, by age group



Q14: To what extent are the following general statements about technologies such as the internet and mobile phones true or not true? If you are not sure, please let us know. Note. The knowledge score is created by calculating the proportion of the items correctly identified as being 'Definitely true' or 'Definitely not true' (for individual items, see Table 10). Base: All children 11–16.

Figure 41: Skills at a high level for different subdomains, by gender





Q12 & Q13: Please indicate how true the following statements are of you when thinking about how you use the internet and technologies such as mobile phones. Note I: Scores represent the proportion of skills at a high level ('Very true of me') from the three skills measured on each dimension (for individual items, see Table 9 and Table 10). Note II: Serbia (RS) did not collect data on Communication and Interaction or Content Creation and Production skills. Base: All children 10–16

Gendered skills differentials

Differences between boys and girls in their level of digital skill has been of interest to digital inequalities researchers from the very beginning, and it is where there have been considerable changes over time. The conceptualisation of skills has expanded from more functional, technical understandings of digital skills, including an emphasis on programming and coding, to a broader conceptualisation emphasising the importance of relational and interactional skills as well as a deeper critical understanding of why and how content is presented online. With this development, the evidence for gendered divides has shifted: whereas inequalities in technical skills and information navigation skills still reflect historical inequalities, girls show a deeper understanding of bias and the norms and values and economical models that underpin the digital environment.⁵⁹

In previous EUKO surveys there were minimal gender differences in most countries. However, in the current survey, where a more complex set of measures was used, this picture changes even if the pattern is the same.

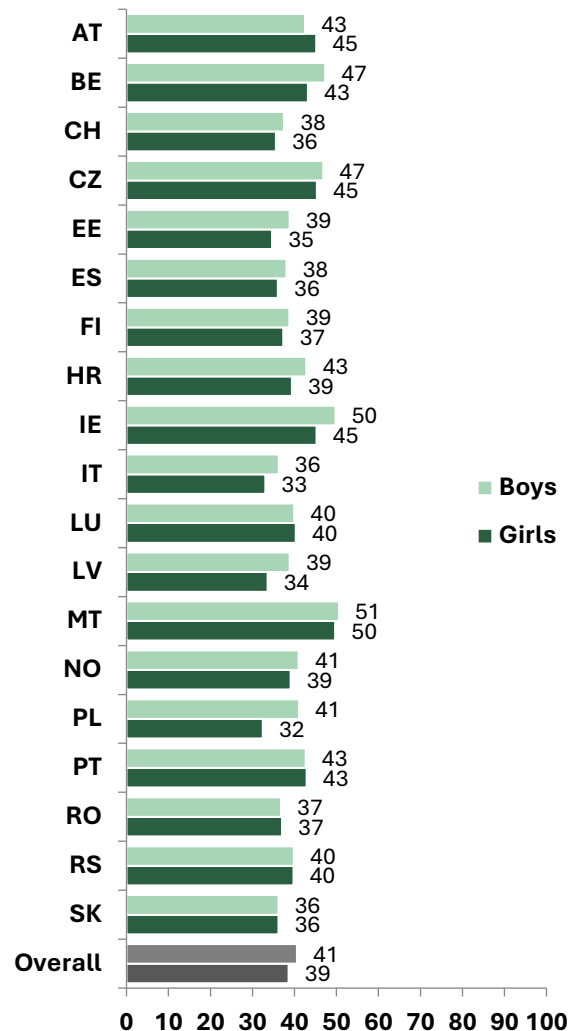
Overall, the expected pattern of gendered skill distribution emerges – girls in Europe indicate having 55% and boys 48% of communication and interaction skills at a high level, and boys indicate having more technical and operational skills at a high level (40%) than girls (33%).

The largest difference for technical and operational skills can be found in Belgium, where boys have 61% of skills at a high level and girls 46%; the smallest difference is present in Ireland and Croatia, where boys and girls have similar skill levels (30% girls and 33% boys in Ireland, 36% boys and 33% girls in Croatia). Malta⁶⁰ is the only country where girls (40%) have more technical and operational skills at a high level than boys (27%).

Boys also report having more information navigation and processing skills at a high level (28%) than girls (18%). This finding is consistent in most countries: girls in Finland (24%) and Estonia (23%) have 14-15% fewer skills at a high level than boys (39%). Thus, while overall skill levels in Estonia and Finland are high, there are considerable gender inequalities, and high skill levels are mostly based on boys being digitally literate. The opposite pattern can be observed in Malta (31% girls and 27% boys) and Croatia (27% girls and 22% boys), where girls have more skills at a high level than boys.

Gender differences were negligible in Ireland (17% boys and 18% girls).

Figure 42: Critical digital knowledge, by gender



Q14: To what extent are the following general statements about technologies such as the internet and mobile phones true or not true? If you are not sure, please let us know. Note. The knowledge score is created by calculating the proportion of the items correctly identified as being 'Definitely true' or 'Definitely not true' (for individual items, see Table 10). Base: All children 11–16

There is considerable variation in gender differences for the communication and interaction skills. The largest difference between boys and girls can be found in Austria, where girls (64%) have 19 percentage point more skills at a high level than boys (45%). The smallest

⁵⁹ Robinson & Gran (2018).

⁶⁰ Malta had a smaller sample, and group comparisons should be made cautiously.

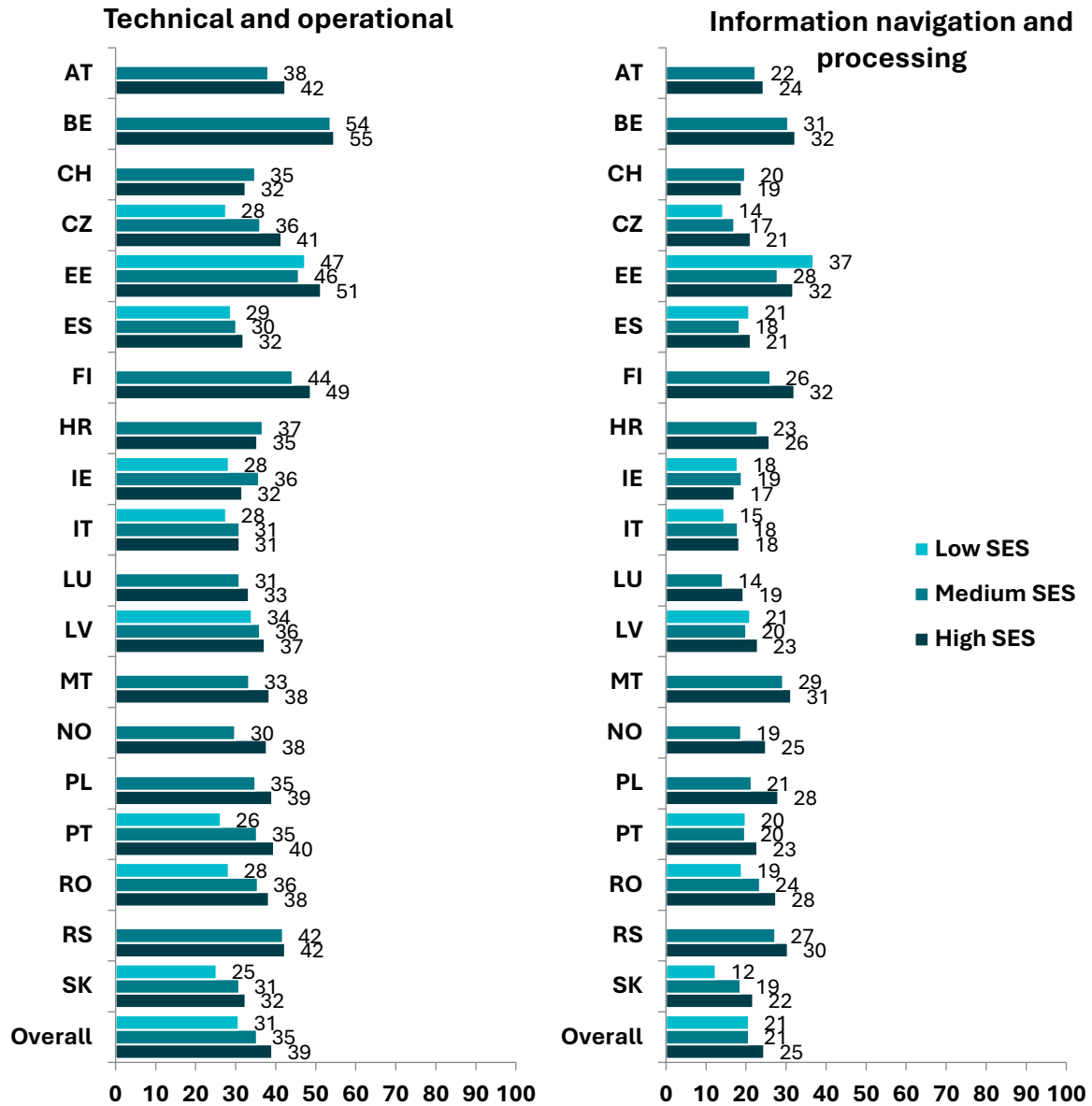
gender differences of 2 percentage points for this indicator are found in Czechia (46% girls and 48% boys).

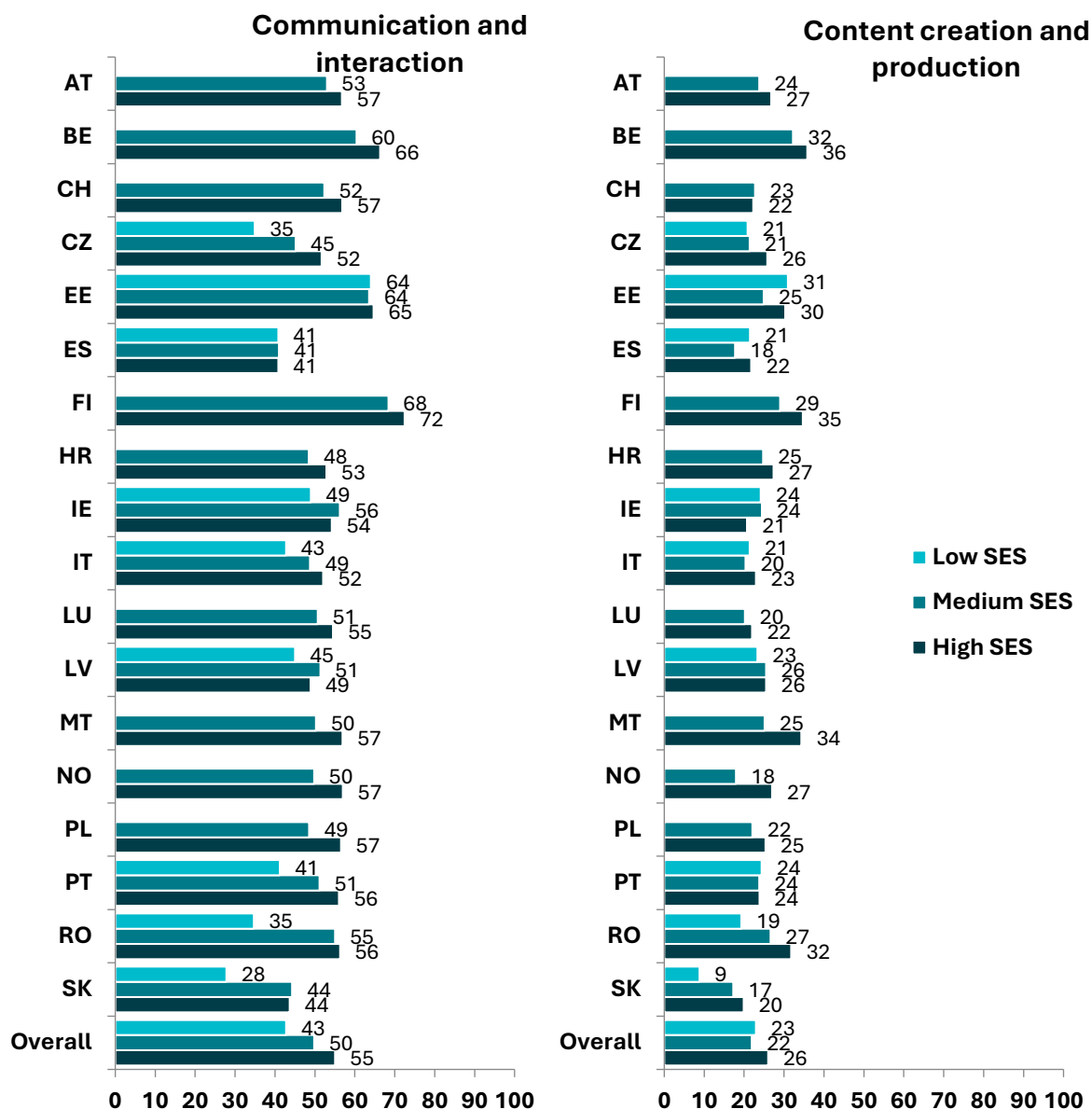
Differences in content creation and production skills are minimal (25% boys and 23% girls), and in many countries this gender difference is close to zero or reversed, with girls having slightly more skills than boys (i.e., in Ireland, and Malta). In Estonia the difference is largest – boys have 31% of skills at a high level in comparison with girls who have 25% of these skills at a

high level. While overall skill levels are quite low in Ireland, inequalities are also not as large.

In terms of critical digital knowledge, differences between boys and girls are minimal – 39% of girls answered critical digital knowledge questions correct, while 41% of boys answered correctly.. In most countries there is no real difference between girls and boys, with the exception of Poland, where boys got 41% of the answers correct and girls less than a third (32%)

Figure 43: Skills at a high level for different subdomains, by socioeconomic status (SES)





QC12 & QC13: Please indicate how true the following statements are of you when thinking about how you use the internet and technologies such as mobile phones. Note I: Scores represent the proportion of skills at a high level ('Very true of me') from the three skills measured on each dimension (for individual items, see Table 9 and Table 10). Note II: Serbia (RS) did not collect data on Communication and interaction and Content creation and production skills. Base: All children 10–16

Socioeconomic status-related skills differentials

Another factor that has been related to inequalities in digital skill is the level of resources that their caretakers have, often measured through socioeconomic status (SES). For adults, level of education is one of the strongest predictors of the level of digital skills they have, even more so than their income. For children there is similar evidence that the SES of the household they live in determines the digital skill levels needed to participate in education.⁶¹

Since SES in other research has been a strong predictor of digital skills levels, this means that the results presented in what follows are likely to be an understatement of differences between children from different backgrounds.

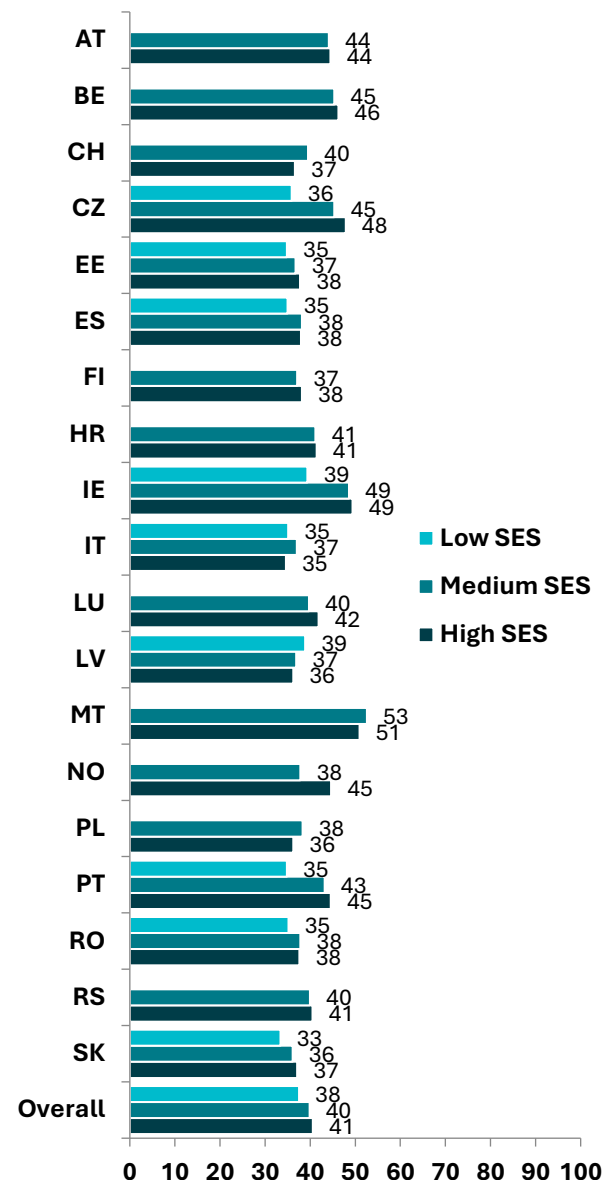
For all skills types, the trend is clear – children from households with a higher SES have more skills at a high level than children from lower SES households.

As for other indicators, there are differences in how large these inequalities are in different countries for different types of skills. Differences between children from middle and higher SES households are sometimes negligible, but for those countries that measured lower SES, the differences with the other children are clear. There are only one or two exceptions to this rule in the EUKO countries.

The largest differences can be observed for communication and interaction skills, where children in higher SES households have 55% of skills at a high level compared to 50% of skills at that level in middle SES households, and 43% of skills at a high level in lower SES households. In Romania especially these differences are significant – children from higher SES backgrounds have more than half (56%) of skills at a high level compared to children from lower SES backgrounds who have only a third (35%) of skills at a high level. In Spain (41%) and Estonia (64%) there are no such class differences in these skills.

Technical and operational skills differed by 8 percentage points between children from high (39%) and low SES (31%) backgrounds, with middle SES children right in between the two (35%). For this skill a few countries (Latvia, Italy, Ireland and Spain) had small differences between children from different SES backgrounds. The differences were largest in Czechia (low SES 28% and high SES 41%).

Figure 44: Critical digital knowledge, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC14: To what extent are the following general statements about technologies such as the internet and mobile phones true or not true? If you are not sure, please let us know. Note. The knowledge score is created by calculating the proportion of the items correctly identified as being 'Definitely true' or 'Definitely not true' (for individual items, see Table 10). Base: All children 10–16

The smallest differences can be found for information processing and navigation skills, with higher SES children having 25% of skills at a high level compared to 21% for middle and lower SES background children. In most countries class inequalities are minimal for

⁶¹ Helsper (2021).



these skills; the largest differences are found in Slovakia (high SES 22% and low SES 12% at a high level) and Romania (high SES 28% and low SES 19% at a high level).

SES differences in content creation and production skills were similarly small – children from high SES backgrounds had 26% of skills at a high level compared to 22% for middle and 23% for low SES children. In countries that made a distinction between lower, middle and higher SES children, the largest difference could be found in Romania, where children from lower SES backgrounds had 19% of skills at a high level compared to 32% of skills at a high level among those with higher SES. In Spain (22% for high and 21% low SES) and Estonia (30% for high and 31% for low SES) class differences were negligible.

There was more consistency in which countries showed the largest class differences for skills (Romania, Slovakia and Czechia) and which had the smallest class differences (Spain and Estonia) than for comparisons between gender and age groups.

It is interesting that differences in critical digital knowledge between children from different SES backgrounds is minimal – 41% of children from high SES background answered critical digital knowledge questions correctly compared to 38% of children from lower SES backgrounds.

The largest difference is found in Czechia, where high SES children correctly identified 48% of the statements as true or not true compared to 45% correct answers among middle SES and 36% correct for lower SES children. In Norway, the difference between higher and middle SES children is also considerable (45% and 38%). The smallest differences are found in Romania and Italy, which is interesting since, for the digital skills questions, Romania often had the largest SES differences.

Differences in literacy and skills

The **myth of the digital native is once again debunked** by EU Kids Online. There are considerable differences in how capable young people are depending on the type of skills measured and where they grow up. Digital literacy is multi-dimensional and this needs to be taken into consideration.

Differences between European countries are considerable and likely reflect **different resources available to children, varying policy emphasis** on

(certain) skills as important, as well as **differences in educational settings**.

The findings suggest that digital literacy inequalities are **not only individual-level differences** but are also **shaped by national and local contexts**. The extent to which gender, age and SES matter varies across countries, pointing to the importance of equality in access conditions, school curricula, policy priorities and opportunities for informal learning within as well as between countries.

Functional skills and those to do with everyday communication and technical skills are **more widespread**, but those to do with active use, creation of content, and **critical skills are less developed across Europe**.

Critical knowledge is still low, children may be reasonably skilled at using digital media without fully understanding what the social consequences of online interactions are or how algorithms, paid promotion, and commercial interest shape what they see. **Critical digital literacy interventions should address not only algorithms**, but also social impact, influencer marketing and the political economy of platforms.

Children are capable consumers rather than producers of content. Though future research might show a jump in the creation of content (though perhaps not in the popularity this will have), considering that recent research shows that this kind of creativity is strongly facilitated by and now one of the main uses of AI.⁶²

Digital literacy is not only about gaining competence in using technologies, but about the ability to ethically use technologies to create (new) opportunities while also being aware of the risk and aiming to avoid harm not just for themselves but also for others.

Critical media literacy interventions that **allow children to identify bias and normative frameworks** guiding the production of platforms and content and guidance in active participation and the creation of content following ethical principles is direly needed, especially with the advent of AI.

The **large age differences, indicate a need for age-appropriate design** both in terms of the platforms and their ease of use as well as in terms of digital literacy curriculum design. Nevertheless, **some countries seem to do better than others** when it comes to digital literacy acquisition **for the youngest generations**, it is important to find out whether this is

⁶² Stoilova et al. (2025).

due to formal digital literacy training and/or due to greater opportunities for informal learning or implementation of regulations that allows younger people to learn in safe environments.

The **knowledge about how technologies work is low across all age groups**, while skills are developed more by age, this suggests that perhaps a lot of **learning takes place by doing, informally**, rather than through formal digital literacy education in which children are taught. It remains to be seen how this pans out in the future, because the humanisation and personalisation embedded in AI can create misplaced trust for children, especially among younger children or those with fewer critical skills.

The results for gender differences in skills indicate that the assumption that boys are more expert when it comes to digital technologies is misplaced, and that a broader understanding of what digital literacy entails would allow for a **differentiation in where girls need support and where boys need this**. Noteworthy is that in countries with high overall skill levels gender inequalities tend to be larger, with boys driving high skill levels for Technical and Information navigation skills.

Girls continue to be underrepresented in STEM careers as well as the much promoted ‘digital jobs’. These different trajectories appear not to be based in overall differences in digital skills but might be rooted in the **perception that only technical and operational skills prepare a young person** for a career in tech or allow them to flourish in a digital world.

Girls’ show greater capabilities in digital Communication and interaction skills and gender differences are small for Content creation and production as well as Critical digital knowledge. **A rethink of the framing of 21st century skills will put girls at an advantage or at least at par with boys in terms of future opportunities**, especially since these skills are likely to gain importance over more technical and functional skills in an AI driven future.⁶³

SES differences are as large in some countries as those between age groups and, since they are structural and systemic in nature, this has clear implications for future inequalities of opportunity. **Roll out of digital literacy programmes** needs to be more equally distributed and attention needs to be paid to the **creation of positive informal learning opportunities for children from lower SES backgrounds**. This is especially true in countries with lower levels of overall skills.

⁶³ van Laar et al. (2017).



PART II

Worries, safety and risk of harm

What do children themselves worry about, how safe do they feel online, and who do they turn to when something goes wrong?

How common are experiences such as bullying, unwanted sexual messages, harmful or hateful content, and difficulties regulating internet use?



6. What children are worried about

Children's lives are shaped not only by their experiences at home, school and online, but also by wider social, economic and political circumstances. To understand the concerns children themselves bring to these different areas of their lives, the latest EUKO survey introduced a new question asking children how worried they were about a range of issues. These included family and economic concerns, such as someone in their family becoming seriously ill or dying; their family not having enough money and parents arguing; personal and future concerns, including school performance, getting the job they want, their appearance, physical and mental health, friendships, exclusion and bullying; and wider societal concerns, including becoming a victim of crime, climate change and war affecting their lives. These questions also captured concerns arising specifically in contemporary digital environments, including nude or fake images being created or shared online, parents sharing information about them online, online hate speech and uncertainty about what to trust because of fake news. Taken together, these items provide a broad picture of what children worry about, spanning their immediate relationships and everyday lives as well as developments in the wider world.



The children report worries across many different areas of their lives, but some concerns are much more prominent than others. **The most widespread worry is that someone in their family would become seriously ill or die**, with just over half (51%) saying they are 'quite' or 'very worried' about this. Concerns about education and the future are also high: 39% worry about how they are doing at school and 38% about not getting the job they want. Wider geopolitical events

also feature prominently, with 36% worried that a war will impact their life.

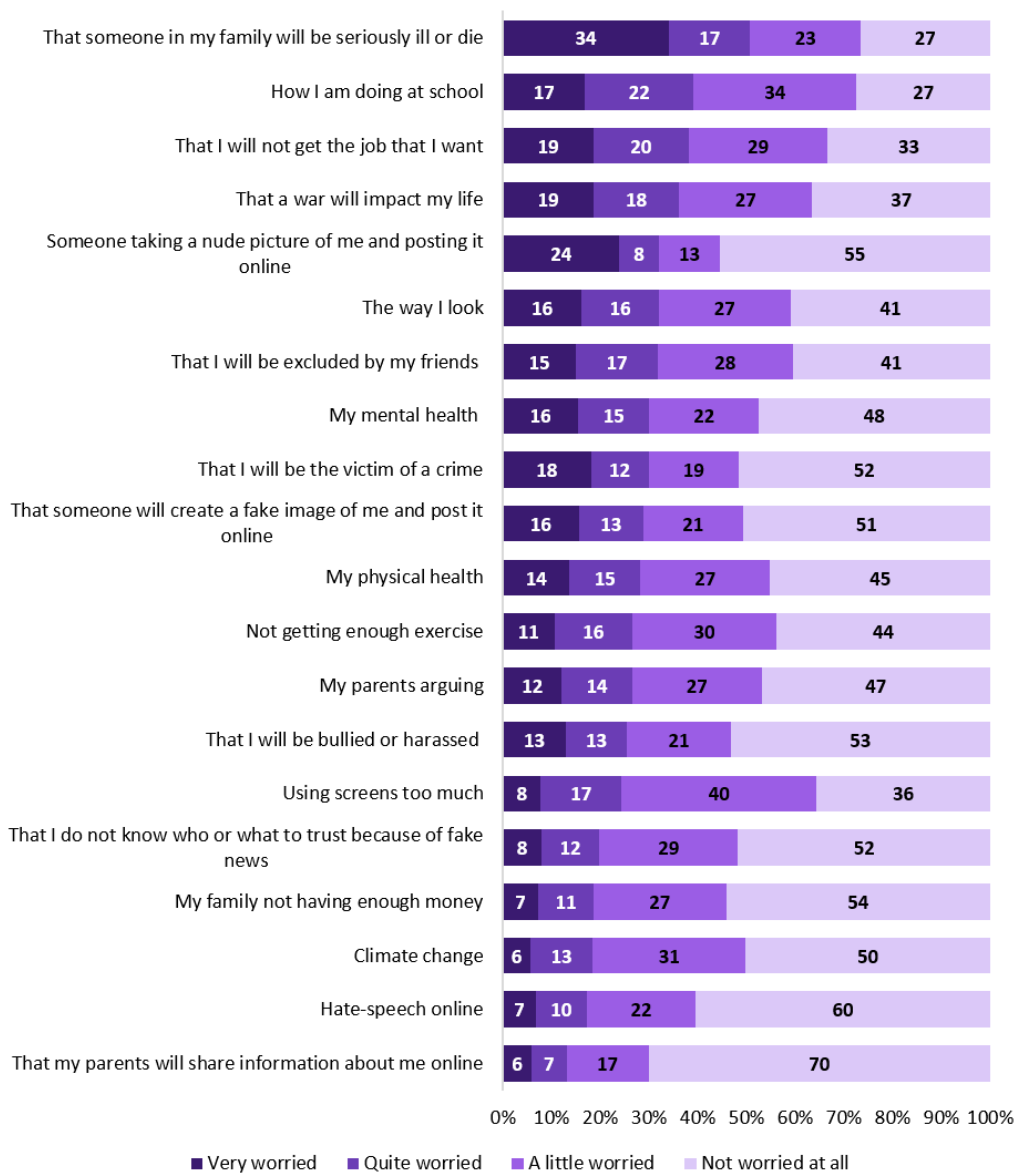
A second group of concerns, reported by around three in ten children, relates to personal wellbeing, relationships and safety. Around a third worry about the way they look (32%) or being excluded by their friends (32%), while 30% are worried about their mental health and the same proportion about becoming the victim of a crime. Physical health is a concern for 28%, while 27% worry about not getting enough exercise, 26% about their parents arguing and 26% about being bullied or harassed.

Digital worries are generally not among children's top priorities, although some are nevertheless a concern for a substantial minority. The most prominent relate to children losing control over images of themselves: 32% worry about someone taking a nude picture of them and posting it online while 29% worry about someone creating a fake image of them and posting it online. With the rapid spread of GenAI, the relatively high level of concern about fake images is perhaps unsurprising, reflecting growing awareness of how easily realistic images can be created or manipulated and shared online.⁶⁴ Around a quarter (24%) worry about using screens too much. Other digital concerns sit towards the lower end of children's worries overall: 20% worry that they do not know who or what to trust because of fake news and 17% about online hate speech. An average of 13% of children worry about their parents sharing information about them online, making this the least commonly reported concern among the 20 issues included in the survey. Overall, **digital concerns appear less prominent than worries about family health, education and future prospects**, although image-based risks stand out as comparatively important within this group.

Some of the remaining concerns are among the least commonly reported overall. **Around one in five children are worried about their family not having enough money** (19%) or climate change (19%). These findings reinforce the broader pattern that children's most widespread worries are centred on the health of those close to them, their education and their future, rather than economic, environmental or most digital issues.

⁶⁴ Staksrud et al. (2026b).

Figure 45: What children are worried about



QC30⁶⁵: Sometimes and over a period of time people might worry about different things in their lives, while other times they do not worry so much. Are you worried about any of the following things? Base: All children 12–16. Percentages are rounded and may not add up to 100%.

⁶⁵ New question in EUKO2025. Developed by Elisabeth Staksrud.

Table 12 What children are worried about (% ‘quite worried’ or ‘very worried’), by country

	Someone Someone in my family will be seriously ill or die	Someone taking a nude picture of me and posting it online	I will be the victim of a crime	A war will impact my life	Someone will create a fake image of me and post it online	Using screens too much	I will not get the job that I want	I will be excluded by my friends	The way I look	Not getting enough exercise
AT	41	15	16	29	17	32	31	33	38	30
BE	52	25	23	31	24	22	35	30	37	27
CH	39	13	12	21	13	24	29	21	25	18
CZ	41	29	25	30	25	16	36	36	39	17
EE	52	44	44	47	35	21	34	27	26	26
ES	91	82	78	76	72	31	71	62	37	43
FI	37	20	20	22	20	19	21	28	38	16
HR	38	18	14	27	13	24	27	22	24	28
IE	20	8	9	9	8	14	16	13	13	12
IT	47	34	30	34	29	21	40	33	29	25
LU	9	20	21	14	18	16	14	14	14	20
LV	51	32	27	48	29	26	45	33	35	24
MT	45	20	24	38	24	28	48	48	42	30
NO	42	19	14	28	14	23	31	25	28	28
PL	53	19	20	33	15	19	29	31	31	14
PT	82	71	69	62	61	39	71	50	49	51
RO	67	34	30	44	34	29	45	26	30	28
RS	58	26	24	33	26	29	43	29	25	27
SK	73	67	59	57	60	30	59	47	40	39
Ave	51	32	30	36	29	24	38	32	32	27

QC30: Sometimes and over a period of time people might worry about different things in their lives, while other times they do not worry so much. Are you worried about any of the following things? Base: All children 12–16.

There are substantial differences between countries in what children worry about, although the extent of this variation differs considerably depending on the issue. Some concerns vary considerably between countries, while others are reported at more similar levels, suggesting that some worries may be more dependent on national context than others.

The **largest cross-country differences are found for worries about serious illness or death in the family, crime, war and sharing of fake images of oneself.** Concern that someone in the family will become seriously ill or die shows the widest variation, ranging from 9% in Luxembourg to 91% in Spain, a difference of 82 percentage points. Similarly, worry about someone taking and posting a nude image ranges from 8% in Ireland to 82% in Spain. Becoming the victim of a crime varies from 9% in Ireland to 78% in Spain, while concern that a war will impact the child’s life ranges from 9% to 76% in the same two countries. There is

also considerable variation in concern about someone creating and posting a fake image, ranging from 8% in Ireland to 72% in Spain.

Other worries are considerably more consistent across the countries. Concerns about using screens too much show relatively little variation and were reported by a notable minority of children across the countries. Worries about not getting the job they want, being excluded by friends, the way they look and not getting enough exercise are also comparatively widespread across national contexts. Although the proportions still vary between countries, these concerns do not show the same extreme differences evident for war, crime or image-based risks.

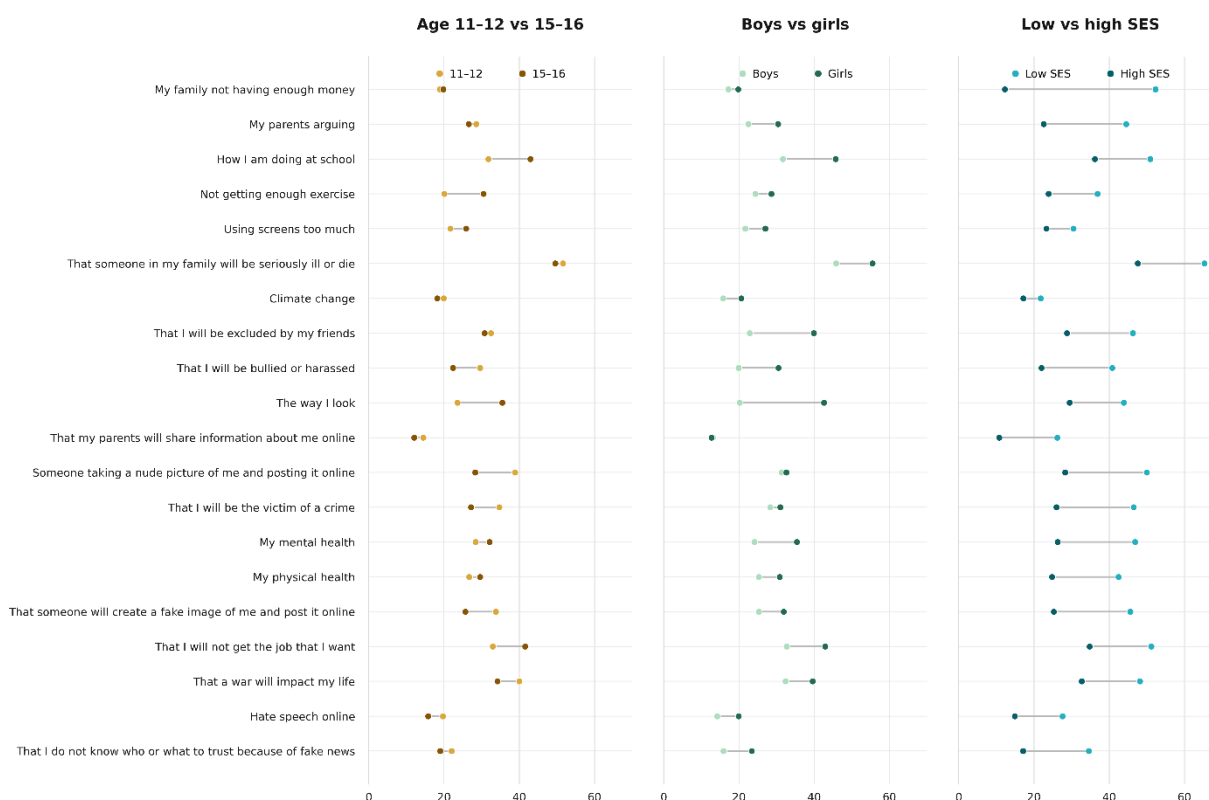
Looking across all 20 issues together reveals substantial differences in the overall level of worry reported by children in different countries. Spain stands out most clearly, with children reporting comparatively high levels of concern across almost the



entire range of issues rather than on only a small number of specific worries. Portugal shows a similarly high-worry profile, while Slovakia also tends to record relatively high levels across many of the concerns measured. At the other end of the spectrum, children in Ireland consistently report among the lowest levels of worry across the 20 issues, while several other countries tend to fall towards the lower end across

multiple concerns (e.g., Switzerland, Croatia and Finland). This suggests that country differences concern not only what children worry about, but also how much they report worrying overall. In some countries, high levels of concern extend across family, personal, social, digital and wider societal issues, whereas in others children report comparatively low levels of worry across these different areas of life.

Figure 46: What children are worried about, by age group, gender and socioeconomic status (SES) (% 'quite worried or very worried')



QC30: Sometimes and over a period of time people might worry about different things in their lives, while other times they do not worry so much. Are you worried about any of the following things? Base: All children 12-16

Across the 20 issues, girls generally report higher levels of worry than boys – 19 of the 20 issues – although for some concerns, the differences are small. Gender differences are particularly apparent for worries relating to appearance, relationships and school. The largest difference concerns the way children look: 43% of girls say they are 'quite worried' or 'very worried' about their appearance compared with 20% of boys. Girls are also considerably more likely than boys to worry about being excluded by their friends (40% compared with 23%) and how they are doing at school (46% compared with 32%). By contrast, gender differences are minimal for some concerns, including someone taking and posting a nude image and parents sharing information about them online. Overall, therefore, girls tend to report more worry

across a broad range of issues, although the size of the gender difference varies considerably depending on the concern.

The nature of children's worries changes as they get older. Concerns about appearance become more common, rising from 24% among 11- to 12-year-olds to 36% among 15- to 16-year-olds. Worry about school performance similarly increases from 32% to 43%, while concern about not getting the job they want rises from 33% to 42%. Not getting enough exercise also becomes more prominent with age, increasing from 20% to 31%. Other concerns become less common: worry about being bullied or harassed falls from 30% among 11- to 12-year-olds to 22% among 15- to 16-year-olds, while concern about becoming the victim of

a crime declines from 35% to 27%. Worry that a war will impact their life also falls, from 40% to 34%. By contrast, some concerns remain relatively stable across childhood, most notably the most widespread worry: around half of children in each age group are concerned that someone in their family will become seriously ill or die.

Worries about upsetting experiences online generally become less prominent with age. Concern about someone taking and posting a nude image falls from 39% among 11- to 12-year-olds to 28% among 15- to 16-year-olds, while worry about someone creating and posting a fake image declines from 34% to 26%. Smaller declines are also evident for online hate speech (20% to 16%), uncertainty about who or what to trust because of fake news (22% to 19%), and parents sharing information about them online (15% to 12%). The exception is concern about using screens too much, which increases with age, from 22% among 11- to 12-year-olds to 26% among 15- to 16-year-olds. This suggests that as children grow older, worries about specific online risks tend to become less common, while concern about their own level of screen use becomes somewhat more prominent.

Socioeconomic status (SES) shows the clearest and most consistent differences in children's worries. Children from low SES backgrounds report higher levels of worry than those from high SES backgrounds across all 20 issues examined. The largest difference concerns family finances: 52% of low SES children worry that their family will not have enough money compared with 12% of high SES children. However, the socioeconomic divide extends well beyond financial concerns. Half of low SES children worry about someone taking and posting a nude image of them compared with 28% of high SES children, while 45% worry about their parents arguing compared with 23%. Differences of around 20 percentage points are also evident for mental health (47% compared with 26%), becoming the victim of a crime (47% compared with 26%), someone creating and posting a fake image (46% compared with 25%), and being bullied or harassed (41% compared with 22%). Even the most widespread concern about someone in the family becoming seriously ill or dying is more common among low SES children, at 65% compared with 48% of those from high SES backgrounds.

Taken together, the demographic patterns differ in both their strength and character. Gender differences are concentrated particularly around appearance, relationships and school; age is associated with a shift in the types of issues children worry about as they grow older; and socioeconomic inequalities are much more pervasive. The consistency of the SES pattern is particularly striking, suggesting that **children from**

less advantaged backgrounds carry a greater burden of worry across many different areas of their lives, rather than being more concerned only about their family's economic circumstances.

Worries about screen time

As digital technologies have become increasingly embedded in children's everyday lives, the amount of time children spend using screens has become an important focus of public and policy debate. Discussions about children's screen use often centre on whether they spend too much time on digital devices and what this may mean for their wellbeing. Less attention has been paid to how children themselves view their screen use, and whether they are concerned about the amount of time they spend online or using digital technologies. The survey therefore asked children how worried they were about using screens too much, providing an insight into the extent to which screen time is a concern for children themselves.

Overall, around one in four children (24%) say they are 'quite worried or very worried' about using screens too much. While **this places screen use below many of children's leading concerns, it is notable for being one of the most consistent worries across the countries**. This is particularly interesting when compared with children's actual patterns of screen use discussed earlier. Screen use varies considerably between countries at some points in the day, including during school and after bedtime. Concern about using screens too much, by contrast, is relatively similar across the countries. This may partly reflect how widely concerns about children's screen time feature in public debate across Europe rather than simply mirroring differences in children's actual patterns of use. At the same time, the findings provide an important perspective: despite the attention given to screen time, children are considerably more worried about a range of other issues in their lives.

At the other end of the scale, **more than one in three children (36%) say they are not worried at all about using screens too much**. In several countries, this proportion is considerably higher, reaching 47% in Luxembourg, 45% in Finland and Czechia, 44% in Ireland and 43% in Poland. By contrast, fewer than one in four children report no concern at all in Spain (23%) and Portugal (24%), the two countries where worry about too much screen use is also most widespread. Overall, the findings show that children's views of their own screen use are mixed: while around one in four are 'quite worried or very worried' about using screens too much, a larger proportion are not worried at all, and the largest group express only a little concern.

Given that almost a quarter of children (24%) say they are ‘quite worried or very worried’ about using screens too much, it is useful to consider whether this concern is related to the amount of screen use reported by children. Figure 48 examines this at the country level, comparing countries’ total screen use activity scores with the proportion of children who are ‘quite worried or very worried’ about using screens too much.

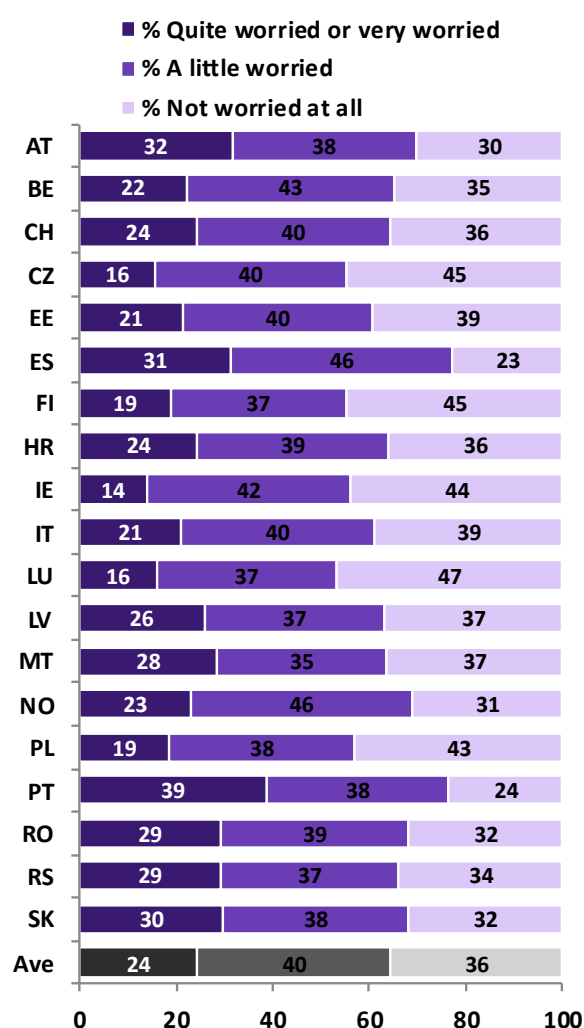
The scatter plot shows **no clear relationship between screen use and worries about screen time**. Countries with higher screen use scores are not consistently those in which children are more likely to worry about using screens too much. For example, Romania has the highest screen use score (47) and a relatively high level of concern (29%), but Belgium and Estonia also have comparatively high screen use scores (43 and 42, respectively) while reporting lower levels of concern (22% and 21%). Conversely, Portugal has the highest proportion worried about using screens too much (39%), despite having a screen-use score (40) close to the overall country average.

There is also considerable variation among countries with similar levels of screen use. Spain and Slovakia, for example, have similar screen use scores (35), and around three in ten children in both countries are worried about using screens too much, whereas Luxembourg and Ireland have similarly low-to-moderate screen use scores (34 and 32), but much lower levels of concern (16% and 14%). This suggests that country-level differences in concern about screen use cannot be explained simply by differences in the amount of screen use reported by children. How children evaluate their screen use may also be shaped by wider social, cultural or family contexts, although the data cannot establish what accounts for these differences.

Looking specifically at who worries about using screens too much, demographic differences are relatively modest, although there are clear patterns by age and SES. Girls are somewhat more likely than boys to worry about their screen use, with 27% saying they are ‘quite worried or very worried’ compared with 22% of boys. Girls report clearly higher levels of worry in 16 of the 19 countries. Luxembourg is the only country where boys report substantially greater concern, while levels are virtually identical among girls and boys in Romania and Portugal. **The gender difference in screen time overall remains relatively modest compared with the much larger gaps found for concerns such as appearance, friendships and school performance.**

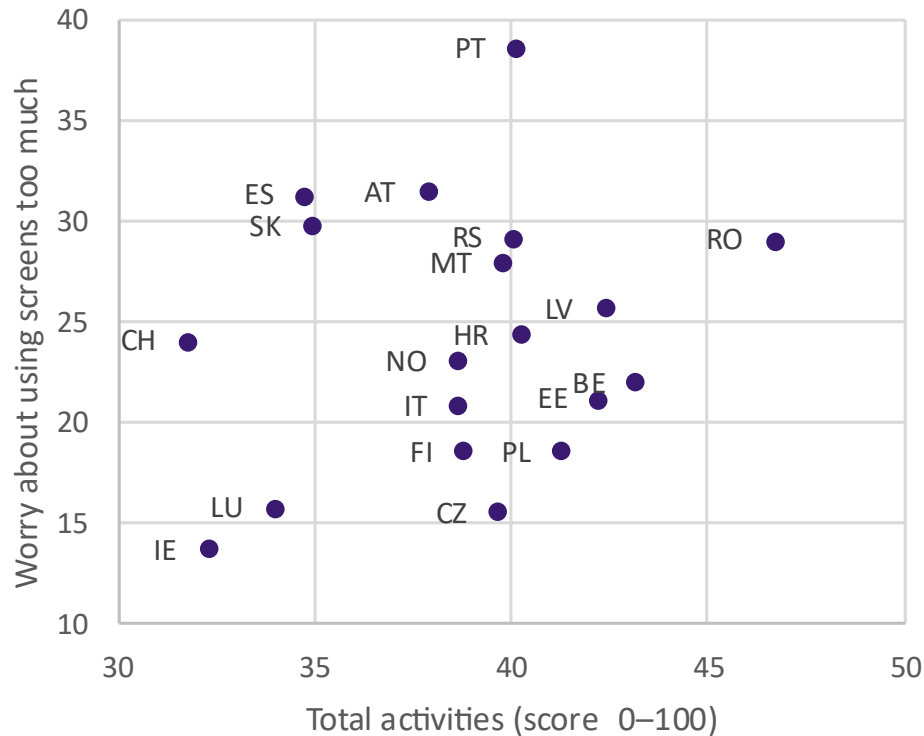
Concern about using screens too much becomes somewhat more common with age, possibly relating to children’s growing awareness of public debates around screen time. Across all countries, the proportion who are ‘quite worried or very worried’ rises from 22% among 11- to 12-year-olds to 24% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 26% among 15- to 16-year-olds. In a number of countries, the increase is considerably bigger, including Malta, Norway, Finland and Austria, while elsewhere there is little change or the pattern is reversed.

Figure 47: What children are worried about (using screens too much), by country



QC30: Sometimes and over a period of time people might worry about different things in their lives, while other times they do not worry so much. Are you worried about any of the following things? QC30e: Using screens too much. Base: All children 12–16

Figure 48: Total screen use vs worry about using screens too much, by country



QC30: Sometimes and over a period of time people might worry about different things in their lives, while other times they do not worry so much. Are you worried about any of the following things? QC30e: Using screens too much. Children who are ‘quite worried or very worried’. AND QC8: In the past month during a regular weekday, how often did you use any type of screen, such as TV, mobile phone, computer games or tablet? Measure: Total screen use activities score (0–100). Base: All children 12–16.

Overall, worry about using screens too much is more common among children from low SES backgrounds. **Almost one in three children from low SES backgrounds (31%) worry about using screens too much** compared with 27% of those from medium SES backgrounds and 23% from high SES backgrounds. This follows the broader pattern across the worries examined, whereby children from less advantaged backgrounds report higher levels of concern. However, the SES gap for screen use is relatively modest compared with many other worries, suggesting that concern about spending too much time with screens is comparatively widely shared across socioeconomic groups. This pattern is also found in 13 of the 18 countries for which both low and high SES estimates are available. However, it is not universal: in five countries (Slovakia, Romania, Estonia, Czechia and Switzerland) children from high SES backgrounds report greater worry than those from low SES backgrounds.

Children’s worries extend across many different areas of their lives and cannot be understood primarily through the lens of digital risk. They point to the importance of seeing children’s digital experiences within the broader context of their relationships, opportunities and everyday circumstances, and of listening to what children themselves identify as sources of concern.

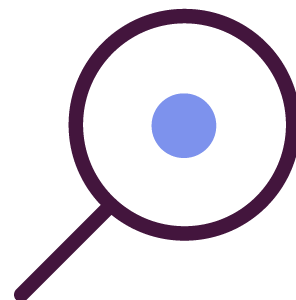
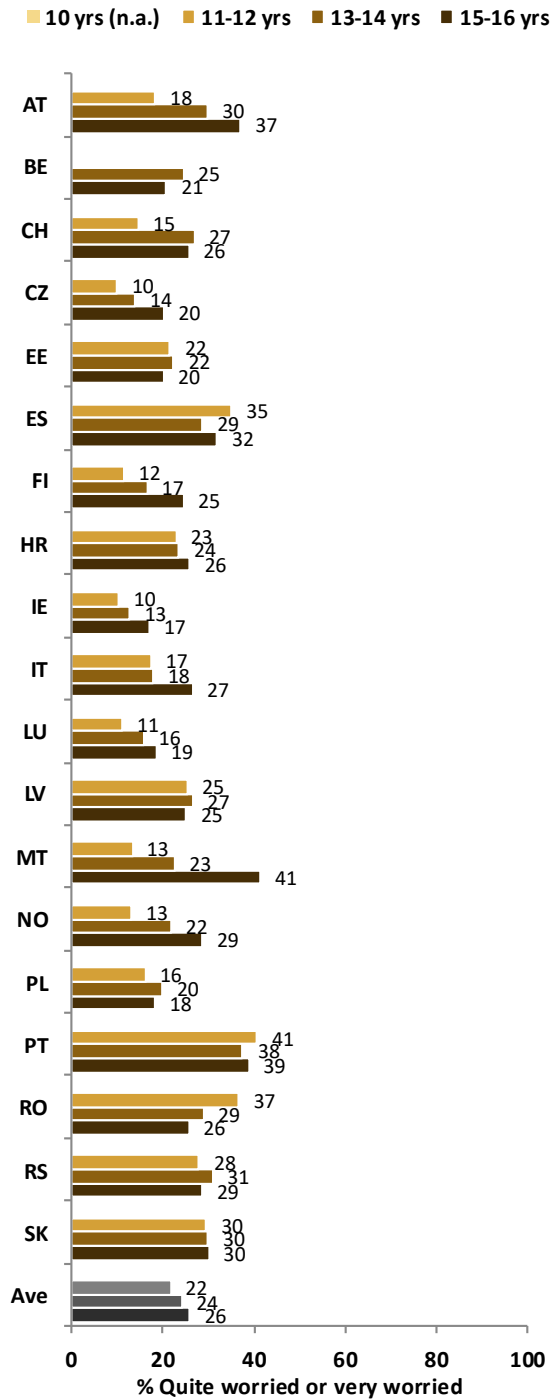
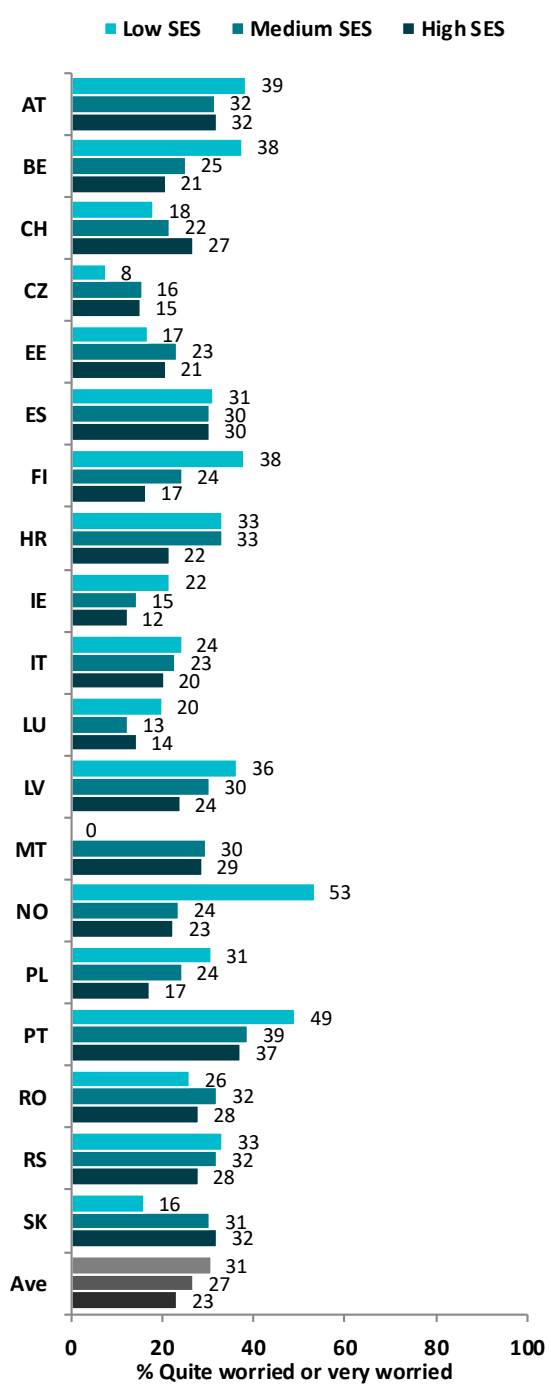


Figure 49: Worry about using screens too much, by age group



QC30: Sometimes and over a period of time people might worry about different things in their lives, while other times they do not worry so much. Are you worried about any of the following things? QC30e: Using screens too much. Children who are 'quite worried or very worried'. Base: All children 12-16

Figure 50: Worry about using screens too much, by socioeconomic status (SES)



QC30: Sometimes and over a period of time people might worry about different things in their lives, while other times they do not worry so much. Are you worried about any of the following things? QC30e: Using screens too much. Children who are 'quite worried or very worried'. Base: All children 12-16

7. Perceptions of safety and communication online

How children perceive and experience the online environment is an important dimension of their digital lives. These perceptions can influence how comfortable and confident children feel online, how they interact with others, and how they respond when they encounter difficult or unwelcome situations. Digital spaces may also provide different possibilities for self-expression and communication than face-to-face settings, including opportunities to present oneself differently or to discuss matters that may be harder to talk about offline. Examining these experiences provides an insight into children's sense of safety, confidence, agency and social connection online, as well as the ways in which the digital environment may shape how they communicate and express themselves.

The EUKO survey examines these experiences through seven items, which can be organised conceptually into four thematic groupings. **Perceived online safety and social climate** is captured by the items 'I feel safe online' and 'I find other people are kind and helpful on the internet'. **Response confidence** is captured by 'I know what to do if someone acts online in a way I don't like'. **Online self-expression and disclosure** encompasses three items: 'I find it easier to be myself online than when I am with people face-to-face', 'I talk about different things online than I do when speaking to people face-to-face', and 'I talk about personal things online which I do not talk about with people face-to-face'. Finally, **perceived online agency** is captured by the item 'I feel powerful online'. These groupings are used to organise the findings thematically and should not be interpreted as empirically validated subscales or composite measures. Six of the seven items have been included in previous EUKO surveys, allowing changes in children's perceptions and experiences to be examined over time. The item on feeling powerful online was introduced in the 2026 survey, extending the questions to capture more explicitly children's sense of agency in the digital environment.

Overall, the findings underscore the ambivalent nature of children's digital experiences, reflecting both benefits and concerns. Perceptions of *online safety*

and *social climate* suggest that children do not experience digital environments as uniformly safe or socially supportive, with considerable variation in how these environments are perceived. At the same time, *response confidence* indicates that many children feel equipped to deal with unwelcome online behaviour, although this confidence is not universal. The findings on *online self-expression and disclosure* suggest that digital environments can provide some children with a distinct space for communication and self-expression, while indicating that communicating differently online does not necessarily entail greater personal disclosure. Finally, *perceived online agency* suggests that digital environments can provide some children with a sense of empowerment, although this is not a widespread experience. Together, these findings show that children's experiences of the online environment encompass **not only questions of safety and protection, but also their capacity to respond to difficulties, express themselves and exercise agency online.**

Perceived online safety and social climate

Across the countries surveyed, **48% of children say that they feel safe online**. However, this overall figure masks substantial cross-country variation. The proportion ranges from 19% in Italy to 73% in Ireland, a difference of 54 percentage points. Ireland is followed by Finland (66%) and Norway (66%), where around two-thirds of children report feeling safe online. In contrast, only around a third do so in Poland (31%), Slovakia (33%), Czechia (36%), Romania (36%) and Luxembourg (36%). In the remaining countries, the proportions are generally closer to half. The scale of this variation suggests that **children's perceptions of online safety may be shaped by country context.**

Fewer children report feeling safe online than in 2020 – 48% of children say they feel safe online compared with 65% who reported always or often feeling safe online in 2020.

Table 13: General perception of safety and communication online, by country

	I feel safe online	I find other people are kind and helpful on the internet	I know what to do if someone acts online in a way I don't like	I find it easier to be myself online than when I am with people face-to-face	I talk about different things online than I do when speaking to people face-to-face	I talk about personal things online which I do not talk about with people face-to-face	I feel powerful online
AT	51	28	61	24	24	10	13
BE	57	33	67	26	31	13	25
CH	50	26	67	17	24	8	11
CZ	36	16	63	28	25	9	15
EE	56	23	62	31	25	12	19
ES	54	35	67	24	24	10	13
FI	66	49	62	24	29	8	24
HR	53	16	71	27	16	9	16
IE	73	28	46	11	6	2	4
IT	19	14	58	18	24	10	10
LU	36	24	58	19	23	9	13
LV	53	26	61	25	21	10	14
MT	58	44	65	26	17	6	11
NO	66	39	55	20	19	7	8
PL	31	16	59	23	22	9	17
PT	47	18	67	24	16	10	9
RO	36	17	60	26	20	8	15
RS	50	15	68	18	19	5	13
SK	33	16	63	24	20	7	17
Ave	48	25	62	23	22	9	14

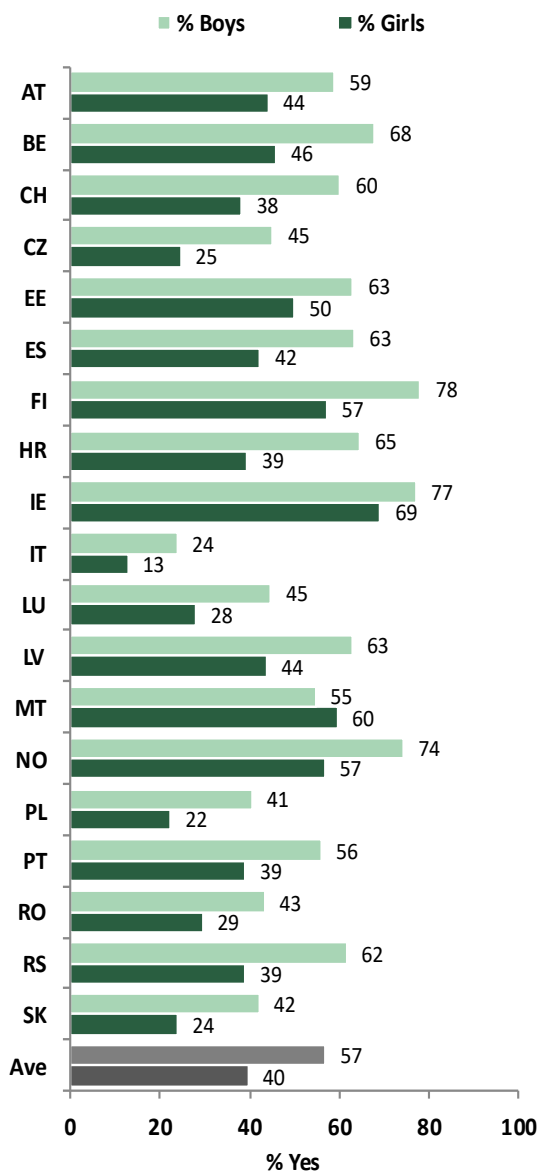
QC15⁶⁶: Which of the following applies to you? Base: All children 10–16

Gender reveals a particularly consistent pattern. Across the countries, 57% of boys report feeling safe online compared with 40% of girls. Boys report greater feelings of safety in 18 of the 19 countries surveyed, indicating that the overall gender difference is reproduced across almost all national contexts. **The differences are particularly pronounced in several countries.** In Croatia, 65% of boys report feeling safe online compared with 39% of girls, a gap of 26 percentage points. Differences of more than 20 percentage points are also evident in Switzerland, Belgium, Spain and Finland, while substantial gaps are found in a number of other countries. Malta is the only exception to the general pattern, with girls slightly more likely than boys to report feeling safe online.

Overall, the findings point to a substantial and remarkably consistent gender divide in perceived online safety. Although the size of the difference varies between countries, girls are less likely than boys to say that they feel safe online in almost every country surveyed. This suggests that gender is an important dimension of how children experience and evaluate safety in digital environments, while the variation in the size of the gap also indicates that the extent of this gender difference is shaped by national context.

⁶⁶ In EUKO2011 (practice question), EUKO2018 (QD2, core) & GKO2020. EUKO2011: different wording. EUKO2011 & GKO2020: different scale. Source: items “a”, “b” and “c”: EUKO (2018); items “d”, “e” and “f”: Smahel et al. (2012) adapted. Changes from EUKO2018: changed wording, “if at all” added for EUKO2025; scale changed, previous scale: Never – Sometimes – Often – Always – I don’t know – Prefer not to say.

Figure 51: I feel safe online, by gender



QC15: Which of the following applies to you? Base: All children 10–16

Children's perceptions of online safety also vary by SES. Across the countries, 51% of children from high SES backgrounds report feeling safe online compared with 46% of those from medium SES and 41% of those from low SES backgrounds. This 10 percentage point difference between the high and low SES groups suggests that **socioeconomic inequalities may extend to how secure and confident children feel in digital environments**.

The size of the difference by SES varies considerably between countries. Among the countries with estimates available for all three SES groups,⁶⁷ some of the clearest gradients are found in Latvia, where 57% of high SES children report feeling safe online compared with 50% of medium SES and 35% of low SES children, Ireland (76%, 71% and 62%), Czechia (39%, 33% and 24%) and Portugal (51%, 42% and 38%). Romania shows a similar, although smaller, gradient (39%, 33% and 31%).

However, the pattern is not uniform. In Spain and Estonia, high SES children report feeling safer than low SES children, but there is no consistent step-by-step gradient across the three groups. Italy shows relatively little difference by SES, while Slovakia shows the reverse of the overall pattern, with 42% of low SES children reporting feeling safe online compared with 30% of medium SES and 35% of high SES children.

The findings raise broader questions about whether children have equal access not only to digital technologies, but also to the **support, skills and resources that may help them navigate digital environments with confidence**. While the data cannot establish what drives the SES differences, they highlight the importance of considering socioeconomic inequalities when developing initiatives intended to strengthen children's digital safety and agency.

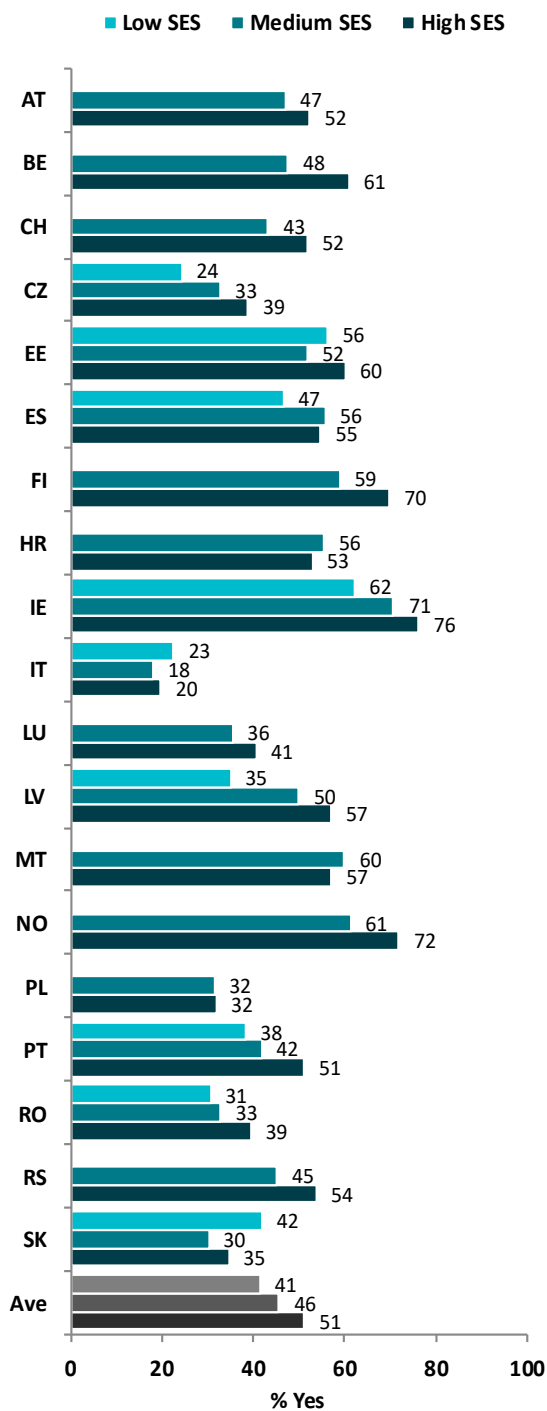
Differences by age are less pronounced and less consistent than those by gender and SES. Across the countries, 52% of 15- to 16-year-olds report feeling safe online compared with 50% of 13- to 14-year-olds, 44% of 11- to 12-year-olds and 50% of 10-year-olds. The pattern is therefore not linear, although the oldest children report the highest level of perceived safety overall. One possible explanation is that younger children may experience greater supervision or more restricted online activities, while older adolescents may have developed greater skills and experience for navigating online risks. The lower figure among 11- to 12-year-olds could therefore coincide with a period of increasing awareness and independence online, although the data cannot establish whether this explains the pattern.

Country-level differences show that the relationship between age and perceived online safety is not uniform. In some countries, perceived safety increases with age, while in others, younger children report similar or higher levels of safety than older age groups. This variation suggests that age alone does not explain

⁶⁷ Low SES estimates are not available for Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Serbia and Switzerland.

how safe children feel online, and that country context and other factors may shape how children’s perceptions develop as they grow older.

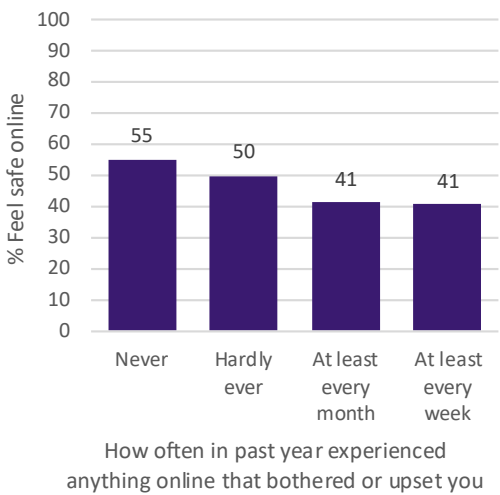
Figure 52: I feel safe online, by socioeconomic status (SES)



QC15: Which of the following applies to you?
Base: All children 10–16

An important question is whether children who feel less safe online are also those who are experiencing things online that bother or upset them. Feeling unsafe may reflect a more general perception of the online environment, but it may also be related to children’s direct experience of negative or upsetting situations. To explore this relationship, Figure 53 compares the proportion who say they feel safe online according to how frequently they report having been bothered or upset by something online during the past year.

Figure 53: Children who feel safe online, by frequency of being bothered or upset online (%)



QC15a: Applies to you: ‘I feel safe online’ AND QC16: In the PAST YEAR, has anything EVER happened online that bothered or upset you in some way (e.g., made you feel upset, uncomfortable, sad, scared or that you shouldn’t have seen it)?

There is a clear relationship between feeling safe online and the frequency with which children have been bothered or upset by something online. Among children who say they have never been bothered or upset by something online during the past year, 55% report feeling safe online. This falls to 50% among those who have hardly ever had such an experience, and to 41% among those who report being bothered or upset at least monthly. The proportion is almost identical, at 41%, among children who experience something upsetting at least weekly.

The main difference appears to be between children for whom upsetting online experiences are absent or infrequent and those for whom they are a more regular occurrence. Children who are bothered or upset at least monthly are around 14 percentage points less likely to report feeling safe online than those who have never experienced something

upsetting. However, the two measures do not correspond directly. Around four in ten children who experience upsetting situations at least weekly still say that they feel safe online. Conversely, a substantial proportion of children who report no upsetting experiences do not say that they feel safe. This suggests that **children's perceptions of online safety are related to their experience of negative situations online, but are not determined by these experiences alone.**

The second item within this grouping focuses on children's perceptions of the online social climate, asking whether they find other people online kind and helpful. Overall, children are relatively cautious in their assessment of online interactions: on average, only 25% say that they find other people online kind and helpful, and there are substantial differences between countries. This ranges from around 14–16% in Italy, Serbia, Czechia, Croatia, Poland and Slovakia, to 44% in Malta and 49% in Finland. The country distribution shows that relatively low levels of positive perceptions are widespread rather than being driven by a small number of countries: **in 14 of the 19 countries surveyed, fewer than three in ten children describe other people online as kind and helpful.** At the higher end, Finland (49%) and Malta (44%) report the most positive assessments, followed by Norway (39%), Spain (35%) and Belgium (33%). Even so, in no country do a majority of children describe other people online as kind and helpful. Taken together, the findings suggest that positive perceptions of the online social climate are not the norm across the countries surveyed, although the substantial cross-country variation indicates that children's assessments of online interactions are strongly differentiated by national context.

Overall, the findings show that **children's perceptions of online safety and the social climate are far from uniform.** The analysis of perceived safety points to particularly consistent gender differences, with girls generally feeling less safe online than boys, while socioeconomic differences suggest that children's sense of safety may also be connected to wider inequalities in the resources and support available to them. Age presents a more complex picture, with no straightforward or uniform pattern across the countries. Perceived safety is related to children's experience of upsetting situations online, with those who are regularly bothered or upset by something online less likely to report feeling safe. At the same time, children's assessments of the online social climate are relatively cautious across the countries, with positive perceptions of other people online remaining a minority view even where they are most widespread. The substantial cross-country variation in both aspects of this thematic grouping highlights the

importance of the wider contexts in which children experience and evaluate digital environments. Together, these findings suggest that creating supportive online environments involves not only addressing the conditions that shape children's sense of safety, but also fostering social spaces in which positive and supportive interactions are more widely experienced.

Response confidence

In contrast to children's relatively cautious assessments of the online social climate, with only a minority describing other people online as kind and helpful, **children generally report much higher levels of confidence in dealing with difficult interactions online.** Across the countries, an average of 62% say that they know what to do if someone acts online in a way they do not like. This is a majority experience in 18 of the 19 countries surveyed, with Ireland the only country where the proportion falls below half, at 46%. At the upper end, around two-thirds or more of children report this confidence in Croatia (71%), Serbia (68%), Belgium, Spain, Portugal and Switzerland (all 67%), and Malta (65%). In most of the remaining countries, the proportion is close to six in ten.

The relatively narrow spread across most countries is notable. Although the full range extends from 46% in Ireland to 71% in Croatia, a difference of 25 percentage points, 18 of the 19 countries fall between 55% and 71%. This suggests that perceived confidence in responding to unwelcome online behaviour is relatively widespread across different national contexts rather than being concentrated in a small number of countries. At the same time, the findings should not be read as indicating universal preparedness. Even in the countries with the highest levels, around three in ten children do not say that they know what to do, and across the countries as a whole a substantial minority do not report this confidence. The findings therefore point to **a broadly shared sense of response confidence among many children, alongside a sizeable group who may feel less certain about how to respond when online interactions cross their boundaries.**

Online self-expression and disclosure

Online environments may provide children with opportunities to communicate and express themselves in ways that differ from face-to-face interactions. The three items in this grouping capture different aspects of this experience: whether children find it easier to be themselves online, whether they talk about different things online, and whether they

disclose personal matters online that they do not discuss face-to-face.

For a minority of children, being online appears to provide a distinct space for self-expression. Across the countries, 23% say that they find it easier to be themselves online than face-to-face. This ranges from 11% in Ireland to 31% in Estonia, with relatively high levels also found in Czechia (28%), Croatia (27%), and Belgium, Malta and Romania (all 26%). At the other end of the distribution, Switzerland (17%), Italy and Serbia (both 18%) and Luxembourg (19%) are among the countries where this experience is less common. Although finding it easier to be oneself online is a minority experience in every country, the variation suggests that the extent to which online environments provide an alternative space for self-expression differs meaningfully across national contexts.

A similar overall proportion of children (22%) say that they talk about different things online than they do face-to-face, but the country pattern is somewhat different. Belgium records the highest proportion (31%), followed by Finland (29%), while Czechia and Estonia both stand at 25%. By contrast, only 6% of children in Ireland report talking about different things online, with relatively low levels also found in Croatia and Portugal (both 16%) and Malta (17%). The differences in country patterns across these first two indicators suggest that finding it easier to be oneself online and talking about different topics online capture related but not identical aspects of children's online communication.

More personal forms of disclosure are considerably less common. Across the countries, an average of 9% say that they talk about personal things online which they do not discuss with people face-to-face. The range between countries is also narrower, from 2% in Ireland to 13% in Belgium, with Estonia at 12% and several countries at around 9–10%. Importantly, personal disclosure is less common than the other two forms of online self-expression and communication in every country surveyed. This indicates that experiencing online spaces as different from face-to-face settings does not generally entail using them to disclose matters that children regard as personal.

The distinctiveness of online communication lies more often in how children express themselves and what they talk about than in greater personal disclosure. At the same time, differences in the country patterns across the three items **caution against treating online self-expression and disclosure as a single uniform experience**: digital environments appear to create different communicative possibilities for different children and in different national contexts.

Perceived online agency

The final thematic grouping considers perceived online agency, captured through the new item asking children whether they feel powerful online. This extends the analysis beyond how children experience and communicate in digital environments to consider whether being online is associated with a subjective sense of empowerment.

Overall, **14% of children say that they feel powerful online, indicating that this is a minority experience** across the countries surveyed. There is nevertheless meaningful cross-country variation. The proportion is highest in Belgium (25%) and Finland (24%), followed by Estonia (19%), Poland and Slovakia (both 17%) and Croatia (16%). At the other end of the distribution, only 4% of children in Ireland report feeling powerful online, with relatively low levels also found in Norway (8%) and Portugal (9%). Most countries fall within a relatively narrow middle range of around 10–15%.

The country pattern suggests that a sense of power online is not widespread in any of the countries surveyed. Even in Belgium and Finland, where it is most common, only around a quarter of children report this experience. At the same time, the difference between these countries and Ireland and Norway indicates that children's sense of agency online may be shaped by the contexts in which their digital lives take place. This raises questions about the conditions under which digital environments are experienced as empowering by children.

As this item was introduced for the first time in 2026, it provides a new baseline for understanding perceived online agency and future waves will make it possible to examine whether children's sense of power online changes and whether the substantial differences currently observed between countries persist. At the same time, the relatively low proportions across most countries point to opportunities to strengthen children's sense of agency online going forward, helping them to feel not only able to navigate digital spaces, but also confident in their ability to participate, express themselves and make choices within them.

Children’s perceptions of online interactions have shifted since 2020. Comparisons with 2020 survey data suggest that changes in children’s perceptions of the online environment have been selective rather than uniform across the different aspects measured. The clearest shift concerns the online social climate: the proportion of children who describe other people online as kind and helpful has fallen substantially, from 42% in 2020 to 25% in 2026. There has also been a smaller decline in the proportion who find it easier to be themselves online, from 29% to 23%.

Other aspects of children’s experiences have been considerably more stable. Response confidence remains relatively high, with 62% now saying that they know what to do when someone behaves online in a way they do not like compared with 67% in 2020. Within online self-expression and disclosure, there has been little change in the proportions who talk about different things online than face-to-face (22% vs 21%) or who discuss personal things online that they would not discuss face-to-face (9% vs 11%).

Taken together, the pattern does not suggest a generalised shift in children’s online experiences. Rather, the most pronounced change is in how positively children perceive other people online, while their reported capacity to respond to unwelcome behaviour and much of the way they communicate online have remained comparatively stable. This distinction is important: it suggests that the change since 2020 is more evident in children’s perceptions of the online social environment than across the full range of experiences captured by these measures.

Taken together, the findings highlight the need to understand **children’s digital experiences in terms of both their ability to navigate potential challenges and their capacity to engage, express themselves and exercise agency online.** Children may recognise and feel prepared for some of the challenges of being online, while also using digital spaces in ways that enable different forms of communication, self-expression and, for some, empowerment. This points to the importance of moving beyond an approach focused primarily on protection from risk towards one that also **strengthens children’s confidence, agency and capacity to participate positively in digital environments.**





8. Children's experiences of bullying and hurtful treatment

Digital media have not created bullying, but they have changed some of the conditions under which hurtful behaviour occurs. Digital bullying and cyberbullying also embed special features that cannot be found or found in the same way in traditional face-to-face bullying, such as the possibility for the bully to be anonymous, a potentially infinite audience, the permanence of cyberbullying material and the possibility of being reached or targeted at almost any time. Research has shown that bullying is more often the result of interaction between the same peers online and offline, even if roles might change. You can be a victim or a bully both online and offline, but you can also be bullied online and be bullying yourself offline, and vice versa. A conflict that begins at school may continue through messaging or gaming; an online post may affect face-to-face relationships the following day; and exclusion from an offline activity may become visible through photographs, posts or location sharing. The same peers may be present across several settings, while the consequences can extend beyond the platform on which an incident first occurred. An exclusive focus on 'cyberbullying' may therefore overlook the relational and institutional contexts in which harmful behaviour develops. Conversely, treating online communication as merely another setting can understate the significance of persistence, searchability, public visibility and rapid redistribution. It is therefore increasingly difficult to understand bullying by treating online and offline experiences as separate domains. Research has traditionally and commonly defined bullying through three elements: **harmful or aggressive behaviour**, **repetition** over time, and an **imbalance of power** that makes it difficult for the targeted child to defend themselves.⁶⁸ Usually, **intent** has also been included in definitions of offline bullying, although this is particularly difficult to establish in self-reported surveys and for online interactions. A single hurtful incident may be serious without meeting this stricter definition, while repeated exclusion, humiliation or harassment may constitute bullying even when each individual act appears minor.⁶⁹ Furthermore, given the nature of digital interaction and communication, bullying might occur even if the interaction is not consistently between a stronger and more specific party (child) in power, and a less powerful child. For these reasons, researchers

have argued that the traditional definitions of bullying do not capture the complexity of online interactions.⁷⁰

Bullying also needs to be understood in relation to inequality and discrimination. Children may be targeted because of characteristics that are socially marked or devalued, including ethnic or family background, skin colour, religion, disability, economic circumstances, appearance, body size, sexuality or expressed beliefs. Such experiences are not only interpersonal conflicts; they may reflect wider social hierarchies and prejudices, and can affect children's rights to non-discrimination, protection, participation and equal belonging. The same act may therefore be simultaneously bullying, discriminatory treatment and a form of online or offline exclusion.

Previous EUKO surveys have therefore distinguished between broadly reported aggression or victimisation and the narrower concept of repeated bullying. In our previous survey we found that face-to-face bullying remained more common than online bullying, but also showed that children who were bullied online were particularly likely to report being upset. It further found that online bullying was more common in countries where bullying was more prevalent overall, suggesting that it should be understood in part as a digital extension of an established social problem rather than simply as a consequence of greater internet use. Earlier EUKO analysis also emphasised that the roles of victim and perpetrator may overlap, and that conduct risks are embedded in peer cultures and relationships.

Our 2020 comparative report reached similar conclusions. Based on our findings, we stressed that online and offline bullying frequently overlap, while digital communication may increase reach, persistence, visibility and the possibility of repeated exposure. At the same time, the EUKO 2020 report cautioned against labelling every act of online aggression as cyberbullying. In most participating countries, sporadic victimisation was more common than repeated victimisation, and the proportion reporting online bullying at least monthly was generally below 10%. Country differences were, however,

⁶⁸ Olweus (1994).

⁶⁹ Ringrose et al. (2015).

⁷⁰ Canty et al. (2016); Kofoed & Staksrud (2019).

substantial, both for broader victimisation and for repeated bullying.

What we asked in the EU Kids Online V survey

This chapter focuses on three related dimensions of children's experiences during the previous year.

First, children were given a child-friendly description of hurtful or nasty behaviour, including unwanted teasing, hitting, kicking or pushing, and being left out. They were then asked whether anyone had treated them in such a way face-to-face, or via the internet, a mobile phone or online game. Children could report both forms. This allows us to examine the *extent* to which victimisation occurred offline, online or across both contexts and *how this might differ* between countries and demographic variables

Second, children who reported such an experience were asked *who* had treated them this way. The possible response options include family members, friends, romantic partners, classmates or other children at school, teachers, people known only through the internet, people not known to the child, and others. This is a new question within the current survey. It moves the analysis beyond a simple division between online and offline settings, and provides valuable information about the relationship between the child and the person responsible. Do children mostly know their perpetrators, or are they mostly online strangers? Harm from a classmate, friend, family member or unknown online contact may arise under very different conditions and may require different forms of support or intervention. It can also tell us something about the relationship between the general conditions children live under in their families, among peers, in schools and online.

Third, all children were asked *how often* they had been treated badly, online or offline, because of particular characteristics or circumstances.⁷¹ These included where their family came from, skin colour, religion, height or weight, disability, not having enough money, the people they fall in love with, appearance or behaviour, opinions or beliefs, and other reasons. This measure concerns children's own attribution of why they were treated badly; it cannot establish the other person's intention. It nevertheless provides an important indication of the social grounds on which children experience repeated mistreatment or exclusion.

The question asking children *who* had treated them in a hurtful or nasty way is new to EU Kids Online V. In addition to friends, classmates, romantic partners, teachers, people known only online and strangers, the response options include *family members*. This broadens the analysis beyond the conventional focus on peer bullying at school or online and recognises that repeated aggression and victimisation may also occur within the home from parents, other caretakers and siblings. Research on sibling bullying is particularly relevant: longitudinal studies have found that sibling victimisation is associated with poorer subsequent mental health, including depression, anxiety and self-harm, and that children victimised by both siblings and peers tend to report greater difficulties than those exposed in only one context.⁷²

The family member category should nevertheless be interpreted carefully. It includes relationships beyond siblings, and the survey does not establish repetition, power imbalance or the precise nature of the behaviour. Reports involving family members should not automatically be classified as bullying in the strict research sense. They may indicate sibling bullying, other forms of intrafamilial aggression or isolated hurtful incidents. Including the category makes these experiences visible and provides a basis for later analyses of how victimisation across family, peer and online contexts may overlap.

In what follows, we present the overall comparative results, asking how common hurtful and nasty treatment is, where it occurs, who children identify as responsible, the characteristics or circumstances they attribute to being treated badly, and how this might differ between countries. Country differences should not be interpreted as straightforward rankings of safer and less safe societies. Reported prevalence may be shaped not only by actual experiences but also by social norms, recognition of bullying, willingness to disclose, translation and survey context. Because the data are cross-sectional, they can identify associations with reported hurtful or nasty treatment, but they cannot establish causality or determine why particular children were targeted.

⁷¹ This question was also asked in a different version in EUKO 2018 (QA16, core/QA17, optional) and GKO 2020. GKO 2020:

different wording, different scale. Source of QA16: Adapted from Williams et al. (2008).

⁷² Bowes et al. (2014); Dantchev et al (2019); Lee et al (2014).

Experiences of bullying and hurtful treatment

Across the sample, **39% of children aged 10–16 reported that someone had treated them in a hurtful or nasty way during the past year**, either face-to-face, online, or both. This was the case in all countries, but with considerable cross-country variation.

The proportion ranged from **22% in Finland to 51% in Italy and Malta, and half of the children in Belgium and Romania (50%)**. Relatively high levels were also found in Poland (46%), Czechia (42%) and Croatia (40%). At the other end of the distribution, fewer than a third reported being treated in this way in Ireland (29%), Norway (31%) and Luxembourg (32%).

Age differences in experiences of hurtful or nasty treatment are very modest at the average sample level. Among both 10-year-olds and 11- to 12-year-olds, 36% reported having been treated in this way during the past year compared with 40% among both 13- to 14-year-olds and 15- to 16-year-olds.

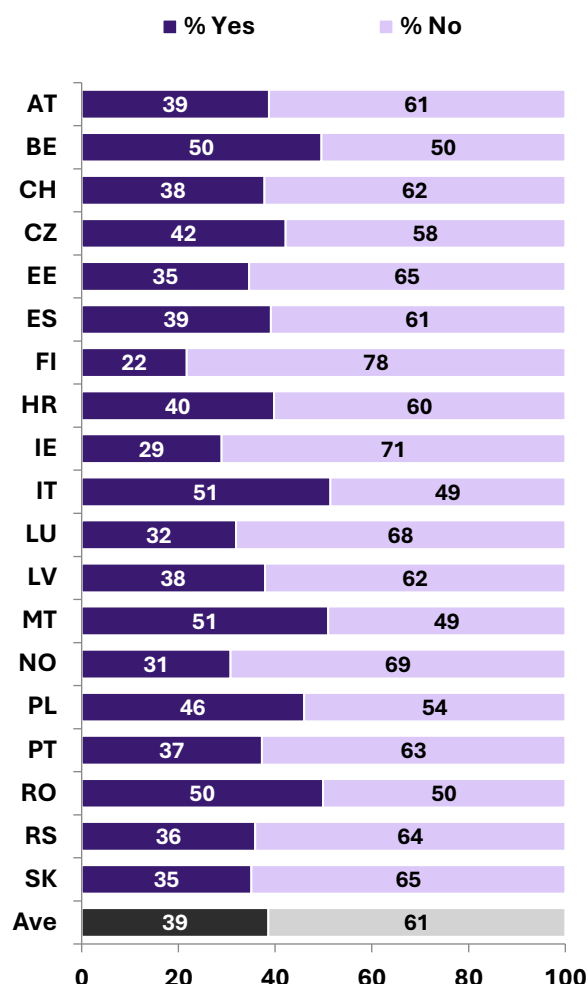
However, when we look across the countries, we find considerably more variation. **In some countries, reports increase quite clearly with age.** In Portugal, the proportion rises from 29% among 10-year-olds to 40% among 15- to 16-year-olds. Norway shows a pronounced increase in the oldest group, from 24% among 11- to 12-year-olds and 29% among 13- to 14-year-olds to 41% among 15- to 16-year-olds. Slovakia and Czechia also show higher levels among teenagers than among younger children, although the pattern is not completely linear.

In other countries, age differences are small because relatively high or low levels are found throughout childhood and adolescence. Romania and Italy stand out for consistently high prevalence across the available age groups: around half of children report hurtful or nasty treatment at most ages. Finland, by contrast, reports comparatively low levels across all age groups. In Malta, prevalence is high throughout, and reaches 67% among 15- to 16-year-olds, the highest estimate among the countries and age groups.

Importantly, several countries do not follow an increasing age pattern. In Poland, reported prevalence is highest among 11- to 12-year-olds (49%) and declines to 40% among 15- to 16-year-olds. Latvia peaks among 13- to 14-year-olds (43%) before falling to 34% among the oldest group, while Switzerland

similarly reaches its highest level among 13- to 14-year-olds.

Figure 54: Treated in a hurtful or nasty way, by country



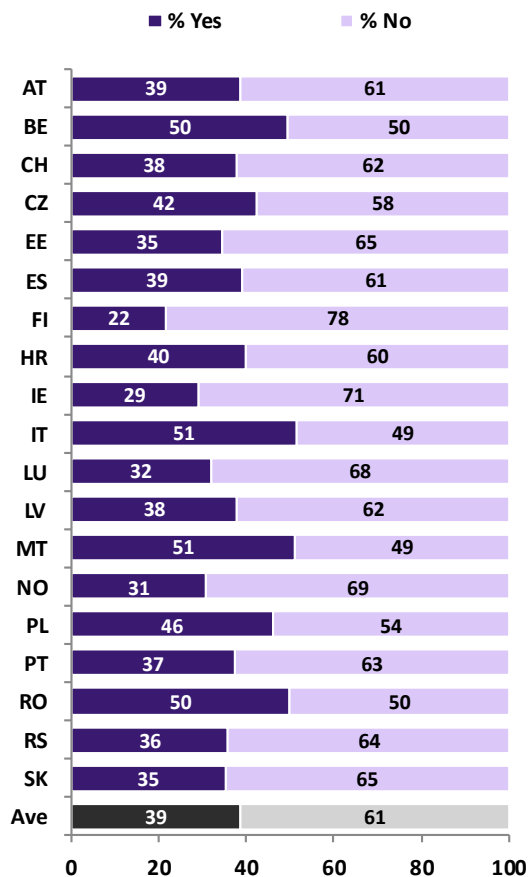
QC18⁷³: In the PAST YEAR, has anyone EVER treated you in such a hurtful or nasty way? THNW combined f2f and online. Base: All children 1016

Overall, we find country differences to be substantially larger than the differences between age groups in the sample as a whole. Among 15- to 16-year-olds, for example, reported prevalence ranges from 25% in Finland to 67% in Malta. This suggests that age alone does not account for variation in children's experiences, and that the relationship between age and hurtful treatment may also be shaped by the broader social and national context.

⁷³ In EUKO2011, EUKO2018 (QF20, core) & GKO2020. EUKO2011 & GKO2020: different wording. GKO2020: two

different questions, different scale. Source: EUKO (2011) adapted.

Figure 55: Treated in a hurtful or nasty way, by country and age group



QC18: In the PAST YEAR, has anyone EVER treated you in such a hurtful or nasty way? (Treated in a hurtful or nasty way, combined f2f and online.) Base: All children 10–16

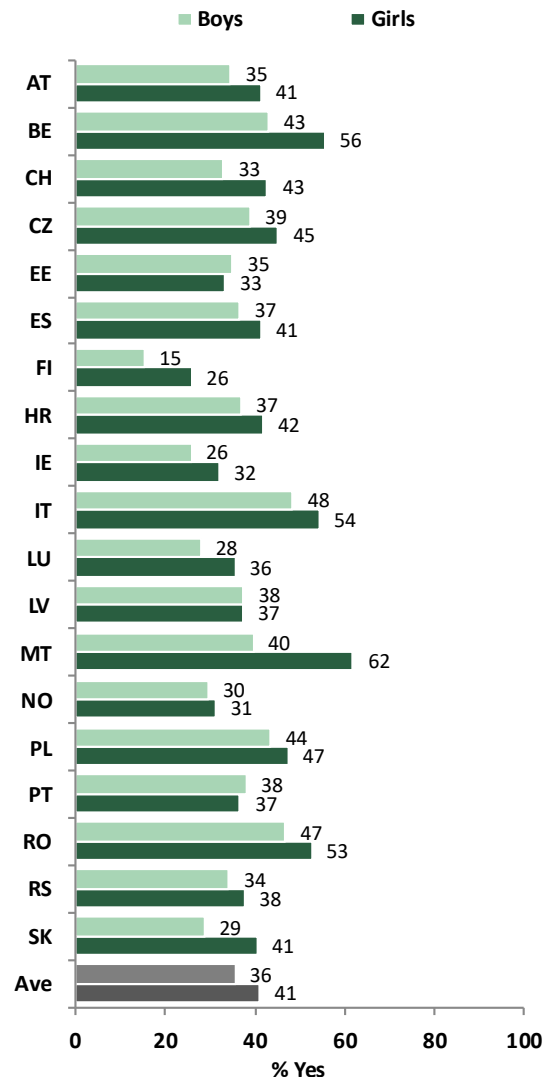
When it comes to gender differences, across the sample, girls are somewhat more likely than boys to report having been treated in a hurtful or nasty way during the past year: 41% of girls compared with 36% of boys, but again, with considerable variation between countries.

As with age, the differences between countries are larger than the overall gender difference. Among girls, reported prevalence ranges from 26% in Finland to 62% in Malta, while among boys it ranges from 15% in Finland to 48% in Italy.

In most countries, girls reported higher levels of being treated in a hurtful or harmful way than boys. The largest difference was found in Malta, where 62% of girls compared with 40% of boys reported such experiences. Differences were also substantial in Belgium (56% vs 43%), Slovakia (41% vs 29%), Finland (26% vs 15%) and Switzerland (43% vs 33%).

However, the gender pattern is not universal. In Estonia, Latvia and Portugal levels were almost identical among girls and boys (33% vs 35%, and 37% vs 38%).

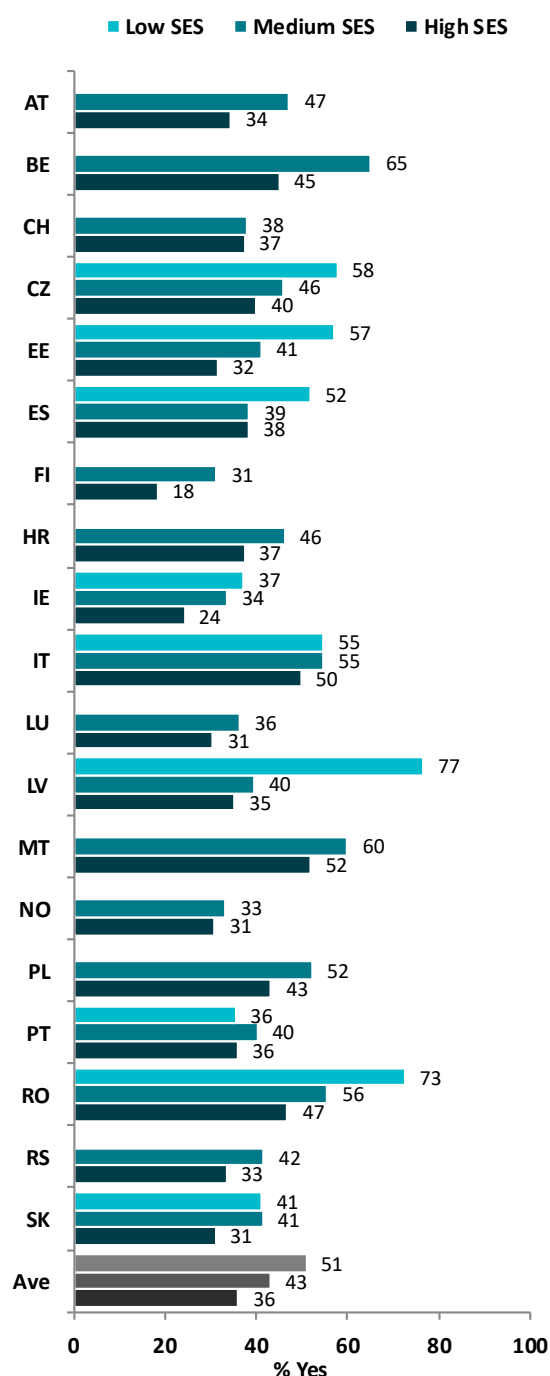
Figure 56: Treated in a hurtful or nasty way, by country and gender



QC18: In the PAST YEAR, has anyone EVER treated you in such a hurtful or nasty way? Combined f2f and online. Base: All children 10–16

The pattern becomes clearer when the results are examined by SES (see Figure 57). Across the sample, 36% of children from high SES backgrounds reported having been treated in a hurtful or nasty way during the past year, compared with 43% of those from medium SES backgrounds and 51% of those from low SES backgrounds. This substantial difference between the high and low SES group indicates a marked social gradient in reported victimisation.

Figure 57: Treated in a hurtful or nasty way, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC18: In the PAST YEAR, has anyone EVER treated you in such a hurtful or nasty way? (Treated in a hurtful or nasty way, combined f2f and online.). Base: All children 10–16

This pattern is also evident in several countries where estimates are available for all three SES groups. Latvia stands out: 35% of high SES and 40% of medium SES children reported hurtful treatment compared

with 77% of those in the low SES group, the highest in the survey. In Romania, prevalence rises from 47% among high SES children to 56% among those in the medium SES group and 73% among low SES children. Similar gradients are found in Estonia (32%, 41%, 57%) and Czechia (40%, 46%, 58%). Spain also shows a notable increase among low SES children (52%), compared with 38–39% in the other two groups.

In other countries the differences between SES groups are smaller or less linear. In Slovakia and Italy, prevalence is still higher among medium and low SES children than among high SES children, but the difference between the medium and low SES groups are limited. Portugal shows no clear SES gradient, with similar levels across the available groups (36%, 40% and 36%).

Differences between online and offline bullying and hurtful experiences

Given EUKO's focus on children's digital lives, we are particularly interested in the extent to which hurtful or nasty treatment takes place online, and how this compares with face-to-face experiences. We therefore examine the two settings separately. This is not to treat them as independent forms of harm, but to assess if and how the balance between face-to-face and online victimisation differs across the countries.

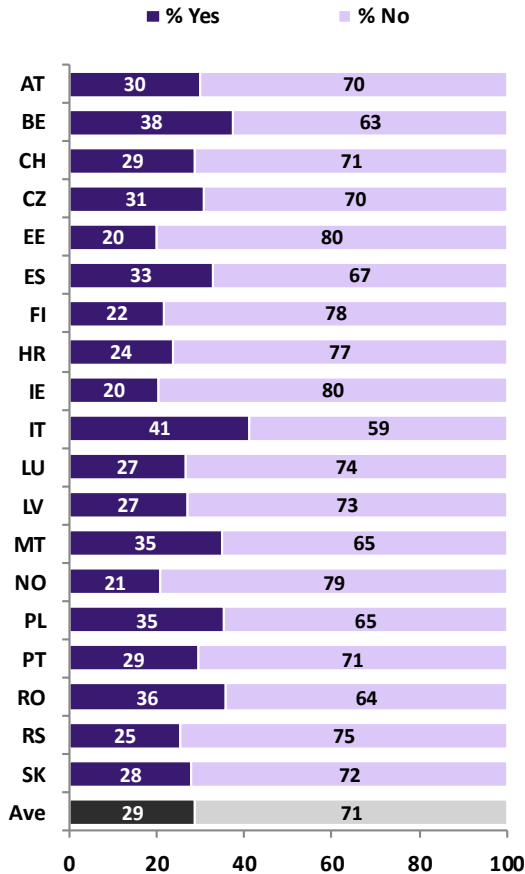
Importantly, the majority of children do not report such experiences. Among those who do, on average, **more children report being treated in a hurtful and nasty way face-to-face (29%) than online (17%). This pattern is consistent across all countries except Estonia.**

At the same time, the group differences in experiencing hurtful and nasty experiences face-to-face versus online vary significantly across the countries. In some countries the difference is small, such as Norway (3 percentage points), Serbia (6 percentage points) and Latvia, Ireland and Croatia (all 7 percentage points), compared to Italy and Austria (both 21 percentage points), and Switzerland and Spain (both 20 percentage points).

The same broad pattern has been found throughout EUKO's comparative surveys: face-to-face victimisation has remained more common than online victimisation. In 2011, 19% reported that someone had acted in a hurtful or nasty way towards them, with 13% of children reporting hurtful or nasty treatment face-to-face compared with 6% on the internet and 3% via mobile phone calls or messages. The EUKO 2020

report again found higher levels offline: overall, 23% reported victimisation and 7% reported face-to-face victimisation at least monthly compared with 5% online. When less frequent experiences ('a few times') were also included, the corresponding figures were approximately 18% and 14%.

Figure 58: Treated in a hurtful or nasty way in the past year face to face⁷⁴, by country



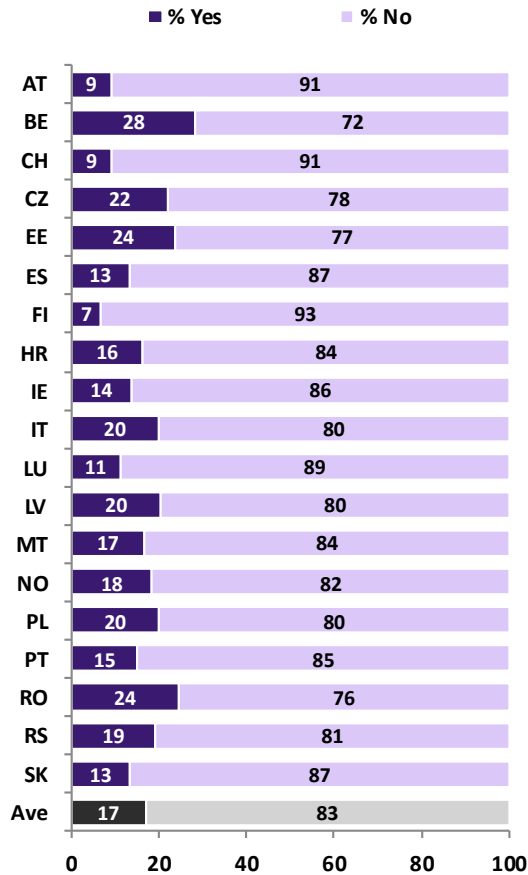
QC18: In the PAST YEAR, has anyone EVER treated you in such a hurtful or nasty way? (Treated in a hurtful or nasty way in the past year face-to-face.) Base: All children 10–16.

In the present survey, the pattern remains clear, with 29% reporting face-to-face hurtful treatment and 17% reporting online hurtful treatment. Although differences in question format, country coverage and age groups mean that these figures should not be

treated as a strict trend comparison, the substantive pattern is remarkably consistent. **Overall, the EUKO V findings show a pattern in which, across the countries, face-to-face hurtful treatment remains more common than online treatment.**

Despite the much greater integration of digital communication into children's lives, the evidence does not indicate a simple displacement of face-to-face bullying by online bullying. Rather, online environments have become an important additional setting for hurtful behaviour, while face-to-face social contexts continue to account for the larger share of reported victimisation.

Figure 59: Treated in a hurtful or nasty way in the past year online, by country



QC18: In the PAST YEAR, has anyone EVER treated you in such a hurtful or nasty way? (Treated in a hurtful or nasty way in the past year online.) Base: All children 10–16

online. Estimates for these countries may therefore *slightly understate the prevalence* of each setting, particularly where experiences overlapped across offline and online contexts.

⁷⁴ Note: In a small number of countries (Austria, Switzerland, Croatia and Malta) a questionnaire implementation error meant that children were not given the option to report that hurtful or nasty treatment had occurred *both face-to-face and*

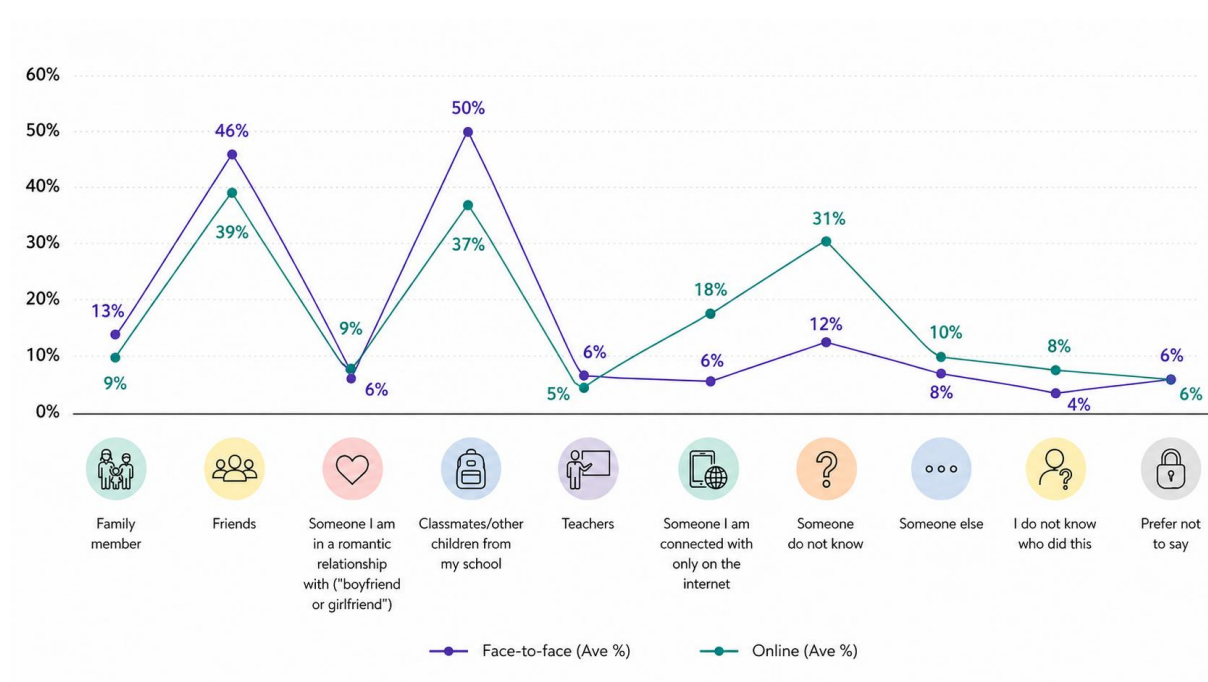
Who treated children in a hurtful or nasty way?

As described at the beginning of this chapter, **children who reported being treated in a hurtful or nasty way were asked who had treated them this way**. Options included perpetrators from the child's inner circle of family, friends and someone they are in a romantic relationship with, school-related perpetrators (classmates, children from their own school, teachers), internet connections and someone they do not know. Options also included 'Someone else' and 'Prefer not to say'.

In the following, we compare both the differences between online and offline contexts, as well as country differences (see Table 14 and Table 15).

Across the sample, **people already known to the child are the most reported perpetrators of both face-to-face and online hurtful treatment**.

Figure 60: Comparison between perceived perpetrators face-to-face and online, whole sample



QC19⁷⁵: Who was it that did this/these things? Base: All children 10–16 who have been treated in a hurtful or nasty way FACE-TO-FACE and ONLINE

Classmates or other children from the same school were the most prominent face-to-face perpetrators of bullying (50%), followed closely by friends (46%). These same groups also dominated online experiences, although at somewhat lower levels: 37% identified schoolmates and 39% friends. Family members were also more commonly reported in face-to-face incidents (13%), but still almost one in ten had an online experience of being treated in a hurtful or nasty way by a family member (9%). Thus, **much online victimisation seems to occur within relationships that also exist in children's offline**

lives, rather than being confined to encounters with people known only through the internet.

At the same time, the online setting broadens the range of people who may be involved. **Eighteen per cent of children experiencing online hurtful treatment identified someone they were connected with only on the internet**. Strangers were reported far more often in online settings (31% vs 12%), while not knowing who was responsible was twice as common online as face-to-face (8% vs 4%). Romantic partners were also somewhat more frequently identified in online incidents (9% vs 6%). Overall, the pattern points to **continuity rather than a sharp separation**

⁷⁵ New question in EUKO2025.

between online and offline victimisation: friends and school peers remain central in both settings, while online environments additionally create opportunities for hurtful treatment involving online-only contacts and less identifiable perpetrators.

For **face-to-face experiences**, the overall pattern is strongly centred on children's existing peer environments. Across the sample, classmates or other children from the same school were most frequently identified (50%), followed closely by friends (46%). These two categories dominate in almost every country, although their relative importance varies. Schoolmates were particularly prominent in Luxembourg (63%) and Ireland (62%), followed by Switzerland and Poland (56%), Norway (55%), and Austria, Latvia and Portugal (54%). Friends were most commonly reported in Croatia (56%), Italy (54%) and Spain (52%). In Romania, the two categories were

equally common (50% each), whereas in Estonia, Spain, Croatia and Italy, friends were more frequently identified than schoolmates.

Other face-to-face perpetrators were reported substantially less often, but there are some notable country differences. **Family members accounted for an average of 13%**, ranging from only 3% in Ireland to 21% in Switzerland. Someone the child did not know was identified by 12% overall, with comparatively high figures in Finland (20%), Latvia (19%) and Romania (18%). Teachers were relatively uncommon across the sample (6%), ranging from 9% in Italy to 0% in Malta. This was also the case with romantic partners (6%), with Romania and Switzerland at the highest (both 10%) and Malta the lowest (also 0%).

Table 14: Who child was victimised by offline, by country

	Family member	Friends	Someone I am in a romantic relationship with	Classmates /other children from my school	Teachers	Someone I am connected with only on the internet	Someone I do not know	Someone else	I do not know who did this	Prefer not to say
AT	13	45	6	54	8	2	10	7	1	5
BE	13	44	9	48	5	5	15	10	3	7
CH	21	45	10	56	6	2	4	5	0	6
CZ	12	40	6	49	7	11	16	7	6	10
EE	14	49	5	45	6	9	n.a.	14	13	7
ES	16	52	7	43	5	2	8	8	3	8
FI	9	42	4	50	6	6	20	6	6	7
HR	10	56	7	46	8	6	9	3	3	6
IE	3	40	3	62	3	5	12	3	2	1
IT	16	54	7	44	9	5	14	10	3	6
LU	8	36	6	63	7	5	8	8	2	5
LV	15	43	7	54	6	12	19	11	2	6
MT	10	35	0	38	0	0	4	1	1	9
NO	7	50	5	55	3	7	16	9	3	4
PL	12	36	6	56	7	8	11	8	4	8
PT	10	42	4	54	4	4	11	7	4	6
RO	13	50	10	50	6	9	18	7	1	4
RS	14	44	5	43	5	6	13	12	9	9
SK	15	49	6	46	6	5	11	7	6	9
Ave	13	46	6	50	6	6	12	8	4	6

QC19: Who was it that did this/these things? Base: All children 10–16 who have been treated in a hurtful or nasty way face-to-face

Overall, our findings on face-to-face victimisation point primarily to **victimisation embedded within children's established peer and school relationships**, although family members and strangers also form an important part of the picture.

For online experiences (Table 15), friends (39%) and classmates or other children from school (37%) again constitute the two largest groups, with very similar shares. Thus, online hurtful treatment is often connected to relationships that also exist offline.

There are, however, notable and significant differences between countries. Friends were particularly prominent in Finland (53%) and Spain (52%), followed by Italy (47%) and Norway (44%). Schoolmates were especially common in Finland (51%), Luxembourg and Portugal (47%), Poland (43%) and Romania (42%). In

Austria, by contrast, only 17% identified schoolmates, while friends were twice as common (34%), suggesting a different composition of online perpetrators.

At the same time, the online environment involves a substantially broader range of social connections, combining continuity with children's offline relationships with exposure to people outside their immediate social networks.

Across the sample, **18% identified someone known only through the internet and 31% someone they did not know**. Online-only contacts were particularly prominent in Romania (26%), Poland (24%), and Croatia and Latvia (22%). Strangers were especially common in Norway (39%), Czechia (38%), and Latvia and Italy (both 37%), and least common in Luxembourg (19%).

Table 15: Who child was victimised by online, by country

	Family member	Friends	Someone I am in a romantic relationship with	Classmates /other children from my school	Teachers	Someone I am connected with only on the internet	Someone I do not know	Someone else	I do not know who did this	Prefer not to say
AT	7	34	17	17	2	19	28	11	8	2
BE	9	39	9	38	4	13	26	14	4	5
CH	10	39	11	37	5	16	34	8	0	9
CZ	11	31	8	40	5	21	38	8	8	7
EE	9	35	5	26	6	18	n.a.	21	33	7
ES	11	52	12	32	7	12	24	8	5	8
FI	12	53	12	51	10	16	34	12	18	8
HR	5	33	10	24	2	22	32	7	8	7
IE	3	40	5	40	3	15	24	8	3	0
IT	17	47	12	38	10	18	37	11	7	4
LU	8	31	8	47	8	18	19	13	7	6
LV	12	35	8	36	6	22	37	5	4	9
MT	0	25	3	19	3	9	22	0	6	9
NO	6	44	5	35	2	14	39	12	1	5
PL	8	32	8	43	5	24	32	10	6	10
PT	9	34	7	47	3	16	34	5	1	6
RO	11	43	11	42	7	26	32	4	4	4
RS	12	38	5	32	3	13	30	12	9	9
SK	11	42	11	40	10	17	29	13	10	11
Ave	9	39	9	37	5	18	31	10	8	6

QC19: Who was it that did this/these things? Base: All children 10–16 who have been treated in a hurtful or nasty way online.

We can also find some distinctive national patterns and results beyond these main categories. Estonia stands out for the high proportion of online-victimised children who did not know who was responsible (33%), compared with a sample average of 8%. Romantic partners account for a larger share of online than face-to-face experiences overall (9% vs 6%), reaching 17% in Austria and 12% in Spain, Finland and Italy.

Taken together, our EUKO country results reinforce two patterns.

First, friends and school peers are central to hurtful treatment, both face-to-face and online, supporting the view that the two contexts are closely interconnected rather than separate social worlds.

Second, the online setting expands the range of possible perpetrators. In many countries, strangers and online-only contacts constitute a substantial part of children's online experiences. The relative importance of these groups nevertheless differs markedly between countries, indicating that the social configuration of online victimisation of children is not uniform across Europe.

Why children believe they are or were treated badly

Finally, to assess **children's own perceptions and understanding of why they were treated in a hurtful or nasty way by others**, we asked them what they believed were the reasons for this treatment (QC20⁷⁶). This is important because the measure captures children's own interpretation of the experience rather than the intentions of the person who treated them badly. Such perceptions can provide insight into how children make sense of victimisation, including whether they understand it as connected to aspects of their identity, appearance, social position or personal views. Note that we do not distinguish between online and offline experiences here.

Our response options covered a broad range of possible reasons: where their family is from, their skin colour, religion, height or weight, a disability, not having enough money, the people they fall in love with, how they look or behave, and their opinions or beliefs, as well as an option 'For some other reason'. Taken together, these items allow us to examine whether hurtful treatment is perceived as linked primarily to

background and identity, bodily or behavioural characteristics, socioeconomic circumstances, or beliefs and relationships. The responses should be read as children's own understanding of why the treatment occurred, rather than as independently verified motives or formal classifications of discrimination.



Across the sample, the most commonly reported reasons concerned **how children look or behave (35%)** and **their height or weight (31%)**, followed by **their opinions or beliefs (28%)** and 'For some other reason' (28%). One in five (20%) attributed the treatment to the people they fall in love with. Reasons related to family background (11%), skin colour (8%), religion (7%), disability (6%) and not having enough money (7%) were less common overall. The relatively high proportion selecting 'For some other reason' also indicates that children's experiences are not fully captured by the specific categories included in the questionnaire.

Gender differences are generally modest, but the direction varies by reason. Boys were somewhat more likely than girls to attribute hurtful treatment to where their family is from (12% vs 9%), skin colour (10% vs 6%), religion (8% vs 5%), disability (8% vs 5%) and not having enough money (8% vs 5%). Girls, by contrast, more often identified how they look or behave (37% vs 33%), the people they fall in love with (22% vs 18%), and 'For some other reason' (30% vs 26%). **There was almost no gender difference in treatment attributed to height or weight, or to opinions and beliefs.**

Age differences are more pronounced and are concentrated in just some of the responses. Perceived victimisation related to appearance or behaviour rises from 21% among 10-year-olds to 40% among 13- to 16-year-olds, while treatment attributed

⁷⁶ In EUKO2018 (QA16, core / QA17, optional) & GKO2020. GKO2020: different wording, different scale. Source of QA16: Williams et al. (2008) adapted. Changes from EUKO2018: QA16 and QA17 have been joined into one question for EUKO2025; changed wording from QA16 "Do you sometimes feel that you are treated badly because of the following?" and

QA17 "When you were treated this way, how often did it happen ON THE INTERNET?" for EUKO2025; "In the past year" added for EUKO2025; Scale changed, previous scale: Never – Hardly ever – Sometimes – Often – Very often – I don't know – Prefer not to say.



to opinions or beliefs increases from 18% at age 10 to 35% among 15- to 16-year-olds. A similar pattern is found for the people children fall in love with, increasing from 14% to 25%, and for height or weight, from 22% to a third (33%) among teenagers.

By contrast, **reasons relating to family origin, skin colour, religion, disability and money vary relatively little by age**. Rather, the age pattern seems to be driven particularly by appearance, relationships and personal expression, which become increasingly salient during adolescence.

The clearest and most consistent differences are found when we compare by SES: **across all 10 reasons included in the questionnaire, children in the low SES group report higher levels** than children in the high SES group. The largest difference concerns not having enough money: 21% of low SES children identify this as a reason compared with 5% of high SES children. However, the SES pattern extends well beyond being mistreated due to economic circumstances. Low SES children are also more likely to attribute hurtful treatment to family origin (20% vs 9%), skin colour (17% vs 8%), appearance or behaviour (44% vs 33%), the people they fall in love with (30% vs 19%), and their opinions or beliefs (36% vs 27%).

This broader SES pattern is particularly noteworthy. In our data, we find that **socioeconomic disadvantage is associated not only with being targeted because of money, but with a wider range of perceived reasons for hurtful treatment**. This begs the question of the realities and consequences of accumulation or overlap of vulnerabilities: children in less advantaged circumstances appear more likely to understand their negative experiences as connected to several aspects of who they are, how they look and behave, as well as their social position.



For the analyses that follow, we focus on children who reported being treated badly at least monthly.

This threshold helps distinguish more recurrent experiences from isolated or occasional incidents and directs attention to patterns that are more likely to represent an ongoing part of children's lives. It also provides a clearer basis for comparing the reasons children give for being targeted, since repeated experiences are more likely to allow children to form a stable interpretation of why the treatment occurs.

Among children who report having regularly (at least every month) been treated in a hurtful or nasty way, the most frequently reported reasons are their own **appearance, behaviour and embodied characteristics**. Across the sample, **38% said that they had been treated badly at least monthly because of how they looked or behaved, while 33% attributed such treatment to their height or weight**.

Almost a third (31%) reported being treated badly because of their opinions or beliefs, and the same proportion selected another reason not covered by the listed categories. **Negative treatment related to the people children fall in love with was reported by an average of 22%.**

The remaining reasons were less commonly reported across the sample. Eleven per cent attributed repeated mistreatment to their family's place of origin, 9% to skin colour and 8% to religion. Seven per cent reported being treated badly because of a disability, and the same proportion because their family did not have enough money. Although these percentages are lower, they concern characteristics closely connected to children's rights to dignity, equality and non-discrimination and should be regarded as important and crucial to address.

The ranking of reasons is broadly similar across the countries (Table 17). How children looked or behaved was the most frequently reported reason in most national samples, followed by height or weight, opinions or beliefs, and 'For some other reason'. This consistency suggests that recurrent mistreatment is often linked to visible characteristics, social presentation and perceived difference rather than to a single narrowly defined identity category.

Table 16: Children's understanding of why they were treated badly, by demographic differences

% somewhat agree or strongly agree...	Boys	Girls	10 yrs	11-12 yrs	13-14 yrs	15-16 yrs	Low SES	Mod SES	High SES	Ave
Because of how I look or behave	33	37	21	29	40	40	44	39	33	35
Because of my height or weight	30	31	22	27	34	33	38	33	29	31
Because of my opinions or beliefs	27	28	18	21	30	35	36	31	27	28
For some other reason	26	30	22	27	29	31	34	29	27	28
Because of the people I fall in love with	18	22	14	16	22	25	30	22	19	20
Because of where my family is from	12	9	13	10	10	12	20	11	9	11
Because of my skin colour	10	6	8	7	8	10	17	8	8	8
Because of my religion	8	5	8	6	6	9	12	7	6	7
Because of not having enough money	8	5	8	6	6	8	21	8	5	7
Because of a disability	8	5	7	5	5	8	10	7	5	6

QC20: In the PAST YEAR, how often have you been treated badly because of the following in any way (online or offline)? Base: All children 10-16 who have been treated in a hurtful or nasty way

Table 17: Why children believe they have been treated badly, by country

	Because of where my family is from	Because of my skin colour	Because of my religion	Because of my height or weight	Because of a disability	Because of not having enough money	Because of the people I fall in love with	Because of how I look or behave	Because of my opinions or beliefs	For some other reason
AT	13	7	9	37	6	8	31	48	39	38
BE	9	6	4	32	5	4	14	36	28	27
CH	10	6	8	25	3	4	16	31	24	23
CZ	12	10	9	44	12	11	24	52	46	41
EE	13	8	10	37	9	12	21	39	30	31
ES	15	9	7	32	6	7	22	36	27	33
FI	7	5	9	37	7	7	18	41	24	37
HR	14	13	15	41	10	9	39	47	43	38
IE	11	7	3	21	3	3	9	21	15	10
IT	10	5	3	26	5	4	23	36	24	28
LU	11	8	8	30	4	3	18	38	27	37
LV	14	12	10	32	8	11	24	40	32	33
MT	8	13	6	36	6	7	17	30	27	31
NO	13	11	8	36	7	8	20	40	32	38
PL	10	8	8	40	8	10	23	43	38	36
PT	12	13	9	31	9	9	23	32	24	22
RO	13	11	5	33	7	8	18	40	35	28
RS	11	7	8	28	6	6	28	35	30	28
SK	8	9	6	30	11	7	21	38	34	31
Ave	11	9	8	33	7	7	22	38	31	31

QC20: In the PAST YEAR, how often have you been treated badly because of the following in any way (online or offline)? Base: All children 10-16 who have been treated in a hurtful or nasty way



We find substantial variation across the countries.

Reports of being treated badly because of appearance or behaviour ranged from 21% in Ireland to 52% in Czechia. Being treated badly because of opinions or beliefs also varied greatly, from 15% in Ireland to 46% in Czechia. Mistreatment related to height or weight ranged from 21% in Ireland to 44% in Czechia.

Some of the largest country differences in reasons given for being treated badly are found under the option ‘The people I fall in love with’. This reason was reported by 39% in Croatia and 31% in Austria, compared with 9% in Ireland and 14% in Belgium. Relatively high percentages were reported in Serbia (28%) and Czechia and Latvia (24% each).

Czechia recorded comparatively high percentages across several categories, including height or weight, appearance or behaviour, opinions or beliefs and ‘For some other reason’. Croatia also showed relatively high levels across several items, particularly those concerning the people children fall in love with, appearance and opinions. **Ireland was either the lowest or among the lowest countries for most categories.** These patterns should not be interpreted as straightforward evidence that particular societies are more or less discriminatory. Differences may also reflect other issues, including the composition of the group who reported hurtful treatment, children’s recognition and attribution of mistreatment, willingness to disclose sensitive experiences, and

linguistic or cultural interpretations of the questions. They may also point to differences in peer, school or wider social contexts that make some characteristics more salient as grounds for hurtful treatment in some countries than in others.

It should be noted once more that the results in this section concern **repeated characteristic-based mistreatment among children who had already reported being treated in a hurtful or nasty way**. They are therefore conditional percentages, not estimates of the proportion of all children in each country who experienced these forms of treatment. The size and composition of the victimised group may differ between countries.

Note also that children could have more than one reason, as reported in our questionnaire. The categories are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily independent: treatment related to appearance may overlap with height, weight, disability, skin colour, economic circumstances or gender expression. The percentages should consequently not be added together to calculate the proportion experiencing identity-based mistreatment. The measure captures children’s own perceptions of why they were treated badly. It does not establish the responsible person’s intention and combines online and offline experiences. The findings are best understood as evidence of how children interpret recurrent mistreatment in their own lives.

9. Harmful content

As children's internet use has expanded, so has the range of content they may encounter online. Some of this content can provide opportunities for information, support and communication. At the same time, children may encounter content that presents harmful behaviour, including self-harm, suicide, eating disorders, drug use and violence. Such content may be encountered deliberately, for example when children search for information or seek out others with similar experiences, but it may also appear without being actively sought, including through social media feeds, recommendations or content shared by others.⁷⁷ (The term 'user-generated content' is used here to emphasise the often non-institutional, peer-to-peer nature of such material, permitting individuals or small groups to promote values, activities or knowledge that may be harmful for children.)⁷⁸

In policy terms, the concept of harmful online content is also broader than illegal content. As reflected, for example, in the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), it includes content that may impair the physical, mental or moral development of minors.⁷⁹ This may include different kinds of content that can affect children's health, wellbeing or development, even where the content itself is not illegal.⁸⁰

EUKO has examined children's exposure to potentially harmful content since the 2011 survey. However, seeing potentially harmful content does not in itself tell us whether a child was harmed by their experience. We continued this work in the EUKO 2018 survey, which emphasised our distinction between risk and harm: exposure to potentially harmful content is important to measure, but it should not be assumed that every encounter results in a negative outcome.⁸¹

The online environment in which these experiences take place has, however, changed considerably. Smartphones, social media and increasingly visual forms of communication have changed how, when and where children encounter online content, while platform design and personalised recommendation systems may also shape what is presented to them.⁸² It has become an important part of the platform economy, with social media platforms relying extensively on content created by their users. Platform design and personalised recommendation systems

may also shape children's exposure to potentially harmful content, including content they have not actively searched for. Experimental research using simulated user profiles has shown how recommender systems can progressively expose users to increasingly toxic content.⁸³ This makes it increasingly difficult to assume that exposure necessarily follows an active search. Children may encounter potentially harmful material because they looked for it, because it was shared by others, or because it appeared in a feed.

For this reason, the present survey continues our earlier measurement of exposure to potentially harmful content while adapting it to changes in children's online environments. As in previous EUKO surveys, **our aim is not to assume that every encounter has the same meaning or consequence for every child.** Rather, we first examine whether children have encountered particular kinds of content and how often this has happened, and then, through follow-up questions, whether the exposure was intentional and how children responded to the experience.

Measuring harmful user-generated content

We first introduced questions on potentially harmful user-generated content in the EUKO 2011 survey, and developed them further in our 2018 and 2025 surveys. In 2011, older children (aged 11–16) were asked about seeing hate, eating disorders, self-harm, drug use and suicide-related content.⁸⁴ In the EUKO 2018 survey, our measure included six categories: ways of physically harming or hurting oneself, ways of committing suicide, ways to be very thin, hate messages attacking certain groups or individuals, experiences of taking drugs, and gory or violent images.⁸⁵

For the current survey, we retained the core of this approach but updated the measure. Children aged 11–16 were asked:

In the past year, how often have you seen online content or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things?

⁷⁷ Livingstone & Stoilova (2021).

⁷⁸ Livingstone et al. (2011).

⁷⁹ Directive (EU) 2018/1808 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 November 2018.

⁸⁰ Livingstone & Stoilova (2021).

⁸¹ Smahel et al. (2020).

⁸² Livingstone et al. (2018).

⁸³ Baker et al. (2024).

⁸⁴ Livingstone et al. (2011).

⁸⁵ Smahel et al. (2020).

The analysis presented in this section covers ways of physically harming or hurting oneself; ways of committing suicide; ways to be very thin, such as being anorexic or bulimic or ‘thinspiration’; experiences of taking drugs; gory or violent images, for example of people hurting other people or animals; challenges and dares that might seriously hurt or kill someone; and adult pornography (X-rated content). Challenges and dares that might seriously hurt or kill oneself and adult pornography were added for the current survey. Conspiracy theories were also included in the questionnaire as a new item but are not included in the analyses presented here as their scope is slightly different.

There are several changes from earlier surveys that should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings. The wording and response scales have changed across survey waves, and for the current survey ‘Several times per day’ was added as the highest frequency category. These changes mean that comparisons with the 2011 and 2018 surveys should be made cautiously. The earlier surveys provide an important historical reference point, but differences in percentages across waves cannot necessarily be interpreted as changes in prevalence over time.⁸⁶

Exposure to potentially harmful online content

Across the 19 countries, children report encountering a range of potentially harmful online content. **On average, the most commonly reported category is gory or violent images of people hurting other people or animals (40%), closely followed by content about ways to be very thin (39%) and ways of physically harming or hurting oneself (37%).** Just over a third report encountering challenges or dares that might seriously hurt or kill someone (36%), while 33% report content about experiences of taking drugs. The two least commonly reported categories are adult pornography or X-rated content (27%) and ways of committing suicide (25%).

There are considerable differences between countries. Belgium and Czechia measured some of the highest levels across several types of harmful content. In Belgium, 65% report gory or violent images, 56% content about physically harming oneself, 52% dangerous challenges or dares and 48% content about experiences of taking drugs. In Czechia more than half report gory or violent images (57%), dangerous challenges (55%), self-harm content (55%) and content about ways to be very thin (54%). Malta also stands out across several categories: 53% report both

self-harm and drug-related content, 46% dangerous challenges and 45% content about ways of committing suicide.

Other countries show high levels for particular types of content rather than consistently across all categories. For example, Poland has the highest percentage reporting content about ways to be very thin (55%) compared with an average of 39% across the countries. In Italy, gory or violent images are reported by 46%, while the other categories range from 20% for suicide-related content to 40% for dangerous challenges. Latvia also reports relatively high levels for content about ways to be very thin (46%) and experiences of taking drugs (47%). These differences suggest that the experiences of specific types of harmful content vary between countries.

On the other hand, Switzerland, Portugal and Serbia generally report lower levels of exposure. In Switzerland, the percentages range from 16% for suicide-related content to 29% for gory or violent images. In Portugal, they range from 18% for suicide-related content to 30% for self-harm content, while in Serbia they range from 14% for suicide-related content to 30% for content about ways to be very thin. Ireland also reports low levels for several categories, including 16% for adult pornography, 17% for suicide-related content and 26% for both self-harm and content about ways to be very thin.

There are also cross-country variations within individual content types. Self-harm content ranges from 25% in Serbia to 56% in Belgium, while content about ways to be very thin ranges from 24% in Switzerland to 55% in Poland. Exposure to gory or violent images varies even more, from 28% in Portugal and Serbia to 65% in Belgium. Dangerous challenges or dares range from 21% in Serbia to 55% in Czechia. Differences are also evident for adult pornography, which ranges from 16% in Ireland to 40% in Czechia.

Although suicide-related content is the least frequently reported category overall (25%), the country figures range considerably, from 14% in Serbia and 15% in Spain to 45% in Malta and 39% in Belgium. Similarly, content about experiences of taking drugs is reported by a third of children on average, but ranges from 18% in Serbia to 53% in Malta. Overall, although there is no single pattern of exposure to potentially harmful online content across the 19 countries, several noteworthy patterns emerge. Countries with high levels for one type of content often have high levels for several others, as is particularly apparent in Belgium, Czechia and Malta, although this is not uniform across all types of content. There are

⁸⁶ Livingstone et al. (2011); Smahel et al. (2020).

also differences in the frequency of the different types of content, with gory or violent images standing out as the most commonly encountered, while some of the other forms of potentially harmful content are less frequently reported. Previous EUKO research has similarly shown that exposure to potentially harmful content varies by both content type and national context.⁸⁷ Looking more broadly across survey waves, the findings point towards higher reported exposure to some types of potentially harmful content than in earlier EUKO surveys. However, this should be understood as a general pattern rather than a precise trend, as the questions, response categories and countries included have changed between survey waves.⁸⁸

Exposure to content about ways of physically harming or hurting oneself

Across the 19 countries, 15% of children report seeing online content about ways of physically harming or hurting oneself at least every month, while a further 24% have seen such content a few times. Almost two-thirds (62%) report that they have never encountered this type of content. While regular exposure is reported by a minority of children, more than a third have encountered self-harm-related content at least occasionally.

Table 18: Experience and frequency of potentially harmful online content, by country

	Ways of physically harming or hurting oneself	Ways of committing suicide	Ways to be very thin	Their experiences of taking drugs	Gory or violent images	Challenges and dares that might seriously hurt or kill you	Adult pornography (X-rated content)
AT	39	25	44	39	41	43	32
BE	56	39	46	48	65	52	32
CH	26	16	24	22	29	27	20
CZ	55	37	54	43	57	55	40
EE	35	29	45	38	36	43	29
ES	27	15	26	26	34	35	18
FI	41	29	45	44	41	34	33
HR	42	28	43	30	38	34	31
IE	26	17	26	30	30	28	16
IT	37	20	38	36	46	40	34
LU	33	19	30	26	35	31	26
LV	41	34	46	47	42	33	31
MT	53	45	42	53	44	46	29
NO	29	24	37	21	33	24	20
PL	41	31	55	32	39	45	30
PT	30	18	28	25	28	23	21
RO	41	26	32	39	43	34	28
RS	25	14	30	18	28	21	18
SK	37	23	48	30	38	30	30
Ave	37	25	39	33	40	36	27

QC24⁸⁹: In the past year, how often have you seen online content or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things? Base: All children 10–16

⁸⁷ Smahel et al. (2020).

⁸⁸ Livingstone et al. (2011); Smahel et al. (2020).

⁸⁹ In EUKO 2011, EUKO 2018 (QF50, core) and GKO 2020. EUKO 2011 and GKO 2020: different wording. GKO 2020:

different scale. Source: Adapted from EUKO (2011). Changes from EUKO 2018: ‘Several times per day’ added for EUKO 2025.

There is considerable variation between countries. Belgium and Czechia have the highest proportions reporting at least monthly exposure, at 24% in both, followed by Malta (21%) and Latvia (20%). Monthly or more frequent exposure is lowest in Ireland (6%) and is also low in Switzerland and Slovakia (9% in both).

Looking at children who have encountered this content either at least monthly or a few times, exposure is the highest in Belgium, where 24% report seeing it at least monthly and a further 32% a few times. A similar pattern is found in Czechia (24% and 30%) and Malta (21% and 33%). In Serbia, 18% report at least monthly exposure and 31% a few times. By contrast, around three-quarters of children in Switzerland and Ireland (74% in both) say they have never encountered such content, and 73% in Spain and 71% in Norway.

Looking at our previous measurements across EUKO survey waves, we see that online exposure to self-harm content is not a new phenomenon. In the EUKO 2011 survey, 7% of 11- to 16-year-olds reported having seen websites discussing ways of physically harming or hurting oneself during the previous year, rising from 4% among 11- to 12-year-olds to 10% among 15- to 16-year-olds.⁹⁰ In the 2018 survey, an average of 10% of 12- to 16-year-olds reported encountering such content at least monthly, with a further 25% reporting exposure a few times during the year.⁹¹

These findings indicate the continuing presence of self-harm-related content in children’s online experiences, and show that older adolescents have consistently reported greater exposure than younger children. Looking across our previous surveys, broadly comparable measures also point towards an upward pattern in reported exposure to self-harm-related content. However, the figures should not be interpreted as a direct trend, since the surveys differed in question wording, response categories and age groups.

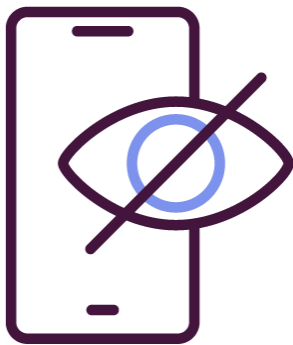
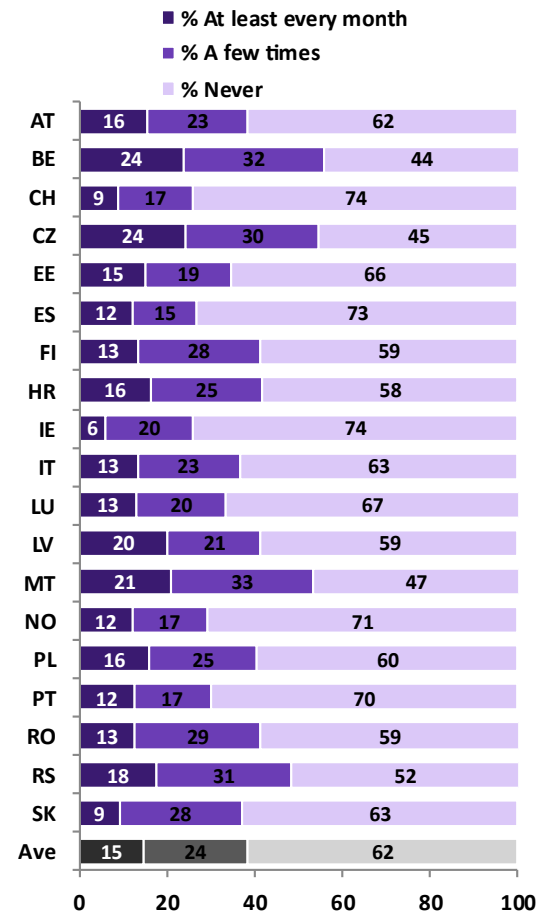


Figure 61: Frequency of seeing harmful user-generated content (ways of physically harming or hurting oneself), by country



QC24: In the PAST YEAR, how often have you seen online content or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things? QC24a: Ways of physically harming or hurting oneself. Base: All children 12–16

Exposure to content about ways of physically harming or hurting oneself increases clearly with age. Across the 19 countries, 27% of 12-year-olds report having encountered this type of content compared with 38% of 13- to 14-year-olds and 48% of 15- to 16-year-olds.

This age pattern is found in almost all countries. Some of the largest increases are found in Norway, where exposure rises from 13% among 12-year-olds to 32% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 50% among 15- to 16-year-olds, and Ireland (9%, 24% and 40%). Large differences are also observed in Luxembourg (16%,

⁹⁰ Livingstone et al. (2011).

⁹¹ Smahel et al. (2020).

30% and 41%), Czechia (37%, 54% and 62%), Estonia (32%, 45% and 52%) and Finland (28%, 45% and 52%).

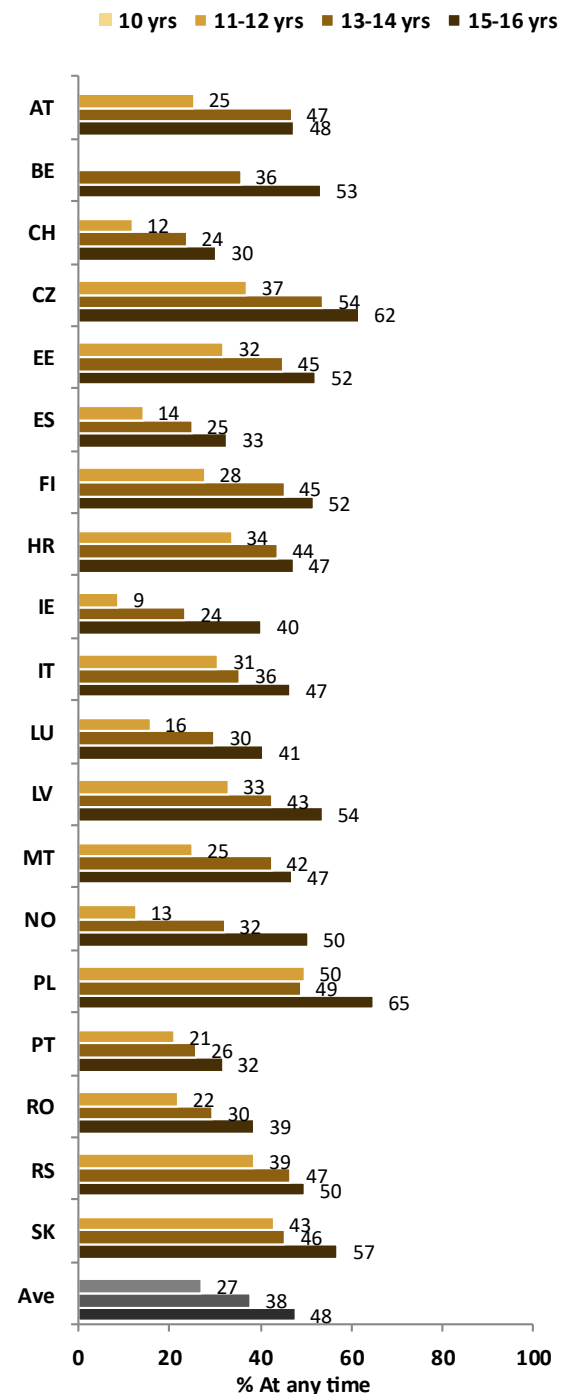
In some countries, high levels are already observed among the youngest age group. In Poland, 50% of 12-year-olds report exposure compared with 49% of 13- to 14-year-olds and 65% of 15- to 16-year-olds. In Slovakia, the figures are 43%, 46% and 57%, while in Serbia they are 39%, 47% and 50%. These countries thus differ from those where exposure rises more sharply from a relatively low level among 12-year-olds.

There are a few exceptions to such increase across all three age groups. In Poland, the percentage is almost unchanged between 12-year-olds and 13- to 14-year-olds (50% and 49%), then increasing to 65% among 15- to 16-year-olds. In Austria, there is also little difference between the two older groups (47% and 48%), following a much lower level among 12-year-olds (25%). Overall, in every country, the percentage among 15- to 16-year-olds is higher than among 11- to 12-year-olds.

The age pattern is also consistent with our earlier EUKO findings. In the 2011 survey, exposure to websites discussing ways of physically harming or hurting oneself increased from 4% among 11- to 12-year-olds to 10% among 15- to 16-year-olds.⁹² The later EUKO survey from 2018/2019 also found that exposure to potentially harmful online content generally increased with age, although the extent of age differences varied by content type and country.⁹³ The current results therefore continue to show age as an important differentiating factor in exposure to self-harm-related content, with older adolescents reporting such encounters more often than younger children.

As with the earlier comparisons, however, we should not interpret the differences between survey waves as evidence of an increase from 4% or 10% to the current percentages. The wording, response categories, age bases and survey coverage changed between waves.⁹⁴ The earlier findings are therefore useful for showing the continuity of the age pattern rather than for estimating change over time. However, the available evidence points towards greater reported exposure over time, although changes in measurement do not allow for a direct trend comparison.

Figure 62: Frequency of seeing harmful user-generated content, by country and age group



QC24: In the PAST YEAR, how often have you seen online content or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things? QC24a: Ways of physically harming or hurting themselves. Base: All children 12–16

⁹² Livingstone et al. (2011).

⁹³ Smahel et al. (2020).

⁹⁴ Livingstone et al. (2011); Smahel et al. (2020).



Across the 19 countries, 42% of girls and 33% of boys report encountering online content about ways of physically harming or hurting oneself at any time. Girls report this experience more often than boys, although the gender difference varies considerably between countries.

Girls report higher exposure than boys in most countries. The largest differences are measured in Poland (49% of girls versus 31% of boys), Finland (49% versus 32%), Latvia (49% versus 32%) and Czechia (63% versus 47%). Differences are also observed in Serbia (54% versus 42%), Norway (34% versus 23%), Romania (46% versus 35%), Estonia (39% versus 29%) and Luxembourg (38% versus 28%).

In some countries, however, the gender difference is small or absent. The shares of girls and boys are the same in Spain (27% for both) and Portugal (30% for both) and differ by only 1 percentage point in Ireland (26% of girls and 25% of boys). The pattern is reversed in Malta (56% versus 53%).

There is also considerable variation between countries. Among girls, exposure ranges from 26% in Ireland to 63% in Czechia, while among boys it ranges from 22% in Switzerland to 56% in Malta.

In the 2018 survey, girls in some countries were more likely than boys to report encountering potentially harmful online content, although gender differences varied by country and by type of content.⁹⁵ In the EUKO 2011 survey, the gender pattern was not that clear for most of the harmful content categories and was reversed for this specific self-harm item.⁹⁶ The current results show a similar lack of a uniform gender pattern: **while girls report greater exposure to self-harm-related content in most countries, the size of the difference varies considerably**, and in a few countries there is little difference or the pattern is reversed.

Across the 19 countries, children from low SES households report greater exposure to content about ways of physically harming or hurting oneself than children from higher SES households. On average, 44% of children from low SES households report having encountered this content compared with 38% of those from medium SES and 36% from high SES households.

The relationship between SES and exposure varies considerably between countries. In Latvia, exposure decreases from 62% among low SES children to 39% among medium SES and 30% among high SES children. A similar pattern is observed in Estonia (63%, 46% and 43%), Romania (54%, 39% and 32%) and Portugal (35%, 26% and 21%). Lower exposure among the high SES group is also found in Spain (38%, 36% and 33%), Ireland (35%, 29% and 26%) and Slovakia (33%, 34% and 29%).

In several countries, however, SES differences are small. In Switzerland, 27% of both medium and high SES children report exposure, while in Czechia the proportions are 56% among low SES, 57% among medium SES and 54% among high SES children. Differences are also small in Belgium (57% among medium SES and 52% among high SES children) and Norway (27% and 25%), although measures for all three SES groups are not available in these countries.

The pattern is reversed in a small number of countries. Most notably, in Malta, exposure is reported by 33% of medium SES children and 52% of high SES children. In Serbia, these figures are 36% and 43%. These results show that the overall association between lower SES and greater exposure is not found in every country.

There is also substantial variation between countries within the same SES group. Among low SES children, for example, reported exposure ranges from 33% in Slovakia to 63% in Estonia, while among high SES children it ranges from 21% in Portugal to 54% in Czechia. Country context therefore appears to be important, with socioeconomic differences within countries.

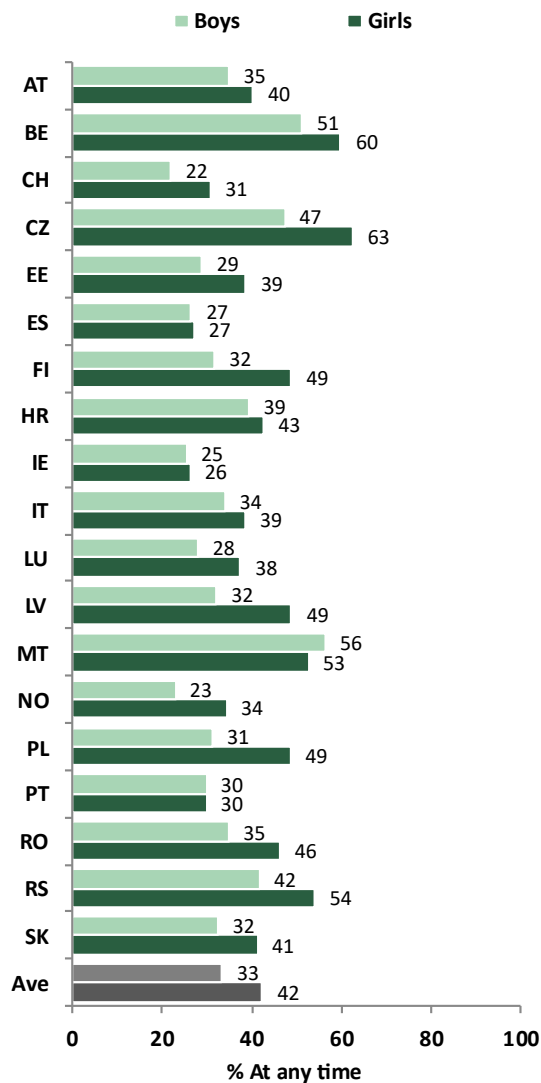
Overall, the results show a tendency towards higher exposure among children from lower SES households, but this relationship is less consistent than the age pattern observed.



⁹⁵ Smahel et al. (2020).

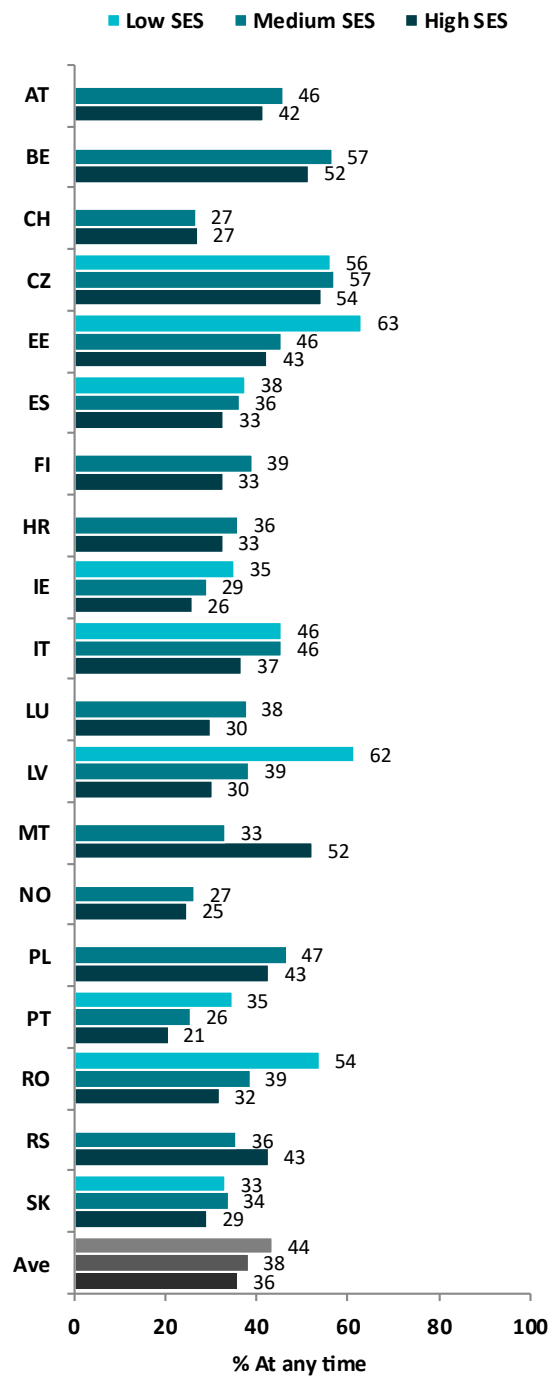
⁹⁶ Livingstone et al. (2011).

Figure 63: Frequency of seeing harmful user-generated content, by country and gender



QC24: In the PAST YEAR, how often have you seen online content or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things? QC24a: Ways of physically harming or hurting themselves. Base: All children 12–16

Figure 64: Frequency of seeing harmful user-generated content, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC24: In the PAST YEAR, how often have you seen online content or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things? QC24a: Ways of physically harming or hurting themselves. Base: All children 12–16.



10. Hateful messages

Hateful messages are examined in more detail in this chapter as a specific case of children's exposure to potentially harmful online content. Unlike many negative online experiences, hateful messages are often directed at social groups or categories rather than at the individual child. Children may therefore encounter degrading or discriminatory content without being personally targeted by it.⁹⁷ Such content also has a wider social dimension, as it may communicate prejudice, discrimination or hostility towards particular groups.⁹⁸

Hate messages are related to hate speech, which broadly refers to forms of communication that spread or promote discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of hatred based on intolerance.⁹⁹ Children can experience hateful content in different ways. They may be exposed to hateful messages without being personally targeted, they may themselves be targets of such messages, or they may create or post hateful content.¹⁰⁰ These distinctions are important, as exposure to hateful content is more common than direct victimisation or perpetration, and the three experiences should not be treated as equivalent.¹⁰¹ As in our previous EUKO research, the analysis presented here focuses on children's exposure to hateful messages rather than on victimisation or perpetration.¹⁰²

As discussed in Chapter 7 on perceptions of safety and communication online, online risk and online harm should not be treated as synonymous. Children may encounter negative situations online without necessarily experiencing them as upsetting or harmful while their capacity to respond and seek support also differs. Hateful messages provide a useful case for examining this distinction, as the current survey measures not only exposure, but also whether the most recent encounter was intentional and how children felt about it.

Measuring hateful messages

EUKO has measured children's exposure to hateful messages in previous surveys. In the 2018 survey, children were asked how often, in the past year, they had seen hateful or degrading messages or comments online against people or certain groups of people.¹⁰³ In the 2020 report, we published the results for children who encountered such content at least every month or

more often, those who had seen it a few times, and those who had never encountered it. In the current survey, we keep this general approach, although some changes were made to the wording and response scale. Children were asked how often in the past year they had seen hateful or degrading messages or comments online against people or certain groups of people, with examples including women, Muslims, migrants, Jews, Roma, LGBTQIA+ people and people with disabilities. The examples were updated from the previous survey, and 'Several times per day' was added as the highest frequency response. For the analyses presented here, responses are again grouped into three categories: at least every month or more often, a few times, and never, allowing us to describe both whether and how frequently children encounter hateful messages.

The current survey also allows us to examine the circumstances in which children encounter such content and their responses to it. Children who had seen hateful messages were asked whether, the last time they saw such content, it was their intention to see it (QC27). This allows us to distinguish between intentional and unintentional exposure. They were also asked how they felt the last time they saw hateful content (QC28), with responses ranging from feeling 'good' or 'thinking it was funny' through to feeling 'nothing in particular', to feeling 'a little', 'fairly' or 'very upset'. By this, we can measure the frequency of exposure, whether the most recent encounter was intentional, and how children responded to it. This distinction is important because encountering hateful content does not in itself tell us whether children experienced the encounter as upsetting or harmful.



⁹⁷ Kansok-Dusche et al. (2023); Smahel et al. (2020).

⁹⁸ Kansok-Dusche et al. (2023).

⁹⁹ Smahel et al. (2020).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Kansok-Dusche et al. (2023).

¹⁰² Smahel et al. (2020).

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Seeing hateful messages online

Across the 19 countries, **30% of children report seeing hateful messages at least every month**, while **27% report seeing them hardly ever**, and **43% say they have never seen such messages**. The results therefore show that exposure to hateful messages is relatively common, although the frequency with which children encounter them varies considerably between countries.

The highest proportions reporting exposure at least every month are found in Serbia (40%), followed by Czechia (39%), Belgium and Croatia (38% in both) and Latvia (36%). At the other end of the distribution, at least monthly exposure is lowest in Ireland (15%) and Switzerland (20%), followed by Malta (22%) and Spain (23%).

The proportion of children who report never encountering hateful messages also varies considerably. More than half report no exposure in Switzerland (58%) and Ireland (56%) as well as in Luxembourg and Norway (51% in both). By contrast, the proportion saying that they have never encountered such messages is lowest in Belgium (29%) and Serbia (30%), followed by Croatia (36%) and Finland (37%).

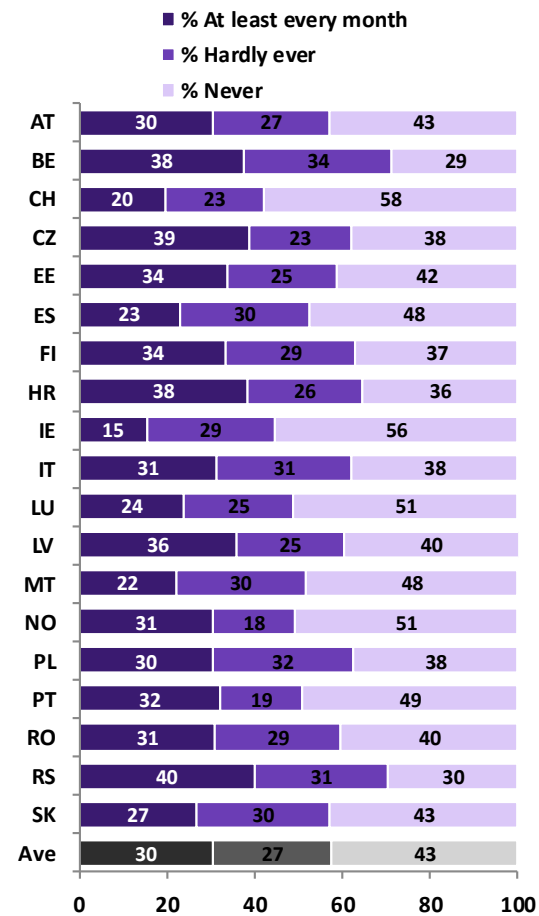
The distribution across the three frequency categories also differs between countries. In Serbia, for example, 40% report encountering hateful messages at least monthly, 31% hardly ever and 30% never. In Belgium, the corresponding proportions are 38%, 34% and 29%. By comparison, in Ireland, only 15% report at least monthly exposure, 29% hardly ever and 56% never.

For context, our previous EUKO research also showed substantial cross-national variation in exposure to hateful messages. In the 2018 survey, an average of 17% of children across the countries included in the analysis reported seeing hateful messages at least every month or more often, while 24% reported seeing them a few times and 59% never saw them.¹⁰⁴ At least monthly exposure also varied considerably between countries, from 4% in Germany to 48% in Poland. These earlier findings provide useful context for the current results, particularly in showing that substantial cross-national variation is not new. They should not, however, be interpreted as a direct trend in comparison with the current survey, given differences in the

response scale and reporting categories, as well as in the countries and samples included.

In the current survey, **30% report at least monthly exposure overall**, and considerable differences between countries are again evident. However, these figures should not be interpreted as showing a direct increase over time, given differences in the response scale and reporting categories, as well as in the countries and samples included in the two surveys.

Figure 65: Frequency of child having seen hateful messages, by country



QC26¹⁰⁵: In the PAST YEAR, have you EVER seen hateful or degrading messages or comments online, against people or certain groups of people? Base: All children 10–16.

Overall, the findings show that exposure to hateful messages is relatively widespread but unevenly distributed across the countries. At least monthly exposure ranges from 15% in Ireland to 40% in Serbia. Importantly, these figures concern exposure to hateful

¹⁰⁴ Smahel et al. (2020).

¹⁰⁵ In EUKO2018 (module 1_2). Changes from EUKO2018: wording changed from “PAST 12 MONTHS” to “PAST YEAR”,

and “women”, “LGBTIQ+” and “people with disability” added for EUKO2025; Scale changed, previous scale: No – Yes – I don’t know – Prefer not to say.

messages; they do not indicate that the messages were directed at the children themselves, nor whether children experienced seeing them as upsetting or harmful. These aspects are considered further through the questions on intentionality of exposure and children's responses to their most recent encounter.

Exposure to hateful messages increases clearly with age. Across the 19 countries, 26% of 10-year-olds report having seen hateful messages compared with 39% of 11- to 12-year-olds, 63% of 13- to 14-year-olds and 77% of 15- to 16-year-olds.

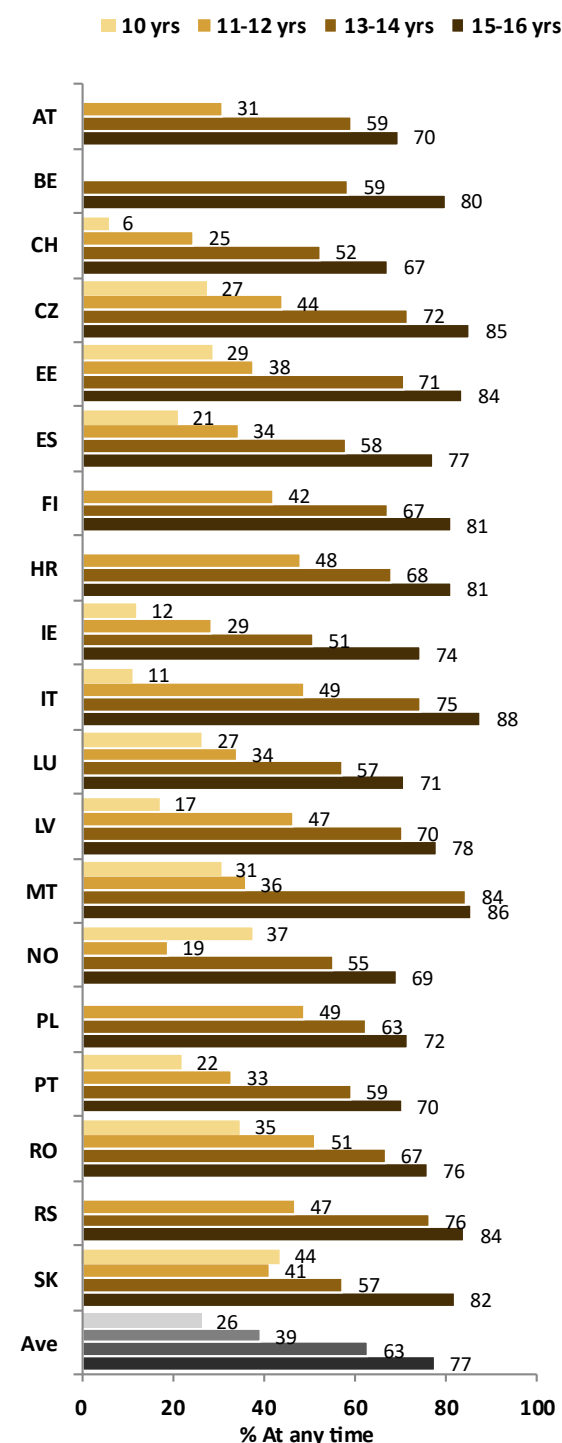
This age pattern is evident in nearly all countries, although the size of the increase varies. Some of the largest differences are found in Switzerland, where exposure rises from 6% among 10-year-olds to 25% among 11- to 12-year-olds, 52% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 67% among 15- to 16-year-olds. A similarly strong increase is found in Ireland (12%, 29%, 51% and 74%) and Italy (11%, 49%, 75% and 88%). In Czechia, exposure rises from 27% among 10-year-olds to 44%, 72% and 85% across the older age groups.

In some countries, relatively high exposure is measured among younger children. In Slovakia, 44% of 10 year olds report exposure compared with 41% of 11- to 12-year-olds, 57% of 13- to 14-year-olds and 82% of 15- to 16-year-olds. In Romania, the figures are 35%, 51%, 67% and 76%. Malta also stands out, with 84% of 13- to 14-year-olds and 86% of 15- to 16-year-olds reporting exposure, although the increase between the two oldest groups is very small.

There are a few exceptions to a completely linear age pattern. In Slovakia, exposure is slightly lower among 11- to 12-year-olds than among 10-year-olds (41% compared with 44%), before increasing among the older groups. In Malta, the difference between 13- to 14-year-olds and 15- to 16-year-olds remains very small (84% and 86%). The age pattern is consistent with our earlier EUKO findings. In the 2018 survey, exposure to hateful messages also increases with age.¹⁰⁶ The current results therefore show continuity in the age pattern.

Across the 19 countries, girls are more likely than boys to report having seen hateful messages online. Overall, **60% of girls report having seen such messages compared with 55% of boys.**

Figure 66: Frequency of child having seen hateful messages, by country and age group



QC26: In the PAST YEAR, have you EVER seen hateful or degrading messages or comments online, against people or certain groups of people? (% 'At any time' in the past year.) Base: All children 10-16

¹⁰⁶ Smahel et al. (2020).

In most countries, girls report higher exposure than boys. Some of the largest differences are observed in Austria, where 64% of girls compared with 49% of boys report having seen hateful messages, and Malta (58% compared with 45%). Differences are also evident in Finland (68% of girls and 56% of boys), Slovakia (63% and 51%), Latvia (65% and 55%) and Czechia (66% and 58%). In Belgium, exposure is high among both girls and boys, at 73% and 70%.

In several countries, however, gender differences are small or absent. The proportions are the same in Poland (62% for both boys and girls) and Portugal (51% for both) and differ only slightly in Romania (60% of girls and 58% of boys). The pattern is reversed in Croatia, where 66% of boys compared with 62% of girls report exposure, and in Ireland (46% of boys and 44% of girls).

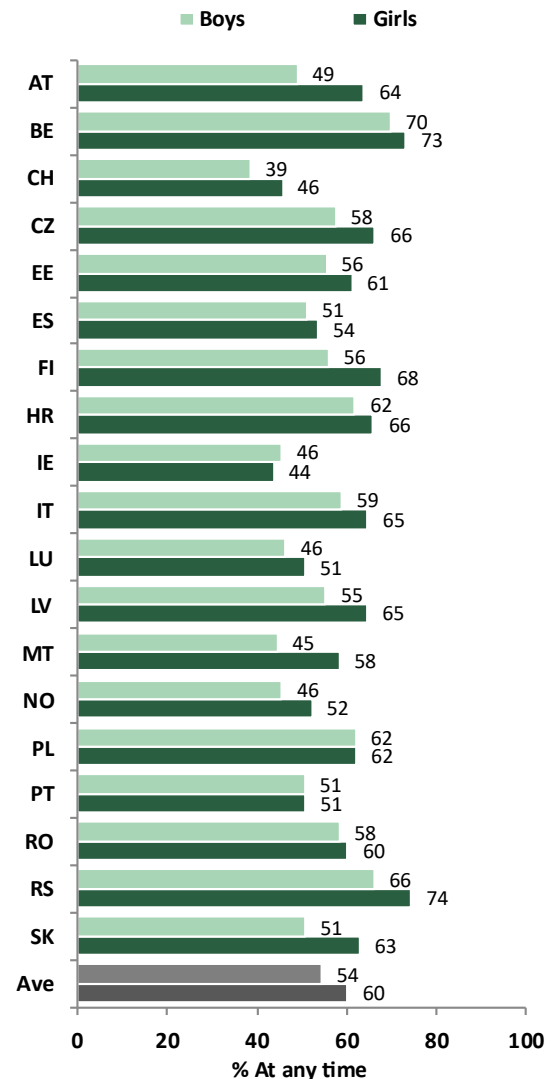
There are also substantial differences between countries. Among boys, reported exposure ranges from 39% in Switzerland to 70% in Belgium, while among girls it ranges from 44% in Ireland to 74% in Serbia. Relatively high levels among both boys and girls are found in Belgium and Serbia, whereas exposure is lower among both genders in Switzerland and Ireland.

The current gender pattern differs somewhat from that found in our earlier EUKO research. In the 2018 survey, no consistent gender differences in exposure were found.¹⁰⁷ Overall, the current findings show that girls report somewhat greater exposure to hateful messages than boys, but country differences remain substantial.

Across the 19 countries, the overall differences in exposure to hateful messages according to SES are relatively modest. On average, **57% of children from low SES households report having encountered hateful messages compared with 61% of children from medium SES and 58% from high SES households**. There is therefore no clear overall pattern of exposure increasing or decreasing with SES.

In some countries, children from low SES households report higher exposure than those from more advantaged households. This pattern is particularly evident in Estonia, where exposure decreases from 77% among low SES children to 61% among medium SES and 59% among high SES children, and Latvia (77%, 68% and 59%). Differences in the same direction are also found in Portugal (43%, 55% and 51%) only between low and medium SES, so Portugal does not show the same consistent pattern. In Spain, the differences are small (59%, 55% and 55%).

Figure 67: Frequency of child having seen hateful messages, by country and gender



QC26: In the PAST YEAR, have you EVER seen hateful or degrading messages or comments online, against people or certain groups of people? (% 'At any time' in the past year.). Base: All children 10–16.

In other countries, however, exposure is higher among children from medium or high SES households. In Czechia, it rises from 52% among low SES children to 63% among medium SES and 66% among high SES children. Slovakia shows a similar, although non-linear, pattern (49%, 66% and 56%), while in Romania exposure is 50% among low SES, 66% among medium SES and 60% among high SES children.

In several countries, SES differences are small. In Ireland, the proportions are 44%, 47% and 46%, while in Italy they are 60%, 65% and 62%. There is also no

¹⁰⁷ Smahel et al. (2020).

difference between the medium and high SES groups in Croatia (65% in both) or Norway (52% in both), although estimates for all three SES groups are not available in these countries.

There is also substantial cross-national variation within SES groups. Among low SES children, for example, exposure ranges from 43% in Portugal to 77% in Estonia and Latvia. Among high SES children, it ranges from 44% in Switzerland to 72% in Serbia. To conclude, the results therefore do not show a consistent socioeconomic pattern in exposure to hateful messages.

Intention and response to hateful messages

Exposure alone does not provide a complete picture of children's experiences with hateful messages. EUKO research has consistently distinguished between exposure to online risk and the harm that may result from such exposure. It is important to emphasise that encountering a risk does not necessarily mean that a child experiences it as upsetting or harmful.¹⁰⁸ As shown, hateful messages are relatively common in children's online environments, but seeing them does not necessarily mean that children intended to encounter them or that such experience has upset them. We therefore look at whether children intended to see the hateful content the last time they encountered it, and how they felt about that experience. This allows us to distinguish more clearly between exposure to a potential risk and children's responses to that exposure.

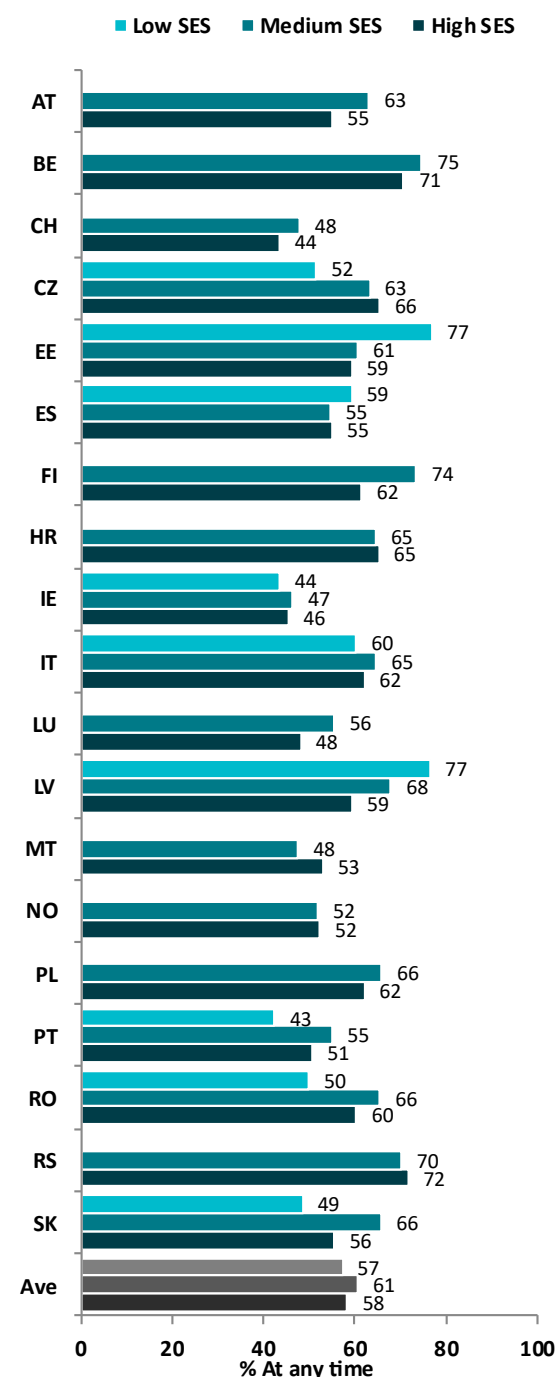
For most children who have encountered hateful messages, their last exposure was not intentional. Across the 19 countries, only 10% of children who had seen hateful or nasty messages said that they had intended to see the content the last time this happened, while 90% said they had not.

The pattern is quite consistent across the countries. Intentional exposure is highest in Romania (16%), Italy (15%) and Latvia (14%), and lowest in Ireland (4%) and Finland (6%). Thus, even in countries where intentional exposure is somewhat more common, a large majority of children report that they did not intend to see the hateful content the last time they encountered it.

Previous research based on EUKO data has also distinguished between intentional and unintentional exposure to cyberhate, showing that these may

represent different experiences and may be associated with different individual factors.¹⁰⁹

Figure 68: Frequency of child having seen hateful messages, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country

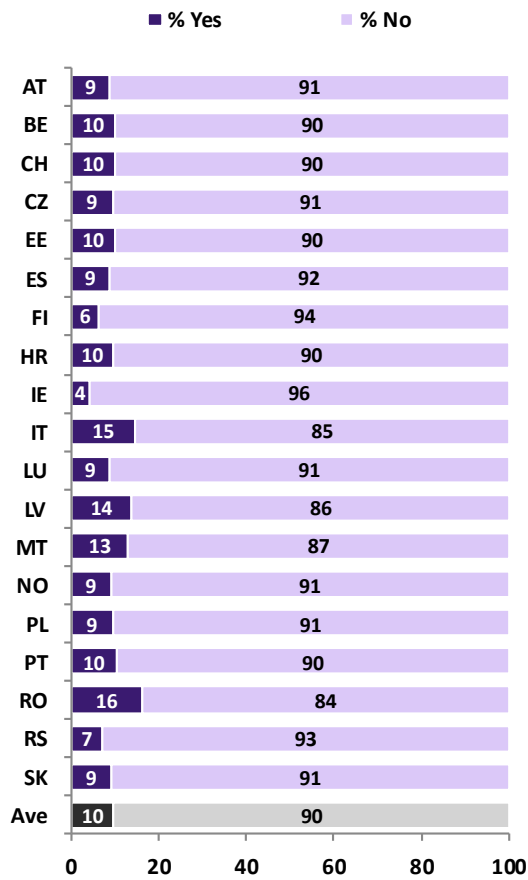


QC26: In the PAST YEAR, have you EVER seen hateful or degrading messages or comments online, against people or certain groups of people? (% 'At any time' in the past year.) Base: All children 10–16.

¹⁰⁸ Livingstone et al. (2011); Smahel et al. (2020).

¹⁰⁹ Bedrosova et al. (2023).

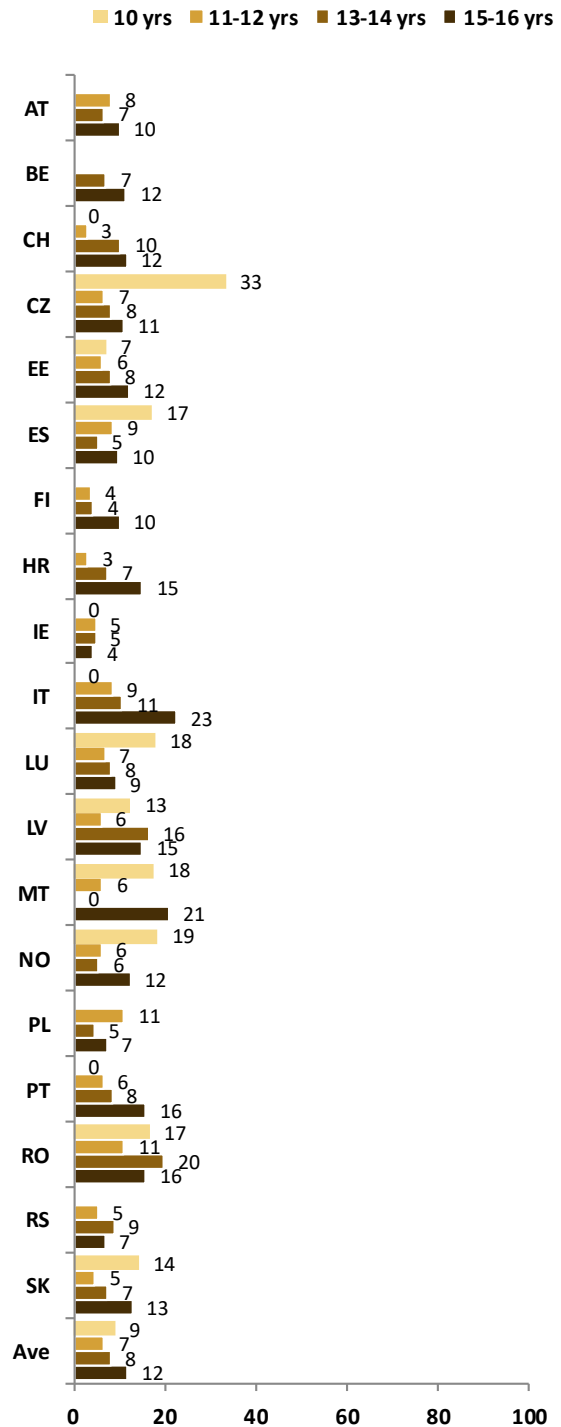
Figure 69: Intention to see hateful messages, by country



QC27¹¹⁰: And the last time you saw such content, was it your intention to see it? Base: All children 10–16 who have seen hateful or nasty messages.

Intentional exposure to hateful messages is relatively low across all age groups. Overall, 9% of 10-year-olds, 7% of 11- to 12-year-olds, 8% of 13- to 14-year-olds and 12% of 15- to 16-year-olds who had encountered hateful messages said that they had intended to see the content the last time this happened. There is therefore no clear age pattern to intentional exposure, although the proportion is somewhat higher among 15- to 16-year-olds.

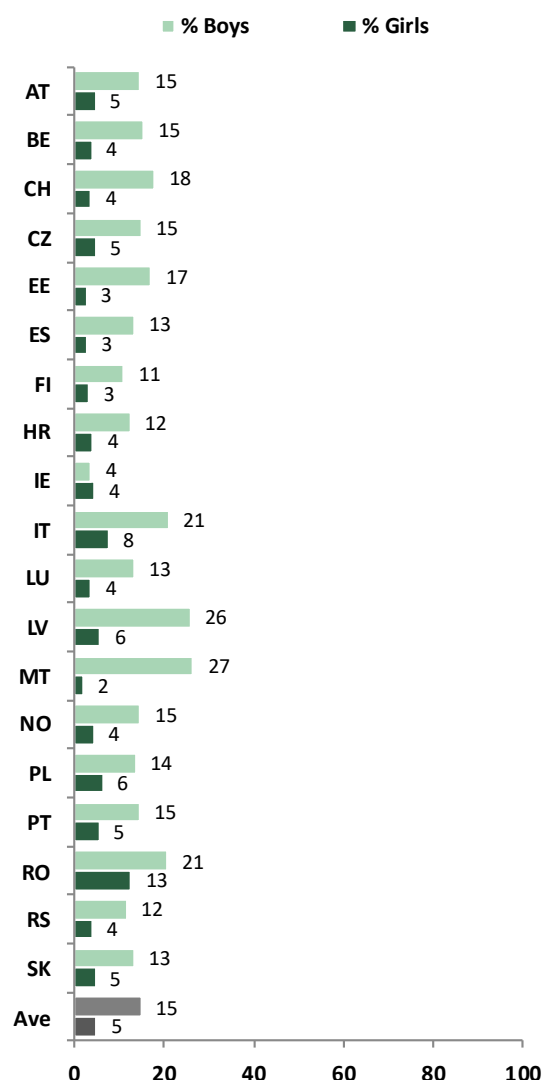
Figure 70: Intention to see hateful messages, by country and age group



QC27: And the last time you saw such content, was it your intention to see it? Base: All children 10–16 who have seen hateful or nasty messages.

¹¹⁰ In EUKO2018 (QF51, optional) about Harmful user generated content. Changes from EUKO2018: changed from “have seen” to “saw” for EUKO2025; Scale modified.

Figure 71: Intention to see hateful messages, by country and gender



QC27: And the last time you saw such content, was it your intention to see it? Base: All children 10–16 who have seen hateful or nasty messages.

Country patterns vary considerably. Among 15- to 16-year-olds, intentional exposure is highest in Italy (23%) and Malta (21%), followed by Romania and Portugal (16% in both) and Croatia and Latvia (15% in both). In some countries, however, relatively high figures are found among younger children. For example, 33% of 10-year-olds in Czechia, 19% in Norway, 18% in Luxembourg and Malta, and 17% in Romania and Spain report that their last exposure was intentional.

Overall, these findings are in contrast with the age pattern found for exposure to hateful messages itself. Older children are considerably more likely to have encountered hateful messages, but among those who

have encountered them, intention to see the content does not increase consistently with age.

Among children who had encountered hateful messages, **boys are more likely than girls to report that their most recent exposure was intentional.** Across the 19 countries, **15% of boys compared with 5% of girls said that they had intended to see the hateful content the last time they encountered it.**

The same general pattern is found in almost all countries. Some of the largest differences are found in Malta (27% of boys compared with 2% of girls), Latvia (26% and 6%), Estonia (17% and 3%) and Switzerland (18% and 4%). Boys also report higher intentional exposure in Romania and Italy (21% of boys in both countries, compared with 13% and 8% of girls). Ireland is the exception, where the figures are very similar and slightly higher among girls (before rounding).

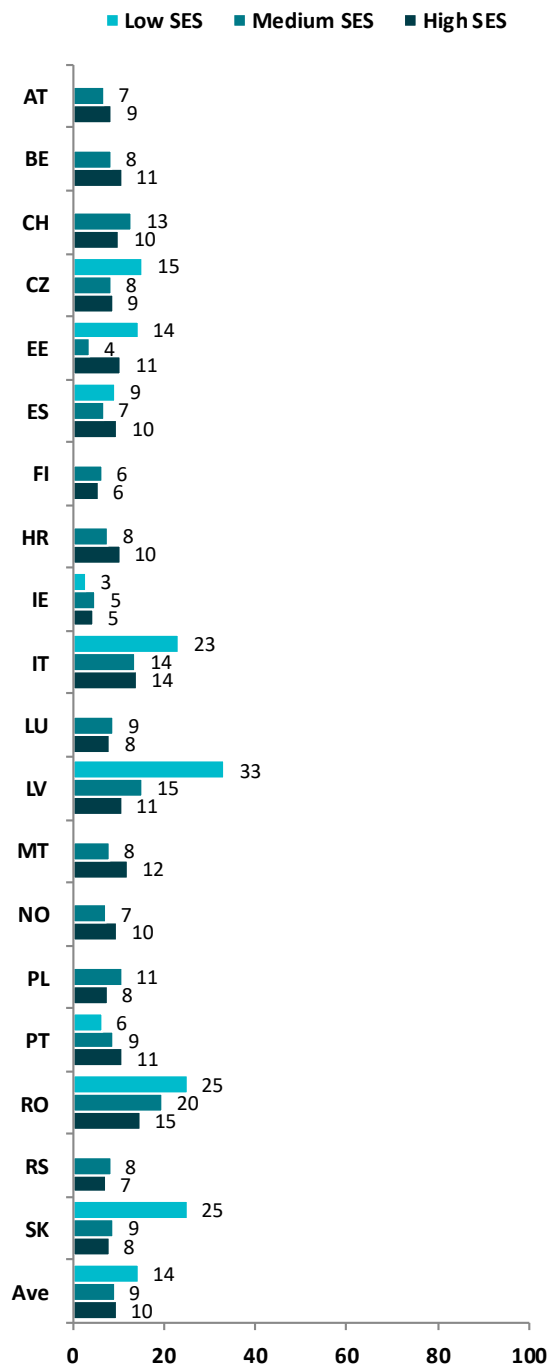
Our findings on exposure to hateful messages show that girls are somewhat more likely than boys to have encountered hateful messages overall (60% compared with 55%), but among children who have encountered such content, boys are more likely to say that their last encounter was intentional. Thus, gender differences in exposure and in intention to see the content show different patterns. This further shows the importance of distinguishing between exposure to hateful content and the circumstances in which that exposure occurs.

Across the 19 countries, 14% of low SES children compared with 9% of medium SES and 10% of high SES children said that they had intended to see the hateful content the last time they encountered it. This indicates no clear overall pattern by SES, although intentional exposure is somewhat higher among children from low SES households.

Country patterns vary considerably. The higher figure among low SES children is particularly visible in Latvia (33% low SES, 15% medium SES and 11% high SES), Slovakia (25%, 9% and 8%), Romania (25%, 20% and 15%) and Italy (23%, 14% and 14%). In some countries, however, the differences are small or move in a different direction. In Ireland, intentional exposure is low across all SES groups (3%, 5% and 5%), while in Switzerland the figure is somewhat higher among medium SES than high SES children (13% and 10%).

Overall, the findings therefore provide some indication of higher intentional exposure among low SES children, but not a consistent SES pattern across the countries. As with the age analysis, these differences should be interpreted cautiously because the analysis includes only children who had already encountered hateful messages and some country by SES groups may have relatively small bases.

Figure 72: Intention to see hateful messages, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC27: And the last time you saw such content, was it your intention to see it? Base: All children 10–16 who have seen hateful or nasty messages.

How children felt about seeing hateful messages

Thinking about the last time they saw hateful messages, **50% of children said that they felt at least 'a little, fairly or very upset'.** A further **38% said that they did not feel anything in particular, while 13% said that they felt good or thought the content was funny.** Thus, feeling upset is the most commonly reported response, although children's reactions vary considerably.

There is considerable variation between countries. The proportion reporting feeling upset is highest in Austria (67%), Malta (67%) and Luxembourg (66%), followed by Portugal (61%) and Italy (59%). It is lowest in Belgium (30%) and Latvia (31%), where more than half instead report that they did not feel anything in particular (53% and 52%). Feeling good or thinking the content was funny is less common, ranging from 4% in Ireland to around 17% in Estonia, Belgium and Czechia.

Overall, the findings show that exposure to hateful messages does not affect all children in the same way. While around half report being upset to some degree about their most recent encounter, others report no particular feeling, and a smaller proportion respond positively or with amusement. Importantly, with this data we aim to capture children's reported feelings about their last encounter and should not be interpreted as a direct measure of harm.

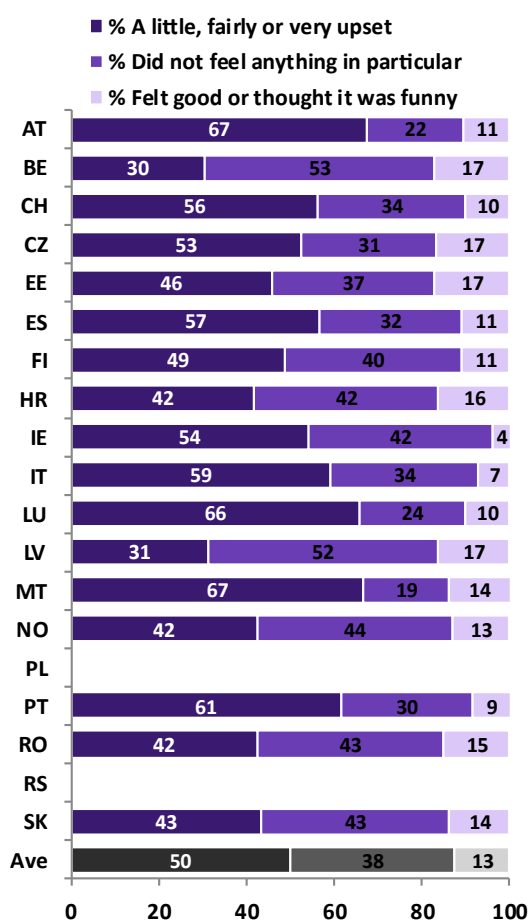
Children's responses to hateful messages vary by age, although the pattern is not linear. Across the countries included, 58% of 11- to 12-year-olds said that they felt at least 'a little upset' the last time they saw hateful messages, compared with 51% of 13- to 14-year-olds and 46% of 15- to 16-year-olds. Among 10-year-olds, the corresponding figure is 47%. Thus, reported upset is highest among 11- to 12-year-olds and somewhat lower among older adolescents.

Among 11- to 12-year-olds, the proportion reporting feeling upset is particularly high in Malta (81%), Switzerland (75%), Luxembourg (72%) and Italy (71%), while lower levels are found in Latvia (41%). Among 15- to 16-year-olds, the figures range from 26% in Belgium and 34% in Latvia and Croatia to 77% in Malta and 70% in Austria. Country patterns by age are not consistent: for example, reported upset decreases with age in Italy (71% among 11- to 12-year-olds and 50% among 15- to 16-year-olds), while in Austria it is higher among 15- to 16-year-olds (70%) than among 11- to 12-year-olds (55%).

Overall, there is therefore no consistent age pattern across the countries, although the average results

suggest that 11- to 12-year-olds are somewhat more likely to report being upset than older adolescents. As before, country by age differences should be interpreted cautiously because the analysis includes only children who had encountered hateful messages, and some age groups have relatively small bases.

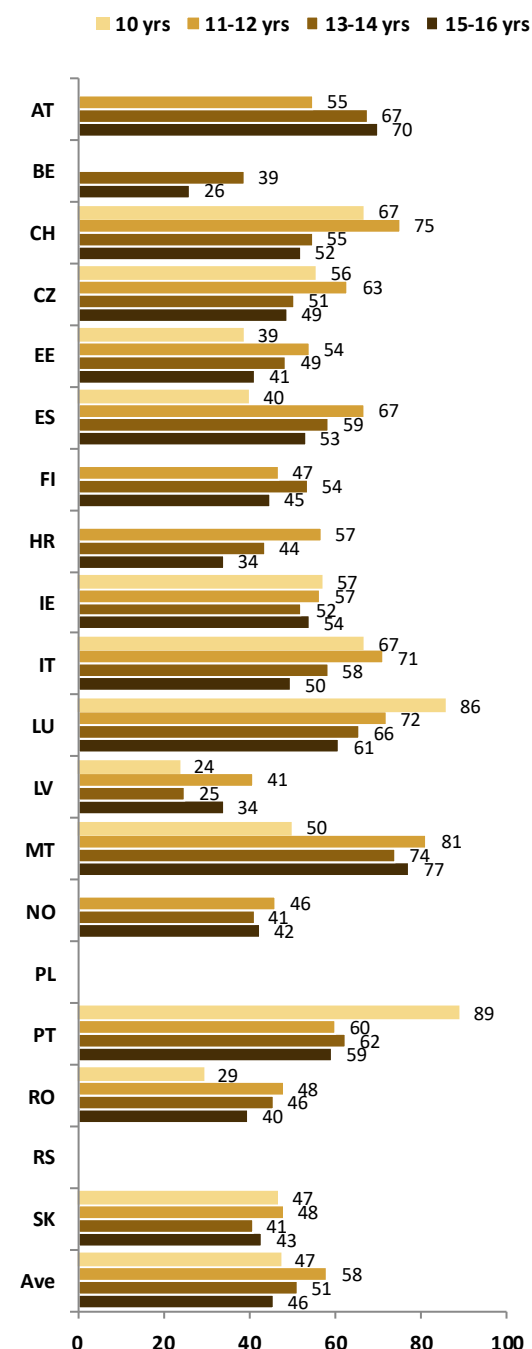
Figure 73: How the child felt about seeing hateful messages, by country



QC28¹¹¹: Thinking of how you felt the last time you saw this kind of content, how did you feel about it? No available data for Poland and Serbia. Base: All children 10–16 who have seen hateful or nasty messages.

¹¹¹ Question formulation QF32 in EUKO2018, but not used specifically for seeing hateful messages/comments in EUKO2018. In EUKO2011, EUKO2018 (QF32, core) & GKO2020. EUKO2011 & GKO2020: different wording. EUKO2011: different scale. Source: EUKO (2011) adapted.

Figure 74: How the child felt about seeing hateful messages, by country and age group



QC28: Thinking of how you felt the last time you saw this kind of content, how did you feel about it? No available data for Poland and Serbia. Base: All children 10–16 who have seen hateful or nasty messages.

Changes from EUKO2018: Wording changed from “Thinking of the LAST TIME you have seen images of this kind, how did you feel about it?”; Scale changed, previous scale: I was happy – I was not happy or upset – I was a little upset – I was fairly upset – I was very upset – I don’t know – Prefer not to say.

There is a clear gender difference in how children respond to hateful messages. Across the countries included, 64% of girls compared with 35% of boys who had encountered hateful messages said that they felt at least ‘a little, fairly or very upset’ the last time they saw such content.

The same pattern is found across all countries for which data are available. Some of the largest gender differences are found in Malta (88% of girls compared with 46% of boys), Finland (65% and 24%), Belgium (46% and 16%) and Czechia (68% and 37%). Girls also report particularly high levels of being upset to some degree in Luxembourg (81%), Austria (79%), Portugal (75%) and Italy (72%). The difference is smaller, although still clear Ireland (63% of girls and 45% of boys).

Overall, girls who have encountered hateful messages are considerably more likely than boys to report being upset by their most recent encounter. This is one of the clearest patterns in children’s responses to hateful messages and adds an important dimension to the earlier gender findings: girls are somewhat more likely to encounter hateful messages, while boys are more likely to report that their last encounter was intentional. Further, when hateful messages are encountered, girls are substantially more likely to report feeling upset.

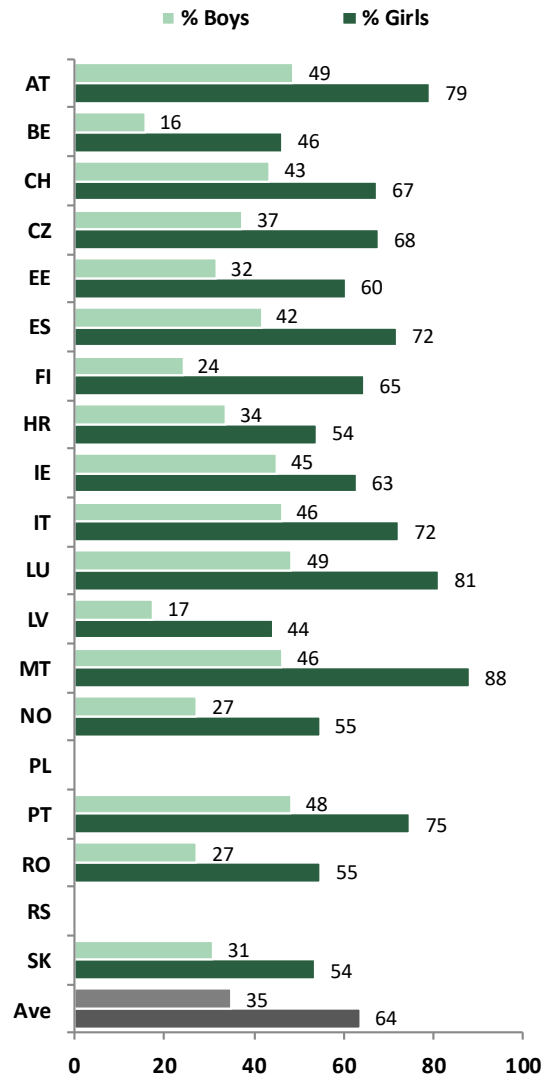
There are some differences by SES in children’s responses to hateful messages, although the pattern is not consistent across the countries. Across the countries included, **55% of children from low SES households** said that they felt at least ‘a little upset’ the last time they saw hateful messages compared with **53% of medium SES and 48% of high SES children**.

Country patterns vary. In Portugal, reported upset is higher among low SES children (74%) than among medium (63%) and high SES children (59%). A similar pattern is found in Ireland (59%, 56% and 53%). In Estonia, medium and low SES children are also more likely to report being upset (55% and 56%) than high SES children (42%). In other countries, differences are small or do not follow this pattern. For example, in Italy the figures are very similar across SES groups (59% low, 58% medium and 60% high SES), as they are in Austria (67% among both medium and high SES children).

Overall, we might indicate that children from lower SES households are more likely to report being upset by hateful messages. These differences should also be interpreted cautiously, as low SES data are not available for several countries, and the analysis

includes only children who had encountered hateful messages.

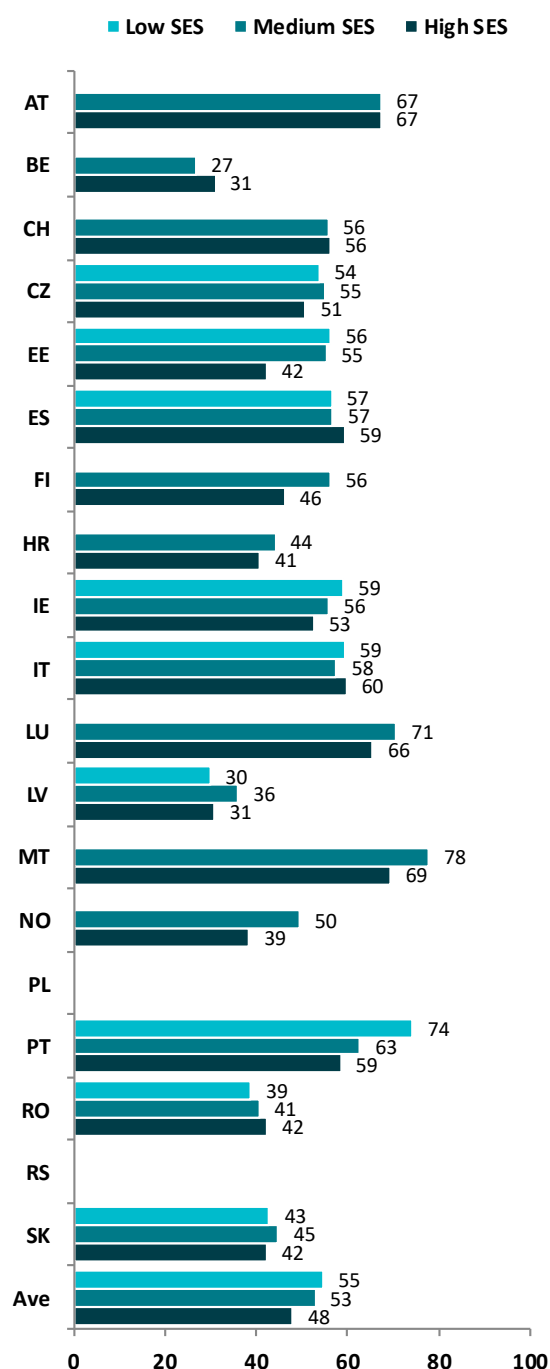
Figure 75: How the child felt about seeing hateful messages, by country and gender



QC28: Thinking of how you felt the last time you saw this kind of content, how did you feel about it? No available data for Poland and Serbia. Base: All children 10–16 who have seen hateful or nasty messages



Figure 76: How the child felt about seeing hateful messages, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC28: Thinking of how you felt the last time you saw this kind of content, how did you feel about it? No available data for Poland and Serbia. Base: All children 10–16 who have seen hateful or nasty messages.

Frequency of exposure to hateful messages and how children felt

Children's responses to hateful messages differ relatively little between those who encounter them a few times and those who see them at least every month. In both groups, just over half report being upset: 52% among those exposed a few times and 53% among those exposed at least monthly. In both groups, 39% report no particular feeling and 9% say that they felt good or thought the content was funny.

A somewhat different pattern is found among children who encounter hateful messages **at least every week or more often**. In this group, 46% report being upset while 36% report no particular feeling. At the same time, 19% say that they felt good or thought the content was funny, around twice the proportion among children exposed less frequently (9%).

Overall, the findings do not show that more frequent exposure is associated with greater reported upset. Rather, the most frequently exposed children are somewhat less likely to report being upset and more likely to report a positive or amused response. To discover why this is so, we would need more in-depth data.

Intention to see hateful messages and how children felt

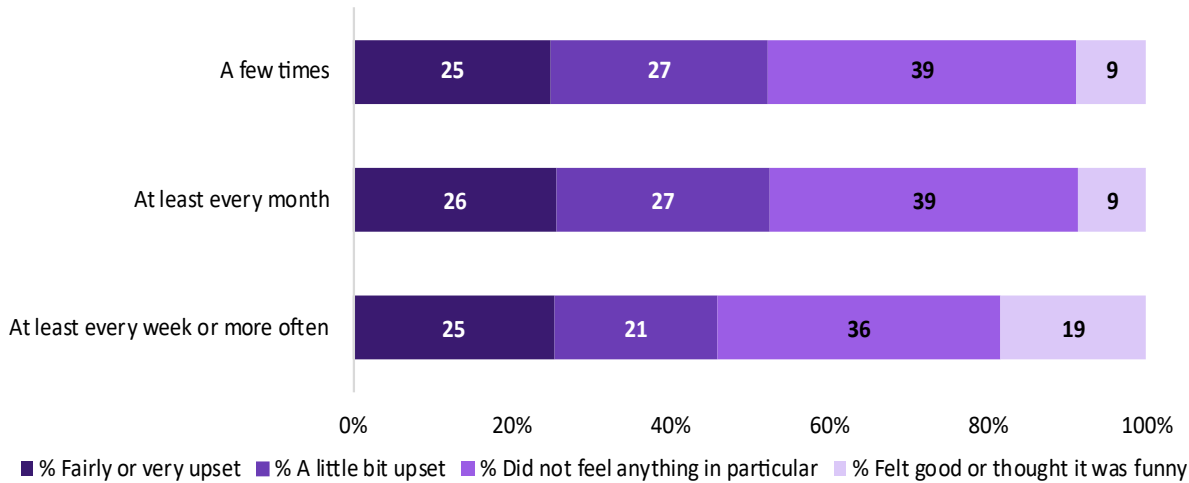
Children's responses to hateful messages differ substantially depending on whether their most recent encounter was intentional or unintentional. Among children who **did not intend to see the content**, **57% report being upset**: 29% were 'fairly or very upset' and a further 28% were 'a little upset'. By comparison, only **21% of children who intended to see the content** report being upset (11% 'fairly or very upset' and 10% 'a little upset').

The difference is particularly marked for positive or amused responses: **52% of children whose exposure was intentional said that they felt good or thought the content was funny compared with only 6% of those whose exposure was not intentional**. A further 28% of those who intentionally encountered the content report no particular feeling compared with 36% among those whose exposure was unintentional.

Overall, intention is strongly associated with how children report feeling about their most recent encounter with hateful messages. Children who encountered the content unintentionally were much more likely to report being upset, whereas those who intended to see it were much more likely to report feeling good or finding it funny. These findings further

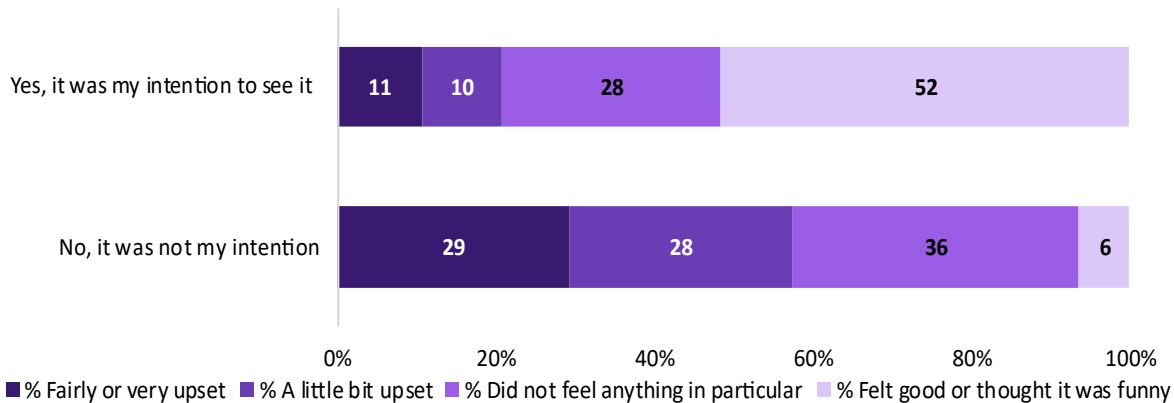
illustrate why exposure to hateful messages should not in itself be treated as equivalent to experienced harm, as children’s responses differ substantially according to the circumstances of the encounter.

Figure 77: Frequency of exposure to hateful messages and how children felt



QC26 In the past year, have you ever seen hateful or degrading messages or comments online, against people or certain groups of people? AND QC28: Thinking of how you felt the last time you saw this kind of content, how did you feel about it? No available data for Poland and Serbia. Base: All children 10–16 who have seen hateful or nasty messages

Figure 78: Intention to see hateful or degrading messages or comments and how children felt



QC27: And the last time you saw such content, was it your intention to see it? AND QC28: Thinking of how you felt the last time you saw this kind of content, how did you feel about it? No available data for Poland and Serbia. Base: All children 10–16 who have seen hateful or nasty messages



11. Sexual messages and requests

As children grow older, digital communication can become an increasingly important part of their social and personal relationships. This can include encounters with sexual content and conversations about sexuality, which may occur in a range of contexts and are not necessarily unwanted or harmful. EUKO research has consistently emphasised the importance of distinguishing exposure to online risk from the experience of harm, including in relation to sexual messages.¹¹² Sexual communication online can take different forms and elicit different emotional responses, meaning that its significance depends on the circumstances in which it occurs and how it is experienced by the young person involved.¹¹³ At the same time, such interactions can raise concerns when they are unsolicited, involve pressure, are developmentally inappropriate or make children uncomfortable.

These experiences also need to be understood within their wider social and cultural contexts. Comparative research suggests that national and cultural contexts, including wider norms and understandings of sexuality, can shape how children encounter and interpret sexual content and interactions online.¹¹⁴ This is particularly important when interpreting cross-country differences, since similar reported experiences may not necessarily have the same meaning or consequences across different contexts.

The following section examines two related experiences: receiving sexual messages and how often, and being asked for sexual information online. Considering these together provides insight into the extent to which sexual interactions feature in children's

online lives and where they may involve more direct or potentially unwanted requests, while avoiding the assumption that all sexual communication has the same meaning or consequences.

Whether and how often child has received sexual messages

Children aged 10–16 were asked how often, if ever, they had received sexual messages in the past year, including voice messages, words, pictures or videos. Regular receipt of sexual messages is **not a common experience for most children aged 10–16**, although it forms a recurring part of online communication for a minority. **Across the countries surveyed, 8% report receiving such messages at least monthly, while 15% select 'hardly ever' and 77% say they have never received them.**

There is meaningful variation between countries. The proportion receiving sexual messages at least monthly ranges from 1% in Ireland¹¹⁵ and 3% in Switzerland to 13% in Croatia and Czechia. However, looking only at frequent receipt does not capture the full extent of cross-country variation. Belgium stands out, with 11% reporting receipt at least monthly and 58% who say they have never received sexual messages. In Czechia, 68% report never receiving them compared with 92% in Ireland. These differences suggest that sexual messaging has a more visible presence in children's digital interactions in some countries than in others, even where regular receipt remains relatively uncommon. Such cross-country variation should be interpreted with some caution, however, as wider cultural attitudes towards sexuality may also influence how children recognise, understand and report sexual experiences online.¹¹⁶

Age is strongly associated with receiving sexual messages, **becoming substantially more common as children move through adolescence**. Across the countries, the proportion increases from 12% among 11- to 12-year-olds to 23% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 37% among 15- to 16-year-olds. This pattern is remarkably consistent at country level: **in all countries, the proportion increases with each successive age group between 11 and 16.**



¹¹² Livingstone & Görzig (2014); Smahel et al. (2020).

¹¹³ Barbovschi et al. (2021).

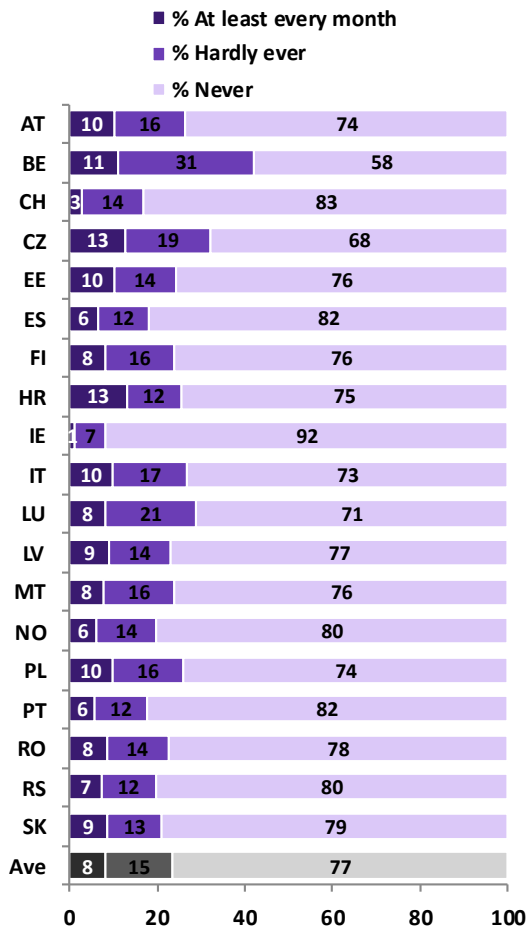
¹¹⁴ Green et al. (2020).

¹¹⁵ Note that in Ireland, data were collected through an in-home survey, which may have influenced children's

willingness to report certain experiences, and should be considered when interpreting the comparatively low levels reported.

¹¹⁶ Green et al. (2020).

Figure 79: Frequency of receiving sexual messages, by country



QC21¹¹⁷: In the past year, how often, if ever, have you received sexual messages? (This could be voice messages, words, pictures or videos.). Base: All children 10–16

The pattern among 10-year-olds is less straightforward. Across the countries, 21% of 10-year-olds report having received sexual messages.¹¹⁸ Among the countries for which estimates are available, reported receipt of sexual messages varies considerably. Country estimates range from 0% in Luxembourg, Italy, Ireland and Switzerland to 19% in Spain. In some countries, for example in Spain, 10-year-olds report higher levels than 11- to 12-year-olds, while in others they report lower levels. This contrasts with the much clearer and more consistent increase observed between the ages of 11 and 16.

¹¹⁷ In EUKO2011, EUKO2018 (QF41, optional) & GKO2020. EUKO2011 & GKO2020: different wording, different scale. Changes from EUKO2018: “voice messages” added for EUKO2025; “NEVER” added to scale for EUKO2025.

The increase with age suggests that sexual messaging becomes progressively more present in children’s digital interactions as they grow older. This may reflect broader **developmental changes, including greater independence online, changing peer and romantic relationships, and growing engagement with sexuality**. The strong age gradient is important for interpretation: the receipt of sexual messages should be understood within the changing social and relational contexts that accompany it.

Gender differences in receiving sexual messages are relatively limited overall, with 23% of girls and 24% of boys reporting receiving sexual messages in the past year across all participating countries. The overall similarity, however, masks some variation between countries. In some countries, girls are more likely to report receiving sexual messages, while in others, the pattern is reversed. This lack of a consistent gender pattern reinforces the finding that gender alone does not appear to be a strong predictor of whether children receive sexual messages. Importantly, this measure tells us about receipt rather than the nature or context of the message; similar levels of exposure do not necessarily mean that girls and boys experience these interactions in the same way.

There is also some evidence of socioeconomic differences. Across the countries, 23% of children from high SES backgrounds and 25% from medium SES backgrounds report receiving sexual messages compared with 30% of children from low SES backgrounds. The similarity between the high and medium SES groups, alongside the higher proportion among low SES children, suggests that **the overall difference is concentrated particularly among children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, rather than following a strong step-by-step socioeconomic gradient**.

Country-level findings show, however, that this pattern is far from universal.¹¹⁹ Particularly large differences are evident in Latvia, where receipt rises from 21% among high SES children to 29% among medium SES children and 56% among low SES children. Estonia shows a similar pattern, with 24% of both high and medium SES children reporting receiving sexual messages compared with 46% of low SES children. Smaller differences in the same direction are evident in Portugal (16%, 17% and 26%) and Spain (18%, 18% and 25%). In contrast, some countries show little difference between SES groups, while Czechia shows a different pattern, with the highest proportion

¹¹⁸ Estimates for 10-year olds are not available for Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Poland and Serbia.

¹¹⁹ Low SES estimates are not available for Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Serbia and Switzerland.

among medium SES children (39%), compared with 31% among high SES and 36% among low SES children.

Receiving sexual messages in EU Kids Online 2020

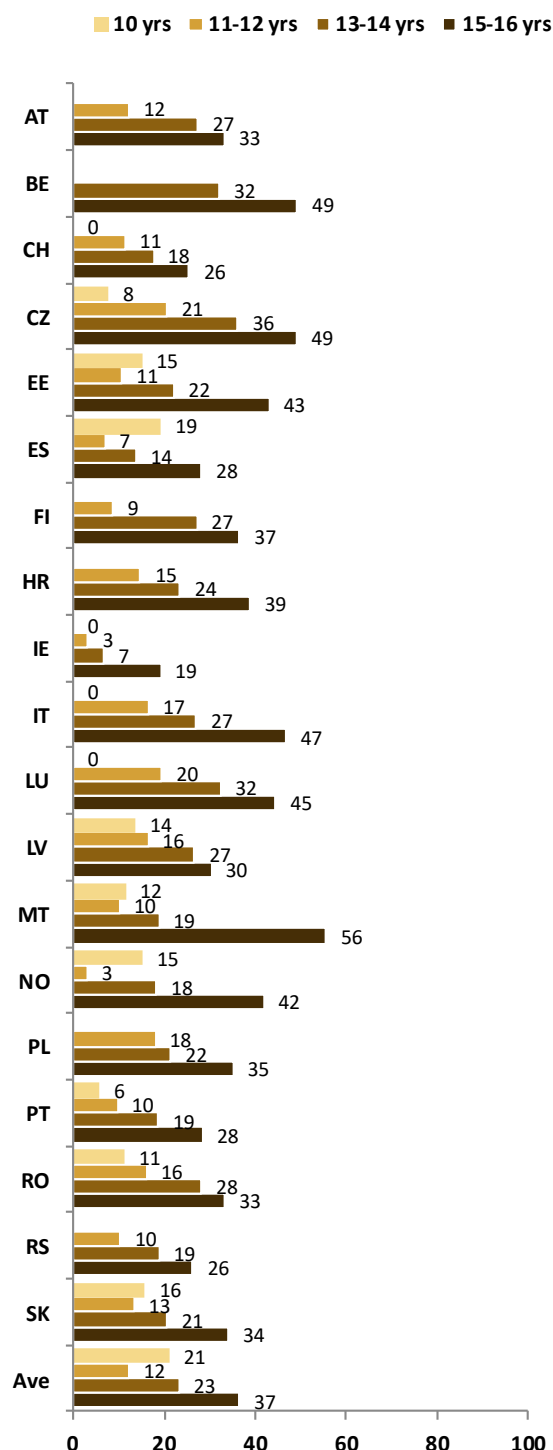
In EUKO 2020, 22% of 12- to 16-year-olds across the countries reported receiving a sexual message in the previous year (see 'Note'), although there was substantial cross-country variation, ranging from 8% in Italy to 39% in Flanders. In 10 countries, between 25% and 39% reported this experience, while in Estonia, Croatia, Italy and Slovakia, the proportion was 10% or lower.

Gender differences were generally modest, with differences between boys and girls of 5 percentage points or less in most countries, although larger differences occurred in some national contexts. Age was a much more consistent differentiating factor: across the countries, receiving sexual messages increased from 16% among 12- to 14-year-olds to 32% among 15- to 16-year-olds, and older children reported receiving such messages more often in every country surveyed. Among 15- to 16-year-olds in 2020, the proportion reached 40–50% in eight countries. Overall, the 2020 findings showed that receiving sexual messages was already a relatively common experience for a substantial minority of older children and, above all, one that became markedly more prevalent with age.¹²⁰

The 2026 findings show a broadly similar pattern to that identified in 2020 (see 'Note'). Receiving sexual messages becomes progressively more common as children move through adolescence, making age the clearest and most consistent differentiating factor. Gender differences remain relatively small overall and vary more across the countries. This continuity across survey waves points to a strong and persistent developmental pattern in children's exposure to sexual messaging online.

Note: The 2020 figures refer to children aged 12–16 who had received a sexual message at any time in the previous year. Comparisons with 2026 should therefore take account of differences in age coverage, question wording and response categories.

Figure 80: Frequency of receiving sexual messages, by age group



QC21: In the past year, how often, if ever, have you received sexual message? (This could be voice messages, words, pictures or videos.) Base: All children 10–16

¹²⁰ Smahel et al. (2020).

The findings highlight that **receiving sexual messages is not a uniform experience, even if it becomes more prominent with age, and needs to be understood within the wider context of children's relationships and communication online.** This is important for how these experiences are understood and addressed: the focus should not be on sexual messaging as a single category of risk, but on **the circumstances in which it occurs, whether children have control over the interaction, and whether their boundaries are respected.** This points towards the importance of equipping children with the knowledge and confidence to navigate sexual communication online, while recognising that the meaning and potential consequences of these interactions may differ considerably depending on their context.

Who sent sexual messages to the child

Who sends sexual messages is important for understanding the context in which these interactions occur. Sexual messages may come from people within children's existing social and intimate relationships, such as friends, classmates or romantic partners, but also from online-only contacts or people they do not know. **Examining the relationship between sender and recipient adds a much-needed relational dimension** to previous EUKO research, which focused primarily on the prevalence of sexual messaging and its variation by age, gender and country.¹²¹ The 2026 findings provide a more differentiated picture of where sexual messaging sits within, and beyond, children's social networks.

Overall, **someone the child does not know is the most commonly reported sender of sexual messages, identified by 38% of children** who received such messages. Friends are the next most common source (25%). Romantic partners, classmates or other children from school, and people known only through the internet, are each identified by around 14%. Family members (5%) and teachers (4%) are much less frequently identified. These findings show that **sexual messages reach children through a mixture of unknown contacts and people within their existing social, peer and intimate relationships**, rather than originating predominantly within a single relational context.

There is considerable cross-country variation in these patterns. Unknown people are particularly prominent as senders in Finland (60%) and Belgium (51%), followed by Czechia (46%) and Austria (44%). They are also reported by around four in ten recipients in Switzerland and Slovakia (both 42%) and Estonia (40%). By contrast, unknown senders are much less prominent in Italy (20%) and Portugal (25%), as well as in Malta (27%) and Serbia (33%).

In several countries, existing peer relationships feature more prominently. Friends are particularly frequently identified as senders in Malta (39%) and Italy (37%), followed by Latvia (32%), compared with 14% in Austria and 13% in Ireland. Classmates or other children from school are most frequently reported in Ireland and Malta (both around 25–26%) and Croatia (22%), while they are considerably less prominent in Austria (7%) and Finland (8%). The country patterns suggest that in **some contexts sexual messaging is more embedded in children's existing peer networks, whereas elsewhere messages from unknown people are more prominent.**

Romantic and online-only relationships add further diversity to the picture. Romantic partners are particularly frequently identified as senders in Spain and Italy (both 25%), followed by Portugal (21%) and Croatia (18%), compared with only 5% in Switzerland and 8% in Malta. People known only through the internet are most frequently reported in Malta (25%), Norway (24%) and Austria (19%), but less commonly in Poland (8%) and Luxembourg (9%). The prominence of these different relationship types therefore varies considerably across the countries.

Sexual messaging takes place across a diverse set of relational contexts. Although unknown senders are an important part of children's experiences, the substantial involvement of friends, classmates, romantic partners and online-only contacts cautions against understanding sexual messaging primarily through the lens of contact with strangers. Who sends a sexual message is likely to be important to its meaning and how it is experienced, particularly given that sexual communication between peers or romantic partners may have a very different context from unsolicited messages from unknown contacts. This reinforces the importance of considering the relationship between sender and recipient when assessing the nature and potential implications of children's experiences of sexual messaging.

¹²¹ Smahel et al. (2020).

Table 19: Who sent sexual messages to the child, by country

	Family member	Friends	Someone I am in a romantic relationship with ('boyfriend or girlfriend')	Classmates/ other children from my school	Teachers	Someone I am connected with only on the internet	Someone I do not know	Someone else
AT	3	14	13	7	3	19	44	12
BE	1	22	11	12	2	13	51	8
CH	3	19	5	14	0	13	42	12
CZ	6	28	14	19	3	14	46	11
EE	11	30	12	12	6	13	40	10
ES	6	30	25	19	7	16	33	9
FI	2	17	14	8	6	15	60	8
HR	5	28	18	22	6	18	32	17
IE	0	13	15	26	2	10	37	7
IT	4	37	25	16	2	13	20	8
LU	6	22	5	16	3	9	30	17
LV	11	32	12	20	6	15	35	11
MT	14	39	8	25	10	25	27	12
NO	3	25	13	13	2	24	37	12
PL	2	18	11	15	4	8	34	10
PT	5	28	21	14	2	11	25	8
RO	2	27	16	13	2	12	37	9
RS	3	21	14	12	3	12	33	10
SK	6	28	16	10	9	18	42	14
Ave	5	25	14	14	4	14	38	11

QC22¹²²: Who was it that sent you this? Base: All children 10–16 who have been sent sexual messages.

Are children being asked for sexual information?

The survey also explored a more direct form of sexual interaction online: whether children had been asked to provide sexual information about themselves. Looking at these requests separately is important because they involve a child being directly invited to disclose personal sexual information rather than simply being exposed to sexual content or communication. The following findings examine how common these experiences are among children aged 10–16 and how they vary across the countries and demographic groups.

Children aged 10–16 were asked whether, in the past year, they had been asked by someone online or through their mobile phone for sexual information about themselves. Across the countries, **5% report**

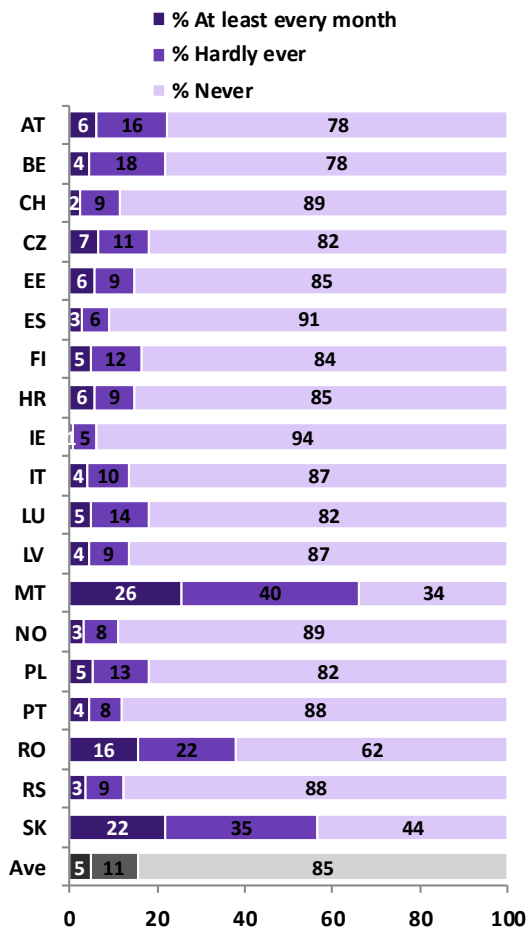
that this happens at least monthly, while 11% select ‘hardly ever’, and 85% say that it has never happened. Compared with simply receiving sexual messages, being directly asked to provide sexual information is therefore less common. **While for the large majority of children, being asked to disclose sexual information is not part of their online experience, for a minority such requests occur, and for some they are a recurring feature of their online interactions.**

There is substantial variation between countries. Malta (26%) and Slovakia (22%) stand out for particularly high proportions reporting such requests at least monthly, followed by Romania, at 16%. In all other countries, the proportion is 7% or lower, falling to 1% in Ireland and around 2% in Switzerland. Malta and Slovakia are also distinctive when non-exposure is taken into account: only 34% of children in Malta and 44% in Slovakia report never having been asked for sexual information compared with over 90% in Ireland and Spain. This

¹²² New question in EUKO2025. Source: n/a.

indicates that the extent to which children encounter direct sexual requests differs markedly between national contexts.

Figure 81: Frequency of being asked for sexual information, by country



QC23¹²³: In the past year, how often, if ever, have you been asked by someone on the internet or through your mobile phone for sexual information? Base: All children 10–16

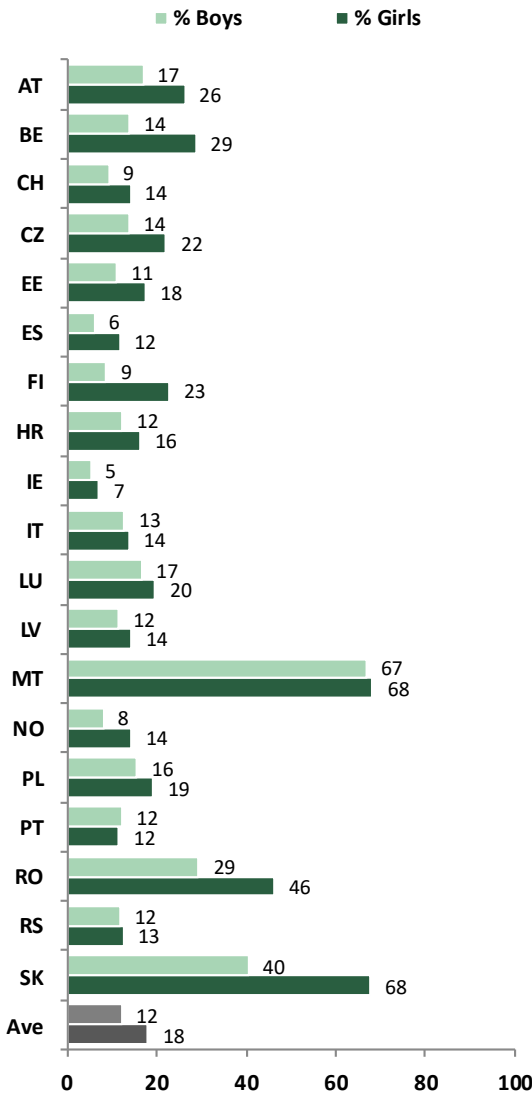


¹²³ In EUKO2018 (QF47, core) & GKO2020. GKO2020: different wording, different scale. Source: Mitchell & Jones (2012).

Context from the EU Kids Online 2020 survey

The EUKO 2020 survey also asked children about requests for sexual information online, although this measure is not directly comparable with the 2026. Specifically, children were asked whether, in the past year, someone on the internet had asked them for sexual information when they did not want to. Overall, 4% reported experiencing this at least monthly and 13% at least a few times, while 84% said this had never happened. These findings provide useful background on children’s previous experiences of sexual interactions online, but should not be interpreted as a trend comparison.

Figure 82: Frequency of being asked for sexual information, by gender



Changes from EUKO2018: “or through your mobile phone” added for EUKO2025.



Gender differences are more pronounced than they were for receiving sexual messages. Across the countries, 18% of girls compared with 12% of boys report having been asked for sexual information. The size of this gender difference varies substantially across the countries. Particularly large gaps are evident in Slovakia (68% of girls compared with 40% of boys), Romania (46% vs 29%), Belgium (29% vs 14%) and Finland (23% vs 9%). Austria also shows a notable difference (26% vs 17%).

The direction of the gender difference is quite consistent across the countries. Girls report higher levels than boys in almost all countries, although in some cases the difference is very small. Portugal is the only country where boys are marginally more likely than girls to report the experience, and the difference is less than one percentage point. Differences are also very small in Serbia and Malta. The gender difference is more evident here than for receiving sexual messages, where girls and boys report broadly similar levels of exposure. **This suggests that gender differences are more pronounced when children are directly asked to provide sexual information about themselves.**

Among children aged 11–16, being asked for sexual information becomes markedly more common with age. **The proportion reporting having been asked for sexual information rises from 8% among 11- to 12-year-olds to 14% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 24% among 15- to 16-year-olds.** This increase is visible across many countries. For example, in Austria it rises from 10% to 22% and 30%, while in Czechia it increases from 10% to 20% and 29%. Portugal similarly rises from 6% among 11- to 12-year-olds to 12% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 22% among 15- to 16-year-olds. **Direct sexual requests therefore become substantially more common through adolescence,** when children's online social and relational lives are also changing. The findings for 10-year-olds are more variable across the countries. Among countries for which estimates are available, the proportion ranges from 0% in Luxembourg, Ireland and Switzerland to

around 10–14% in countries including Norway, Slovakia, Latvia, Spain and Estonia.¹²⁴

Socioeconomic differences are also visible. Across the countries, 15% of children from high SES backgrounds report having been asked for sexual information compared with 17% of medium SES and 24% of low SES children.¹²⁵ In other words, **children from low SES backgrounds are more likely to report being asked for sexual information.** Country-level patterns vary considerably. In Latvia, the proportion rises from 11% among high SES children to 14% among medium SES and 39% among low SES children. Estonia shows a similar pattern, increasing from 14% to 15% and 35%, while Portugal rises from 10% to 13% and 19%. Ireland also shows a gradient, although at lower levels overall (4%, 7% and 15%). In contrast, Czechia shows little evidence of a straightforward gradient, with 18% among high SES, 20% among medium SES and 19% among low SES children. Overall, the findings point to greater exposure to requests for sexual information among children from low SES backgrounds, but this socioeconomic difference is much more pronounced in some countries than others and is not evident everywhere.

Unlike passive forms of risk, requests for sexual information require children to make decisions about whether, how and to whom they disclose such information, often in situations involving trust, pressure, privacy and personal boundaries. The differences observed between groups indicate that understanding **vulnerability requires consideration not only of children's likelihood of encountering these situations, but also of their capacity to recognise, interpret and respond** to them effectively. This highlights the need for support that goes **beyond risk avoidance, equipping children with the confidence and skills to make informed decisions about disclosure, resist coercion or pressure, establish and maintain boundaries, and seek help when those boundaries are challenged or violated.**

¹²⁴ Estimates for 10-year-olds are not available for Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Poland and Serbia.

¹²⁵ Low SES estimates are not available for Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Serbia and Switzerland.

12. Upsetting online experiences and coping strategies

Understanding the nature and extent of children's upsetting experiences online is central to the challenge of making the digital environment safer and more conducive to their overall wellbeing. Without accurate data on what children find problematic, interventions are likely to be ineffective and poorly targeted. Encountering something unpleasant or upsetting does not necessarily mean that a child has experienced lasting harm; at the same time, repeated upsetting experiences may be more consequential for children's wellbeing and their confidence in using digital technologies. Examining how often children feel bothered or upset by something online therefore helps to distinguish occasional negative encounters from experiences that may form a more regular part of children's digital lives, and to identify whether some groups of children are more vulnerable than others.

How often children get upset by something online

Across the countries surveyed, 23% of children report that something online has bothered or upset them at least monthly during the past year. A further 34% select 'hardly ever', while 43% report that this has never happened. The fact that almost one in four children report such experiences at least monthly suggests that, **for a sizeable minority, dealing with upsetting situations is a recurring part of being online rather than an exceptional occurrence**. This highlights the importance not only of reducing children's exposure to potentially harmful experiences, but also of ensuring that they have the skills and support to respond when these occur.

Recurring upsetting online experiences have increased substantially: 23% of children now report being bothered or upset by something online at least monthly compared with 7% in 2020 – more than three times the proportion reported in 2020.

There are substantial differences between countries. Monthly experiences are most common in Poland (37%) and Romania (36%), followed by Estonia (34%), Latvia and Czechia (both 30%). At the other end of the spectrum, they are the least common in Ireland (7%), Switzerland (12%) and Norway (14%). Looking beyond monthly experiences also reveals differences in the overall prevalence of negative encounters. In Belgium and Poland, for example, only around 22–23% say they

have never been bothered or upset by something online compared with 66% in Ireland and 58% in Switzerland. The cross-country variation therefore concerns **not only how frequently children encounter upsetting experiences, but also how commonplace such experiences are within their digital lives**. Differences in online activities, exposure, awareness and expectations may all potentially contribute to variation between countries.

Age shows a clearer relationship with frequent upsetting experiences. Across the countries, the proportion reporting that they are bothered or upset at least monthly rises from 11% among 10-year-olds to 19% among 11- to 12-year-olds, 22% among 13- to 14-year-olds, and 28% among 15- to 16-year-olds. This suggests that **recurring upsetting experiences become more common as children grow older**.

The country-level findings broadly reinforce the overall age pattern, although the progression is not uniform across the countries. In several countries, the proportion reporting being bothered or upset online at least monthly increases markedly with age. Luxembourg shows one of the clearest examples, rising steadily from 10% among 10-year-olds to 18% among 11- to 12-year-olds, 26% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 33% among 15- to 16-year-olds. A similarly clear increase is evident in Ireland, from 3% to 4%, 7% and 14%, while Estonia rises from 19% among 10-year-olds to 27%, 33% and 42% across the successive age groups.

However, this age gradient is not evident in every country. In Romania, for example, 40% of 10-year-olds report being bothered or upset at least monthly compared with 33% of 11- to 12-year-olds, 35% of 13- to 14-year-olds and 37% of 15- to 16-year-olds. Czechia and Switzerland also have comparatively high estimates among 10-year-olds, interrupting what would otherwise be an increase with age. Malta shows a different variation: the proportion falls slightly from 16% among 10-year-olds to 14% among 11- to 12-year-olds, before increasing to 23% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 28% among 15- to 16-year-olds.

Overall, therefore, **recurring upsetting online experiences become more common with age at the aggregate level, but this pattern should not be understood as a uniform developmental progression across the countries**. The general

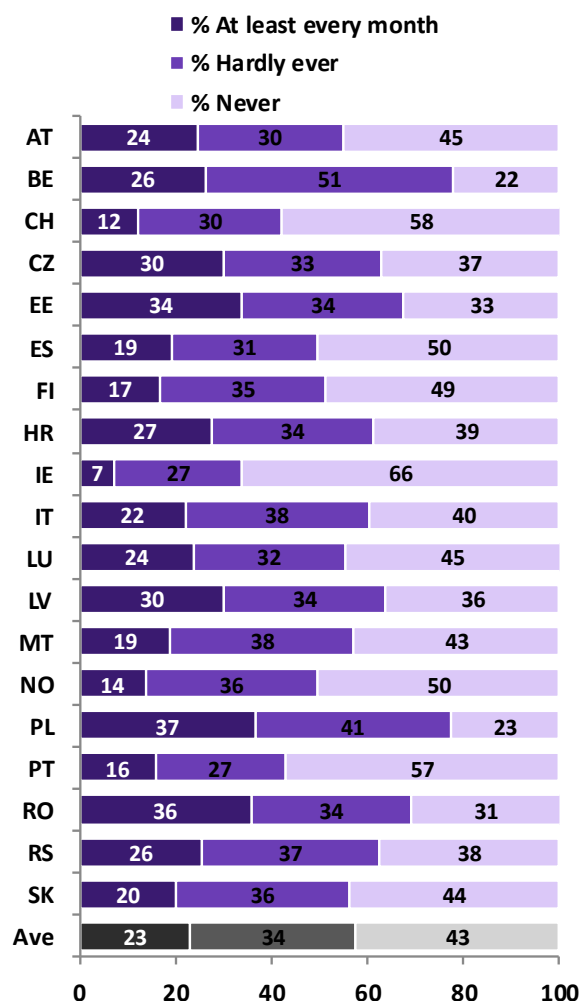
increase may reflect changes in children's digital lives as they grow older, including greater independence online, broader social networks and participation in a wider range of online activities, which may increase opportunities both for positive experiences and for encountering content or interactions that they find upsetting.

Socioeconomic status (SES) reveals another important inequality: being bothered or upset online frequently is more common among children from low than high SES backgrounds. Across the countries, 22% of children from high SES backgrounds report being bothered or upset online at least monthly compared with 25% of those from medium SES and 33% of those from low SES backgrounds. The overall gradient is reflected particularly strongly in some countries. In Latvia, the proportion rises from 27% among high SES children to 36% among medium SES and 52% among low SES children. Estonia shows a similar pattern, with 33% of high SES children reporting being bothered or upset at least monthly, compared with 36% of medium SES and 52% of low SES children. These differences suggest that **some children may experience a double disadvantage: fewer socioeconomic resources alongside more frequent upsetting experiences online**. However, the SES pattern is not uniform across all countries.

Gender differences, by comparison, are relatively modest overall. Twenty-five per cent of girls and 21% of boys report being bothered or upset at least monthly. In many countries the difference is small, although larger gaps appear in some, including Belgium and Estonia, where girls report more frequent upsetting experiences. There are also countries where boys report higher levels, including Malta and Portugal. **Gender appears less consistently related to recurring upsetting experiences than age or SES.**

The findings suggest the need to shift attention from whether children encounter online risk at all to **how regularly upsetting experiences become part of their everyday digital lives, especially if upsetting experiences are increasingly normalised**, as the data indicates. Occasional encounters are relatively widespread, but more concerning is the concentration of recurring upsetting experiences, even if for a small number of children among particular groups, especially older and socioeconomically disadvantaged children. Supporting children online should involve strengthening children's capacity to recognise, manage and recover from difficult experiences, while ensuring that **children who may have fewer resources and sources of support are not disproportionately left to manage these experiences on their own**.

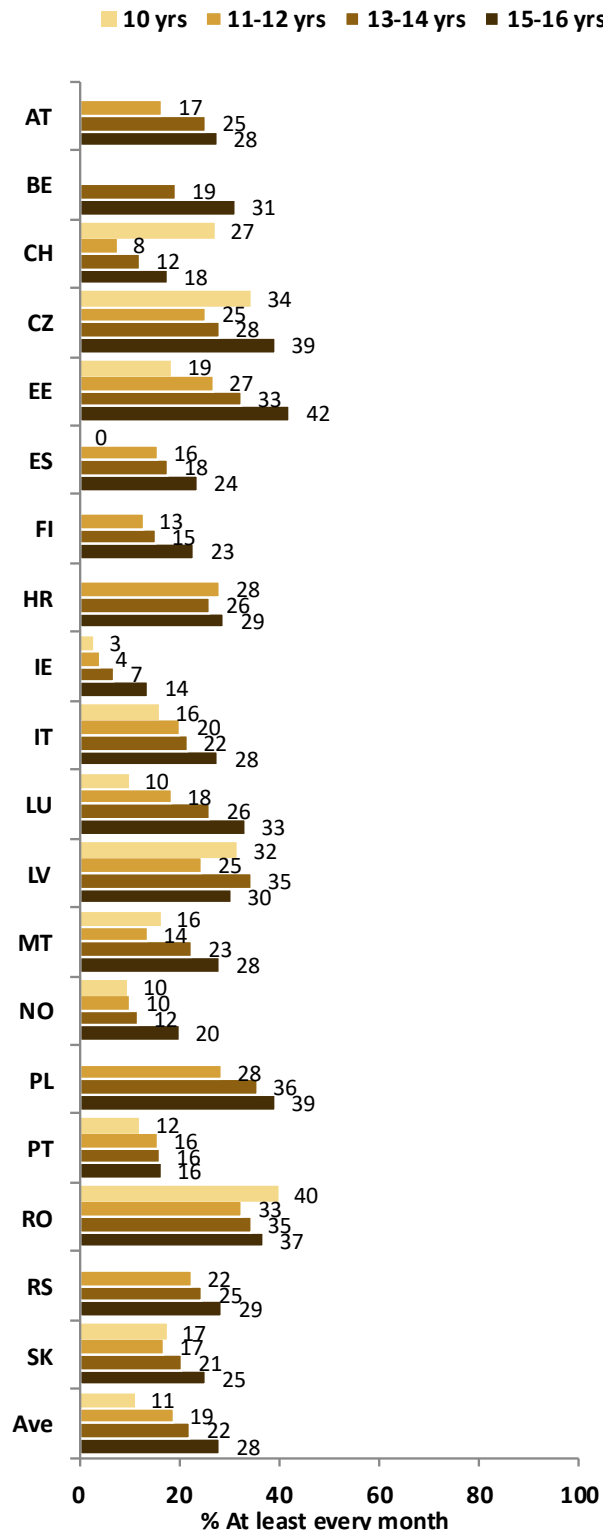
Figure 83: How often the child has been upset online, by country



QC16: In the past year, has anything ever happened online that bothered or upset you in some way? Note: Estimates are not shown where the subgroup base is insufficient for reporting. Base: All children 10–16.



Figure 84: How often the child has been upset online, by age group



QC16: In the past year, has anything ever happened online that bothered or upset you in some way? Note: Estimates are not shown where the subgroup base is insufficient for reporting. Base: All children 10–16.

Who the child talks to after being upset online

When children encounter something online that bothers or upsets them, who they turn to for support can be an important part of how they respond to and manage the experience. Children may seek support from parents, friends or other people in their lives, while some may choose not to talk to anyone. This section examines who children talk to following upsetting online experiences and how these patterns vary.

Friends are the most common source of support following an upsetting online experience. Across the countries, 43% of children who had been bothered or upset by something online say that, following the most recent experience, they talked to a friend around their age. Just over a third (35%) talked to a parent or caregiver, while 17% talked to a brother or sister. Other sources of support are much less commonly reported: 7% talked to another trusted adult, 6% to someone they talk with online, 6% to someone else, 6% to a grandparent, 5% to a teacher and 3% to someone whose job is to help children. As children could select more than one response, these figures are not mutually exclusive.

At the same time, one in five children (20%) say that they did not talk to anyone about what had happened. This is a substantial minority and suggests that, while many children seek support following upsetting online experiences, a notable proportion manage these experiences without discussing them with someone else.

There are also **substantial differences between countries in where children turn to for support.** Talking to a friend is particularly common in Spain (61%), Czechia (54%) and Luxembourg (53%) compared with 24% in Malta and 32% in Croatia. Talking to a parent or caregiver is highest in Spain (56%) and Ireland (50%), but falls to around a quarter in Finland (26%), Slovakia (27%) and Austria (28%). The proportion who say they did not talk to anyone also varies considerably, from 10% in Ireland and 11% in Malta to 28% in Norway and 33% in Finland.

Table 20: Who children talk to after being upset online, by country

	My mother or caregiver	My brother or sister (or r/half sibling)	A grand-parent	A friend around my age	A teacher	Someone whose job it is to help children	Another adult I trust	Someone I talk with online	Someone else	I don't talk to anyone
AT	28	16	4	48	5	5	6	6	9	22
BE	41	21	9	49	5	4	5	6	4	23
CH	34	16	2	44	3	1	4	5	3	20
CZ	31	18	5	54	3	3	5	10	6	22
EE	34	17	6	37	5	4	7	6	8	20
ES	56	22	9	61	8	3	11	7	8	24
FI	26	11	3	44	4	4	5	5	6	33
HR	37	20	8	32	7	6	12	10	11	21
IE	50	11	1	41	4	0	4	3	2	10
IT	30	16	6	43	5	2	8	3	6	18
LU	42	22	6	53	5	5	10	8	7	23
LV	29	17	7	44	6	3	6	12	10	12
MT	37	4	2	24	2	1	4	0	1	11
NO	40	12	3	35	5	2	4	6	5	28
PL	31	13	6	39	3	3	5	7	6	18
PT	41	16	5	40	5	5	9	5	5	15
RO	36	19	5	39	3	2	5	7	3	16
RS	38	21	4	46	3	3	12	5	6	19
SK	27	18	8	43	5	3	7	7	9	13
Ave	35	17	6	43	5	3	7	6	6	20

QC17¹²⁶: The last time something happened online that bothered or upset you, did you talk to anyone of these people about it? Base: All children 10–16 who had been upset by anything online ('Yes' to QC16)

Comparison with EU Kids Online 2020

The overall pattern of who children turn to following upsetting online experiences is broadly similar to 2020, with friends remaining the most common source of support. In 2020, 50% of children reported talking to a friend around their age compared with 43% in the current survey, while the proportion talking to a parent or caregiver has remained relatively similar (40% in 2020 compared with 35% now). The proportion reporting that they did not talk to anyone has also remained broadly stable, at 19% in 2020 and 20% now. These findings suggest continuity in children's main pathways to support, although turning to their main sources of support - friends and parents - appears somewhat less common than in 2020.

Age shows a particularly clear shift in who children turn to after an upsetting online experience. **Younger**

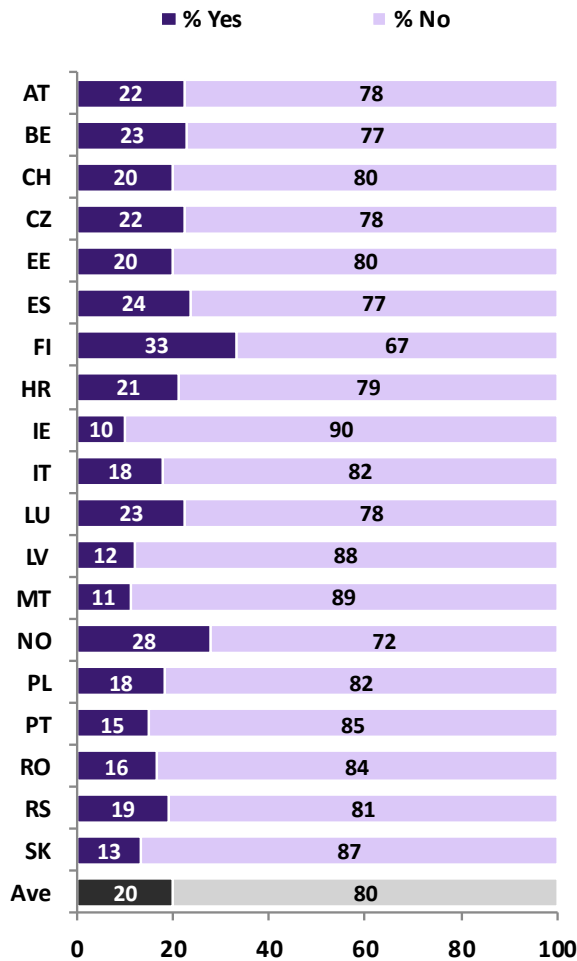
children are much more likely to talk to a parent or caregiver, while older children increasingly turn to friends. Across the countries, 51% of 10-year-olds say they talked to a parent or caregiver, falling to 45% among 11- to 12-year-olds, 34% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 27% among 15- to 16-year-olds. The pattern for friends moves in the opposite direction: 30% of 10-year-olds talk to a friend around their age, rising to 37% among 11- to 12-year-olds, 43% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 50% among 15- to 16-year-olds.

Older children are also more likely to say that they did not talk to anyone. This rises from 11% among 10-year-olds to 15% among 11- to 12-year-olds, and to 22% and 23% among 13- to 14-year-olds and 15- to 16-year-olds respectively. Taken together, the findings suggest that as children grow older, support following upsetting online experiences shifts away from parents

¹²⁶ In EUKO2018 (QF04, core) & GKO2020. GKO2020: different wording. GKO2020 Key measure. Changes from EUKO2018: Some items have been modified or added for EUKO2025.

and towards peers, while a growing minority do not discuss the experience with anyone.

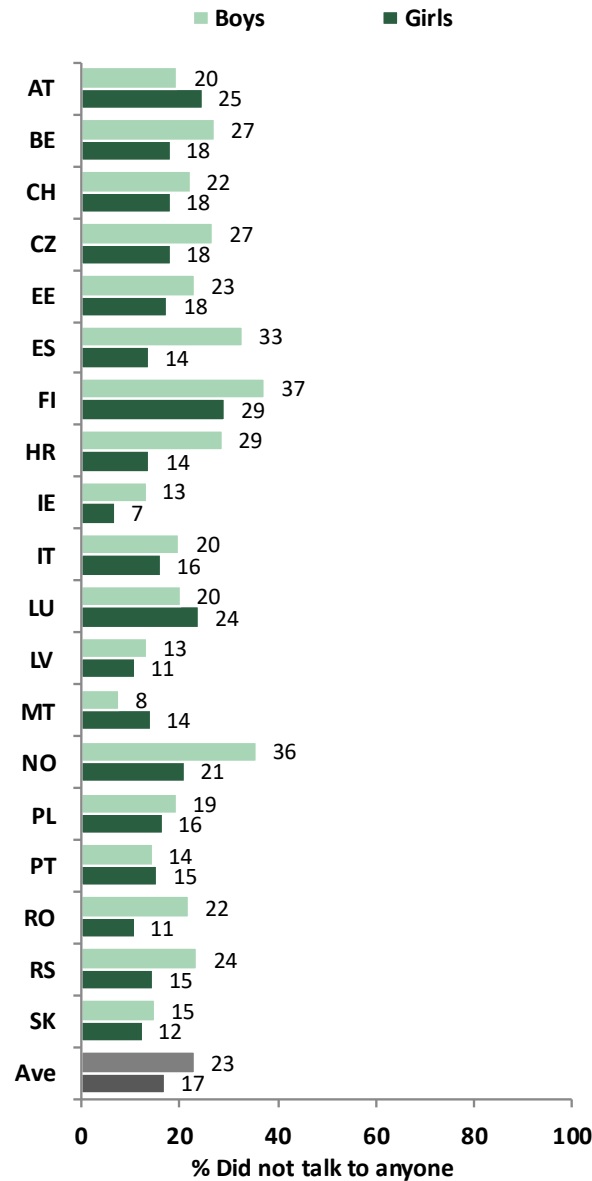
Figure 85: Children who did not talk to anyone after being upset, by country



QC17: The last time something happened online that bothered or upset you, did you talk to anyone of these people about it? QC17j: I don't talk to anyone. Base: All children 10–16 who had been upset by anything online ('Yes' to QC16)



Figure 86: Children who did not talk to anyone after being upset, by gender



QC17: The last time something happened online that bothered or upset you, did you talk to anyone of these people about it? QC17j: I don't talk to anyone. Base: All children 10–16 who had been upset by anything online ('Yes' to QC16).

Gender differences are most apparent in whether children turn to friends. Half of the girls (50%) say they talked to a friend around their age following an upsetting online experience, compared with 35% of the boys. The gender difference in talking to parents or caregivers is smaller, with 38% of girls doing so compared with 33% of boys. **Boys are also more likely than girls not to talk to anyone, reported by 23% of boys compared with 17% of girls.** The gender difference in not talking to anyone varies considerably



across the countries. Boys are more likely than girls to report not talking to anyone in 15 of the 19 countries, although the size of the difference varies substantially. The largest gap is found in Spain, where 33% of boys compared with 14% of girls say they did not talk to anyone. Substantial differences are also evident in Norway (36% compared with 21%) and Croatia (29% compared with 14%), while boys are also more likely not to talk to anyone in Romania (22% compared with 11%), Belgium (27% compared with 18%) and Serbia (24% compared with 15%). The pattern is reversed in Malta, Austria, Luxembourg and Portugal, although the differences are generally smaller. The cross-country variation therefore shows that the overall tendency for boys to be less likely to talk to someone is not uniform across national contexts. **Overall, the findings suggest that girls are more likely than boys to seek support from peers following upsetting online experiences, while boys are somewhat more likely to deal with the experience without talking to anyone.**

In contrast to age and gender, there is little evidence of a consistent overall relationship between SES and who children talk to. Similar proportions of children from high, medium and low SES backgrounds talk to a parent or caregiver (36%, 34% and 35%, respectively). The pattern is similarly close for talking to friends, at 44% among both high and medium SES children and 41% among low SES children. There is also no clear SES gradient in not talking to anyone: 20% of high SES, 22% of medium SES and 19% of low SES children report this.

There are substantial country differences in the proportion of children who do not talk to anyone following an upsetting online experience. Across the countries, one in five children (20%) report not talking

to anyone, but this rises to 33% in Finland and 28% in Norway. At the other end of the spectrum, only 10% in Ireland, 11% in Malta and 12% in Latvia report not talking to anyone. This means that children in some countries are around three times as likely as those in others to deal with an upsetting online experience without discussing it with someone else. **The variation suggests that whether children seek support following upsetting online experiences may be shaped not only by individual characteristics, but also by their wider social and national contexts.**

The gender difference in not talking to anyone varies considerably across the countries. Boys are more likely than girls to report not talking to anyone in 15 of the 19 countries, although the size of the difference varies substantially.

Overall, the findings suggest that **children's pathways to support change as they grow older, with parents becoming less central and peers increasingly important.** However, the **proportion who do not talk to anyone also increases with age**, and boys are somewhat more likely than girls to report this. Together with the substantial differences between countries, this suggests that whether children share upsetting online experiences with others depends on more than simply whether support is available. Understanding why some children choose to talk to others while others do not is important for ensuring that different routes to support remain relevant as children become more independent online.

13.Excessive use

Anxieties regarding excessive use have accompanied the use of the internet since children first started using this technology. It has a long history pre-dating the internet, and can be traced back to long-held concerns about addiction to television and video games.¹²⁷ With current debates around screen time and banning children from social media, parent and teacher concern about this topic has again gained prominence. Considering this longstanding concern, an investigation of excessive use has formed part of EUKO since the first survey.¹²⁸

In this chapter, we are interested in the impact of internet use on the child's everyday life rather than purely in the time spent online or where that time is spent. Since the range of children's experiences is explored here, and since there is much controversy around whether internet use can be considered addictive in the clinical sense, we use the term excessive internet use.¹²⁹ In this report, the term excessive use is not used as a clinical diagnosis or as a measure of 'addiction', but as an umbrella term for indicators suggesting that individuals themselves experience their internet use as difficult to regulate or as interfering with other parts of everyday life. In previous studies, EUKO has used these indicators to examine how often parents, children and young people themselves feel that internet use disrupts sleep, meals, schoolwork, relationships or their own sense of control.

Validated scales for excessive internet use that have shown their robustness both in academic and clinical terms have been included without much change since the first EUKO survey. We asked seven questions corresponding to the criteria of excessive internet use defined in Griffiths' research:¹³⁰

- **Salience:** when the specific online activity becomes the most important activity in the child's life.
- **Mood modification:** a subjective experience influenced by the online activity, such as using online activities to improve the mood or feel better.
- **Tolerance:** the need to increase the amounts of the online activity to achieve the former effects.

- **Withdrawal symptoms:** unpleasant feelings, states and/or physical states after termination of the online activity.
- **Conflict:** disagreements between the child and those around them (such as parents or friends) or within the individual's own mind associated with the online activity.
- **Relapse:** when children tried to reduce the amount spent on the online activity but failed.

For the first time, we also asked young children, aged 10-11, to indicate whether they had experienced any of the criteria associated with excessive internet use.

As five of these questions were also asked in 2020 and 2011, comparisons over time can be made. Although for the first time EUKO asked children as young as 10 about their experiences related to excessive use, in comparisons over time, we only include those older than 12

Children answered the following question:

In the past year, how often have these things happened to you?

The six response options included 'never', 'a few times', 'at least every month', 'at least every week', 'daily or almost daily', and 'several times per day'.¹³¹ If the children answered 'at least every week', 'daily or almost daily' or 'several times per day', they were considered as having met the relevant criterion. The cut-off for considering a criterion as present ('at least every week') was set to reflect the severity of impact that this behaviour has on the day-to-day lives of intense users. According to Griffiths' criteria,¹³² internet users are considered as excessive users only if they experience all the criteria. In our analyses we look at different levels of excessive use rather than identifying a child as using or not using the internet excessively.

¹²⁷ Ferguson & Faye (2018).

¹²⁸ Smahel et al. (2012).

¹²⁹ Internet addiction is currently not a recognized disorder in the psychiatric manual DSM-IV; gaming addiction is included.

¹³⁰ Griffiths (2000). See also EU Kids Online 2020 report (Smahel et al.).

¹³¹ Several times per day was not included in the EUKO 2020 version.

¹³² Griffiths (2000).

Excessive use overall and by country

As we included more items in this survey than in the previous survey, to be able to gain a broader grasp of experiences of excessive internet use, it is worth looking at all these individually before moving to comparisons between countries, gender, age and socioeconomic status (SES) groups.

The most frequent experiences of excessive internet use relate to children desiring more control over their internet use, who would rather be spending their time

online on other things: spending less time with family, friends or doing schoolwork was experienced by 19%, closely followed by using the internet without being interested (18%) and unsuccessfully trying to spend less time on the internet (19%). Going without eating or sleeping (7%) and experiencing conflict (10%) are the least common, and problems caused because of internet use (13%), not enquired about in 2018, are also infrequently experienced.

Thus, it is the experience of time lost that could or should have been spent on other things rather than a dependency on the internet that takes prominence for these children.

Table 21: Excessive use aspects experienced at least weekly, by country

	I have gone without eating or sleeping because of the internet	I have felt bothered when I cannot be on the internet	I have caught myself using the internet although I'm not really interested	I have spent less time than I should with either family, friends or doing schoolwork	I have tried unsuccessfully to spend less time on the internet	I have experienced conflicts with family or friends because of the time I spent on the internet*	I think the amount of time I spend on the internet causes problems for me*
AT	9	8	19	22	20	10	15
BE	8	7	19	29	19	11	11
CH	2	3	6	14	12	6	7
CZ	10	11	25	14	23	11	13
EE	10	11	26	18	20	10	16
ES	4	10	11	12	19	8	9
FI	9	11	22	21	17	8	12
HR	9	22	26	21	20	11	17
IE	3	7	14	16	12	10	8
IT	3	10	22	17	18	13	13
LU	5	6	12	19	18	8	12
LV	13	14	25	22	23	12	18
MT	5	14	13	19	22	14	16
NO	9	9	13	20	22	11	13
PL	9	10	16	16	17	12	14
PT	8	18	21	16	19	11	15
RO	11	11	12	18	20	10	18
RS	5	10	20	29	21	10	12
SK	7	13	16	24	18	12	13
Ave	7	11	18	19	19	10	13

QC29¹³³: In the past year, how often have these things happened to you in relation to the internet? (% that answered 'At least every week', 'Daily or almost daily' or 'Several times per day'.) Note: * Items not included in the EUKO 2018 survey. Base: All children 10–16.

¹³³ In EUKO2011, EUKO2018 (QF70, core/optional) & GKO2020. EUKO2011: different wording. EUKO2011 & GKO2020: different scale. GKO2020 Key measure. Source: Šmahel & Blinka (2012). Changes from EUKO2018: "in relation to the internet" added; "Several times per day" added to scale.

Country variation of the experience of different aspects of excessive use in comparison to other countries is considerable (see Table 21). The indicator on which there are the largest differences between countries is using the internet while not being interested from around a third of children experiencing this in Czechia, Estonia, and Croatia, to only 6% experiencing this in Switzerland. The highest percentage of children experiencing a specific aspect can be observed in Belgium for spending less time than they should with friends and family or on schoolwork because of the internet (29%).

The experience of each aspect of excessive internet use has gone up since 2020 for each aspect that was measured in both 2020 and 2024.

However, the ranking of what was most experienced is has not changed since 2020. In comparing the 2020 survey to the 2024 survey we can see that among the comparable group of 12- to 16-year-olds, the largest increase was for the most frequently experienced criterion (spending less time with family, friends or doing schoolwork): in 2024, 22% experienced this, up from 13% in 2020, although using the internet without being interested (21%, up from 11%) and unsuccessfully trying to spend less time on the internet (20%, up from 10%) also showed significant increases. There is not much change in feeling bothered because you can't go online (8% compared to 4%).

Table 22: Excessive use aspects experienced at least weekly, by country comparison, 2018–24 (12- to 16-year-olds)

	I have gone without eating or sleeping because of the internet		I have felt bothered when I cannot be on the internet		I have caught myself using the internet although I'm not really interested		I have spent less time than I should with either family, friends or doing schoolwork		I have tried unsuccessfully to spend less time on the internet	
	2024	2020	2024	2020	2024	2020	2024	2020	2024	2020
CH	3	4	3	13	8	14	17	17	13	14
CZ	13	4	12	8	29	14	17	9	24	13
EE	12	4	13	5	31	15	22	11	22	14
ES	4	2	11	9	12	11	14	13	19	10
FI	11	4	12	6	25	11	23	15	19	10
HR	11	5	25	19	30	15	24	17	22	13
IT	4	0	12	5	28	5	21	9	19	5
MT	10	6	19	12	23	13	28	19	25	20
NO	11	4	10	8	15	12	23	16	23	9
PL	7	6	7	17	13	16	15	12	15	10
PT	9	3	20	11	25	15	19	10	19	8
RO	13	11	13	13	15	11	22	14	21	15
RS	6	4	11	10	22	11	32	18	21	12
SK	8	1	13	3	18	5	26	4	18	5
Overall	8	4	12	10	21	11	22	13	20	10

QC29: In the past year, how often have these things happened to you in relation to the internet? (% 'At least every week', 'Daily or almost daily' or 'Several times per day'). Note: Only countries participating in both the 2024 and 2020 surveys.¹³⁴ Base: All children 11–16

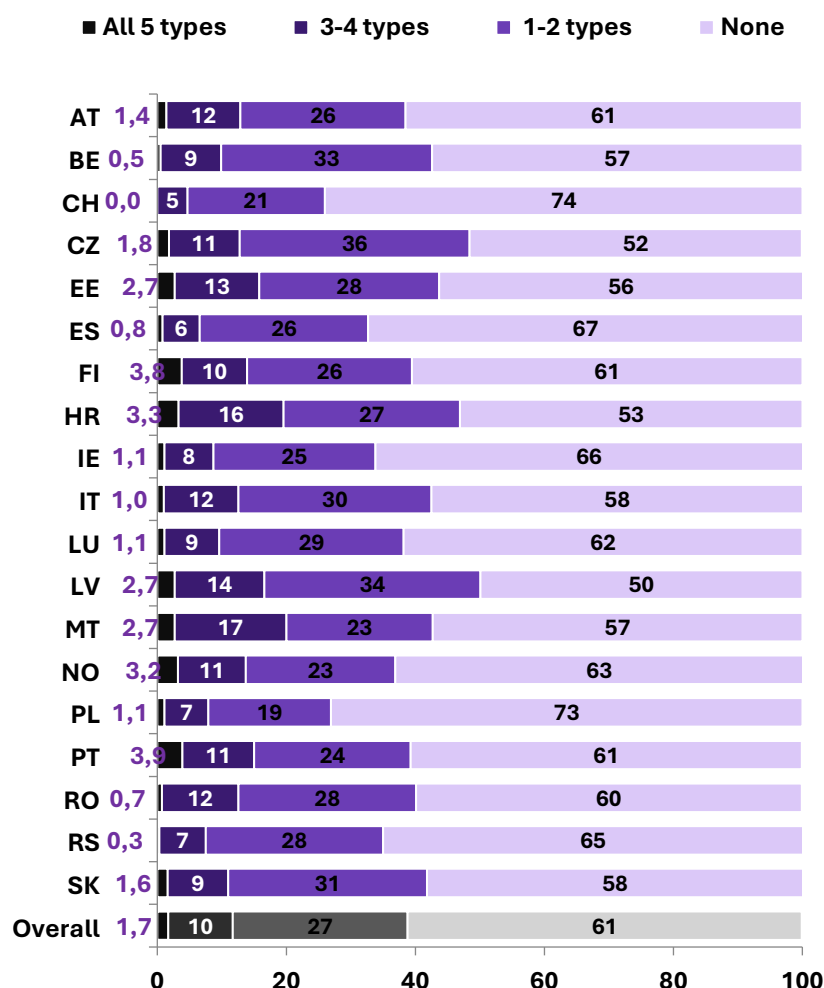
¹³⁴ Comparisons need to be made cautiously since methods of data collection were changed slightly, different countries were included and the answer categories also changed slightly.

An interesting pattern can be observed in Switzerland where excessive internet use experiences have diminished since 2020 on all indicators. In Romania little changed for any of the indicators. In Italy, the largest increase across all countries and aspects took place for using the internet while not being interested (from 5% to 28%). Italy also showed large increases in unsuccessfully trying to spend less time online (from

5% to 19%), alongside Norway (from 9% to 23%) and Slovakia (from 5% to 18%).

Country variation as well as increases over time are concentrated around indicators that refer to a desire to spend more time online rather than aspects that refer to problems caused by internet use.

Figure 87: Number of aspects of excessive internet use experienced at least weekly, by country



QC29: In the past year, how often have these things happened to you in relation to the internet? (% 'At least every week', 'Daily or almost daily' or 'Several times per day.'). Note: The results are calculated for the five items that were also included in the EUKO 2020 survey (see Table 21). Base: All children 12–16.

An examination of the distribution of excessive internet use across the countries shows that the majority of children do not experience any of the criteria for excessive internet use, although the 61% average for no experience has gone down from 2018, when it was 74%.¹³⁵

There is considerable variation in how many children experience at least one of the criteria of excessive use. The countries with the most children not experiencing any of the criteria are Switzerland (74%) and Poland (73%), while in Latvia, half of children experience at least one of the criteria of excessive use (50%).

¹³⁵ Comparisons need to be made cautiously since methods of data collection were changed slightly, different countries

were included, and the answer categories also changed slightly.

Switzerland and Poland are also the only countries with decreases (–9% and –2%) in children experiencing any of the criteria: in 2020 in Switzerland, 36% indicated they had experienced at least one compared to 27% in 2024, and in Poland this was 29% compared to 27%. Slovakia, on the other hand, has seen the largest increases in those experiencing at least one criterion, with 34 percentage points (from 8% in 2020 to 42% in 2024); Italy follows second with 27 percentage points (from 16% in 2020 to 42% in 2024). Slovakia and Italy are just below average in the current survey since they were the countries with the highest percentage of children not having experienced any of the criteria in 2020, which means they are catching up with the rest of Europe.

Croatia (16%) and Malta (17%) are where most children experience between three and four of the criteria and Switzerland is where fewest children (5%) experience between three and four of the criteria. Similar to the 2018 and 2011 surveys,¹³⁶ almost no children experience all criteria of excessive internet use, ranging from 0% in Switzerland to 3.9 % in Portugal.

There are only four countries in which more than 3% of children report genuinely excessive internet use with problematic consequences: Finland, Hungary, Norway, and Portugal.

Excessive use: age, gender and socioeconomic status (SES)

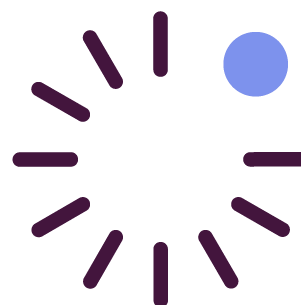
Experiences of children of the digital world vary considerably, and when it comes to excessive use, sociodemographic characteristics are often looked at to predict who is more at risk. One of the surprising findings in previous surveys was that girls are more likely to indicate experiencing some of the criteria of excessive internet use. Findings by age followed a more predictable pattern of older children more likely to experience excessive internet use.¹³⁷ In this report, the data are also unpacked for different socioeconomic groups.

This section examines at least weekly experiences of at least one criterion to make meaningful comparisons with previous years. It is important in future research to make further distinctions between those at risk of real harm from excessive use (problematic internet use) indicating experience of all seven criteria, and those who experience only some aspects and desire to have more control over their internet use rather than seeing

their daily lives impacted in more severe ways. We do not look at psychological vulnerability, but previous research shows clearly that this is a strong predictor of excessive internet use.¹³⁸

In line with previous research and EUKO studies, we find that older children are more likely to experience at least some aspect of excessive internet use: a quarter (27%) of 10- to 11-year-olds, a third (34%) of 12- to 14-year-olds and half (48%) of 15- to 16-year-olds have had these experiences.

The increases since 2020 are larger for the 15- to 16-year-olds (32% in 2020) than for the 12- to 14-year-olds (24% in 2020).



Among 15- to 16-year-olds, the at least weekly experience of some aspect of excessive use ranges from 57% in Malta to 27% in Poland and 38% in Switzerland. Among 12- to 14-year-olds, the highest prevalence of negative outcomes of excessive internet use are found in Czechia and Latvia (both 45%), while the lowest prevalence of excessive internet use experience this in this age category resides again in Switzerland (20%). In those countries that included 10- to 11-year-olds, Switzerland is also the country with the lowest prevalence (12%), while the youngest children in Malta are the most exposed. Thus, while there is variation for the age categories, Switzerland clearly has an established environment that leads children to feel that they are not using the internet excessively.

Malta has the largest difference – 24 percentage points – between older (57%) and younger (33%) teens, while between the older and younger internet users the difference was largest in Luxembourg (31 percentage points): 47% of 15- to 16-year-olds and 16% of 10- to 11-year-olds experienced at least one of the criteria for excessive use.

¹³⁶ Answer scales were different. In 2020, the response option ‘several times per day’ was not included on the five-point scale used, and in 2011 children answered on a five-point scale, from ‘never or almost never’ to ‘fairly often’ or ‘very

often’ (‘fairly often’ or ‘very often’ were considered equivalent to ‘at least weekly’).

¹³⁷ Mikuška et al. (2020); Škařupová et al. (2015).

¹³⁸ Helsper & Smahel (2020).

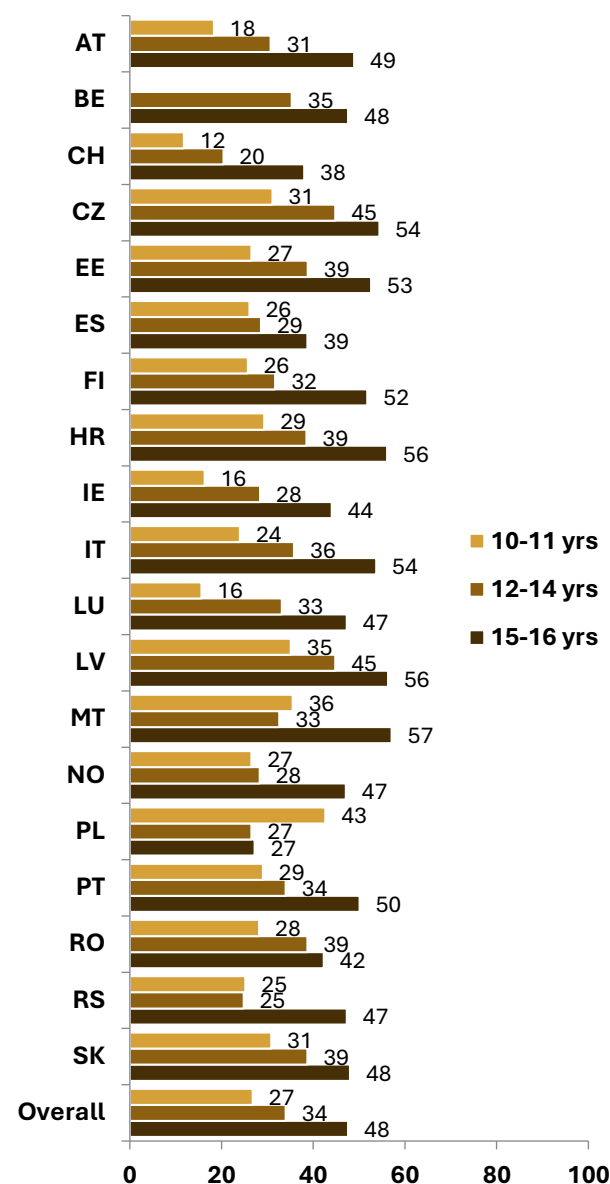
Compared with previous years, 15- to 16-year-olds in Slovakia and Italy have seen the largest increase in experiences of excessive use. These are much larger than in the 12- to 14-year-old age group, even though they are also among the three countries with the largest percentage point increase for that age group. This should be seen against a background of them having low levels of excessive internet use in 2020, and being average in the current survey for all age groups. In Czechia, increases in excessive use are mainly due to a 21% increase among 12- to 14-year-olds (from 24% to 45%).

Gender differences in excessive use are relatively small; overall, girls (43%) are slightly more likely to experience at least one of the criteria at least weekly than boys (36%). In 2020, this difference was in the same direction and of the same size, although both boys and girls were less likely to report that they had experienced at least one of these criteria (girls 29%, boys 26%). Even when overall levels of experience of excessive use have increased for both boys and girls, the direction of gender differences largely remains the same for individual countries.

As in previous surveys, gender differences vary by country. They range from 18% in Finland (girls 48%, boys 30%), 14% in Latvia (boys 42%, girls 56%) and Austria (boys 31%, girls 45%), to 7% in the other direction in Malta (boys 50%, girls 43%).¹³⁹ This is an interesting reversal for Malta, where in 2020 boys were less likely to have experienced excessive use than girls (32% vs 40%). There are a few countries in which the gap between boys and girls has narrowed since 2020, with boys catching up with girls in Romania where the difference between them went from 10 percentage points to 6 percentage points.

Finland and Czechia are the only countries where the gender gap broadened: from 9% (30% girls, 21% boys) to 18% in Finland and from 1% to 8% in Czechia (30% girls, 29% boys in 2020, 53% girls, 45% boys in 2024). In Portugal, girls (40% girls, 39% boys) were less likely to experience some aspect of excessive internet use in 2020, but in 2024 they were equal in this experience (40% girls, 39% boys).

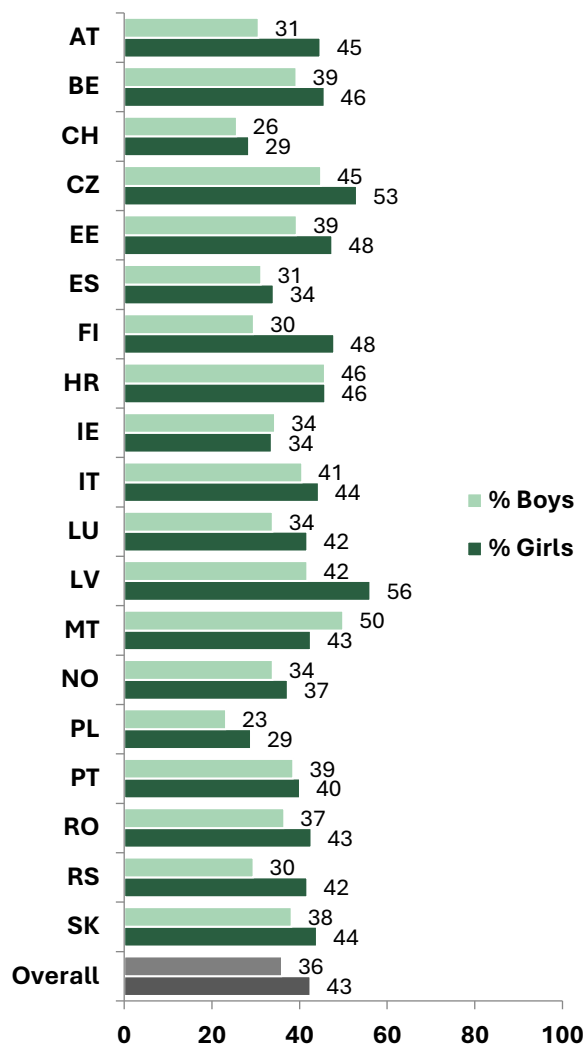
Figure 88: Experienced at least one aspect of excessive use at least weekly, by age group



QC29: In the past year, how often have these things happened to you in relation to the internet? (% 'At least every week', 'Daily or almost daily' or 'Several times per day'.) Note I. The results are calculated for the five items that were also included in the EUKO 2020 survey (see Table 21). Note II. Belgium did not ask the excessive use question of 10- to 11-year-olds. Serbia, Poland, Croatia, Finland and Austria did not ask these questions of 10-year-olds. Base: All children 10–16.

¹³⁹ Malta had a smaller sample and therefore caution needs to be had with group comparisons.

Figure 89: Experienced at least one aspect of excessive use at least weekly, by gender



QC29: In the past year, how often have these things happened to you in relation to the internet? (% 'At least every week', 'Daily or almost daily' or 'Several times per day'.) Note: The results are calculated for the five items that were also included in the EUKO 2020 survey (see Table 21). Base: All children 11–16.

There is little literature on potential differences between children from different SES backgrounds; in previous iterations of EUKO, this factor was not included in reporting. However, there is reason (based on the broader literature on digital inequalities) to believe that children with more resources at home also have more support to prevent negative outcomes of internet use.¹⁴⁰

In almost all countries, children from lower SES backgrounds are more likely to experience excessive internet use: 35% of children from higher SES backgrounds have experienced at least one aspect of excessive use compared with 39% from middle SES backgrounds and 47% from lower SES backgrounds.

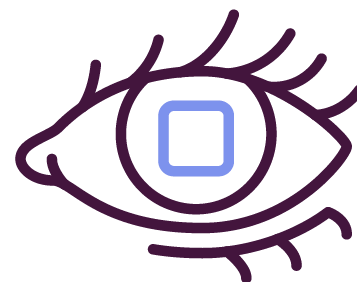
In Malta, however, children from higher SES backgrounds (45%) are actually worse off than those from middle SES backgrounds (33%). Differences between high and low SES groups are largest in Romania (21%) and Latvia (28%), while in Ireland and Czechia they are negligible (1%). Differences between high and medium SES groups are small for all countries, with the exception of children in Finland, where middle SES children (47%) are 14 percentage points worse off than those of higher SES backgrounds (33%).

Differences in excessive use

The finding that excessive use has gone up considerably since 2020 seems alarming. However, this increase **mostly comes from aspects referring to a sense that time was wasted** on the internet, time that could have been spent on other things, **rather than more problematic outcomes** such as sleep deprivation or conflict with family members.

This might indicate an increased awareness due to public campaigning and discussion, resulting in **anxiety about or frustration with how much time is spent online rather than an increase in replacement of other activities** and interactions by mediated interactions and online activities.

There are considerable country differences in how children from different gender and age groups experience their engagement with the internet. It is important to understand how national **public discourse, parental mediation and broader norms and values** around what constitutes problematic internet use for children of various backgrounds relate to these differences in the experience of excessive internet use.



¹⁴⁰ Courtois & Verdegem (2016).

We should ask whether experiences differ because frequent use is more acceptable for some than for others who are more likely to ‘feel guilty’ about this, or because there is a genuine problem among older teens and girls (although increasingly also boys). **Distinguishing which children are at high risk for genuinely problematic excessive internet use from those who need support in gaining more agency** is important for research, clinicians, policymakers and parents, because they require different interventions.

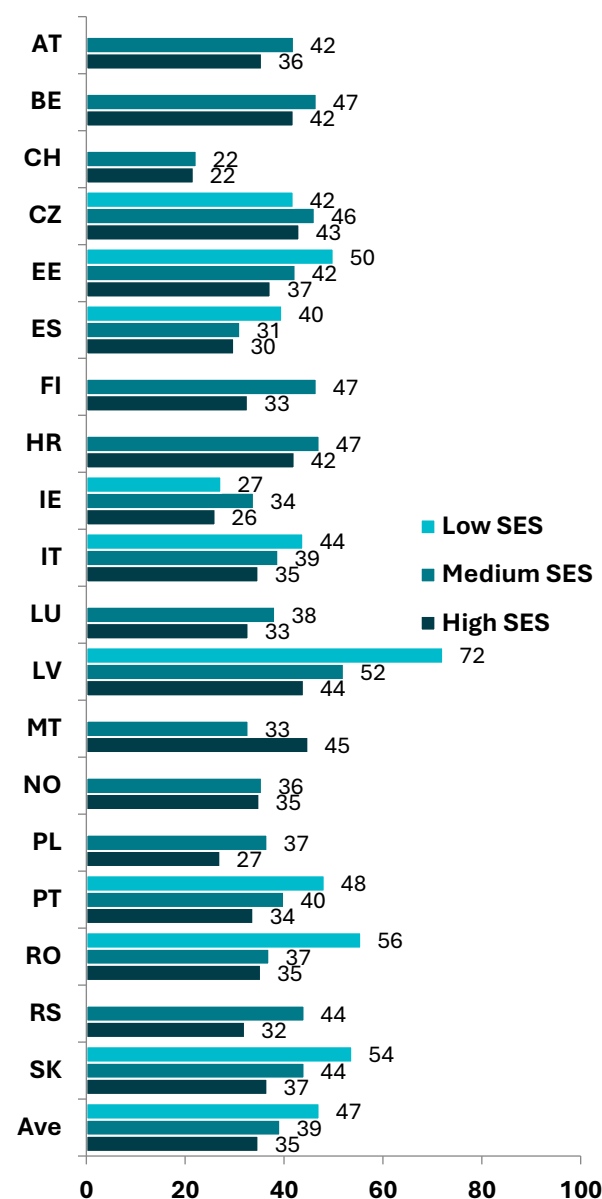
Identifying real at-risk children (at most 2% of a population) **allows for targeted interventions and clinical support.** Those struggling more generally with controlling their use require a different approach, including increasing the availability, both in material and cognitive terms, of suitable non-digital alternatives for doing things and interaction with teachers, family members and peers.

For both boys and girls, the wish to be online less and spend more time doing other things and interact with family and friends has gone up, with girls still experiencing this slightly more than boys. That **boys are catching up with girls** in this respect in most countries might be partially explained by **boys feeling it is less acceptable or desirable to spend their time online** than it was 5 or 15 years ago. This is corroborated by the contradicting finding that girls actually spend on average less time online than boys, although they are more at risk of harm when they are.

Besides potential normative gender differences and developmental differences related to age, it is urgent to **gain understanding about what is lacking in the non-digital lives of lower SES children** across Europe that makes it harder for them to disconnect than for higher SES children. Is there enough support in schools, and can parents be supported to help their children find alternative ways to engage with others and do activities in non-digital spaces?

This is **not just about increasing digital literacy or autonomy or regulation of technologies, but about providing safe, welcoming outdoor, public or communal spaces** to hang out in, more opportunities to interact with parents, and for learning inside and outside schools.

Figure 90: Experienced at least one aspect of excessive use, by socioeconomic status (SES)



QC29: In the past year, how often have these things happened to you in relation to the internet? (% ‘At least every week’, ‘Daily or almost daily’ or ‘Several times per day’). Note: The results are calculated for the five items that were also included in the EUKO 2020 survey (see Table 21. No comparison can be made to the previous survey waves. Base: All children 10–16

PART III

Parental support, enabling and regulation

How do parents support, enable and regulate children's digital lives?





14. The role of parental mediation

Parents and caregivers undertake a wide range of actions in relation to their children's digital lives. Across successive surveys, the EUKO network has honed the questions we ask children about the activities that their parents might undertake to mediate or manage their child's internet use. Collectively, these are theorised as parental mediation, as they represent activities by which parents and caregivers mediate (or get in between) the child and the screen.

We originally distinguished five types of activity, based on parental mediation theory as well as empirical analysis of previous EUKO surveys:¹⁴¹

- Active mediation of the child's internet use
- Active mediation of the child's internet safety
- Monitoring (in person) of the child's internet use
- Technical mediation of the child's internet use through parental tools
- Restrictive mediation through rules and restrictions.

While all of these are still practised, we also recognise shifts in digital parenting cultures:

- Positive parenting advice has recognised that active mediation goes hand in hand with active safety mediation. This is because, if the parent is sharing or co-using a digital service with their child, that likely creates a natural opportunity to offer safety guidance. It also serves an informal monitoring function.
- The range of possible parental tools has also grown significantly in response to consumer demand as well as increasing regulatory pressures on platforms.¹⁴²

Our previous research found that active safety, monitoring and technical mediation are highly correlated, even though they are conceptually distinct.¹⁴³ In practice, this means that parents who do one (say, active safety mediation) are also likely to do another (say, monitoring), which means it makes sense **to group these types of parental activities together under the label of 'enabling mediation'.**

What is interesting here is that enabling mediation includes monitoring and use of tools. In other words, it is not that parents who share digital activities with

their child are somehow against monitoring or parental controls. Rather, what matters is that parents are finding ways to combine these activities simultaneously to encourage their child's digital engagement while also keeping them safe. In its most positive and intense form, enabling mediation constitutes what Gee et al.¹⁴⁴ call 'joint media engagement', a way of embracing the benefits of digital engagement hand in hand with one's child, to be ready if support is needed while exploring the benefits more deeply together. Relatedly, enabling mediation can encompass children's agency, as children are rarely the passive recipients of parental actions.¹⁴⁵

By implication, the use of parental tools and monitoring is not part of restrictive mediation. Indeed, parental activities involved in setting rules or bans or other kinds of restrictions are receiving more criticism in recent years, as this can intimidate children in ways that prevent them from reporting problems,¹⁴⁶ even encouraging workarounds, as well as positioning parents more as 'police' than as 'guides' for their children.¹⁴⁷

Does parental mediation work? In Livingstone et al.,¹⁴⁸ we found that enabling mediation was linked to children having more digital opportunities and digital skills, but they still encountered risks online. Restrictive mediation, by contrast, was linked to children encountering fewer risks but also fewer opportunities and skills – although it remains popular among parents.¹⁴⁹ The holy grail of more opportunities and skills but fewer risks remains elusive.

Hence, parents are confronted with an unresolved and context-dependent balancing act – more enabling activities encourages children's digital exploration; more restriction keeps them safer but with opportunity costs. This explains the ambivalence that many parents report as they face the challenges of the digital age.¹⁵⁰

In recent research, enabling parental mediation was associated with children engaging in more information-seeking and having more informational digital skills, whereas restrictive mediation was associated with children spending more time on

¹⁴¹ Pasquier et al. (2012).

¹⁴² Wood (2026).

¹⁴³ Livingstone et al. (2017).

¹⁴⁴ Gee et al. (2018).

¹⁴⁵ Van Den Bulck & Van Den Bergh (2005).

¹⁴⁶ Jensen et al. (2026).

¹⁴⁷ Livingstone & Blum-Ross (2020).

¹⁴⁸ Livingstone et al. (2017).

¹⁴⁹ Nichols & Selim (2022).

¹⁵⁰ Mascheroni et al. (2018).

entertainment activities.¹⁵¹ Encouragingly, another study found that active mediation was associated with less cyberbullying, especially when linked with monitoring, while restrictive mediation was unrelated.¹⁵² Consistent with this, in a meta-analysis reviewing the findings of 52 empirical studies, the authors concluded that:

Restrictive mediation was more effective than active mediation in decreasing the amount of time children spent on media, whereas the effects of active mediation and co-using were greater than those of restrictive mediation on reducing the incidence of media-related risks. According to the moderator analyses, age, risk type, medium, and culture significantly moderated the effects of active and restrictive mediation on reducing the amount of media use and the incidence of media-related risks.¹⁵³

As this conclusion implies, not only are parents facing difficult decisions about their children's online activities, with much more research needed to identify optimal approaches, but also **not all parents face these challenges equally**. One analysis found that parents who felt more in control as they sought to manage the risks their child might face online, and those with more digital skills, became more involved in their child's online activities.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, as the parental mediation literature has long shown, parents are unequally positioned in socioeconomic terms, and this affects the time, expertise and resources they bring to the tasks of digital parenting.¹⁵⁵

Parental mediation survey question in EU Kids Online V

In the EUKO V 2025 survey, we asked questions about a mix of activities broadly understood as enabling mediation. Where possible, we formulated the survey questions in the same or similar ways as in previous EUKO surveys to allow comparisons over time. However, as needed, we updated some enabling mediation questions or made them more neutral regarding particular apps or devices, although it is still possible to compare the new and previous findings. In total, **we asked about 18 different enabling activities**. Meanwhile, we did not include restrictive parental mediation questions. Parental mediation activities differ from parental use of tools or technical

controls. **We asked about eight uses of parental tools.**

We recognise differences across the countries, as parents and children approach digital media differently for many reasons, including cultural norms and values, as well as wider contexts of regulation and other shaping factors.¹⁵⁶ A recent literature review reported that gender, culture, language, family structure, immigration status and other factors shape how parents and children interact around digital technologies.¹⁵⁷ Nonetheless, **the value of asking the same questions across the countries** is that we can then compare the findings, opening up an analysis of which approaches to digital parenting might be working well in which context and why.

Keep in mind that the survey questions were directed at children. Generally, children can report fairly on the activities their parents undertake, although children and parents may differ in how they recognise and regard these activities.¹⁵⁸ Children may also be less aware of when their parents use technical tools.

Finally, note that in the survey, **we asked children about a parent or caregiver**, leaving open the different circumstances of their lives. Specifically, we prefaced these questions to children with the following remark:

Families are all different, so here are a few questions about you and your family. If you live an equal amount of time at several places, think about the home where you will be sleeping tonight.

In what follows, we refer mainly to parents, intending this to cover the adult(s) the child identified as responsible for their care.

Also, as **the internet itself has become more complex**, the survey recognised that, for children, this might include concerns about their device use, online activities or who they are friends with. We therefore premised the following questions with this reminder to children:

Remember that when we say 'the internet' or 'online', this could include your mobile phone, tablet or computer to send or receive messages, emails, browse, use social media or to communicate with friends and family, uploading or downloading, or anything else that you usually do online.

¹⁵¹ Cino et al. (2022).

¹⁵² Chen et al. (2022).

¹⁵³ Chen & Shi (2019, p. 173).

¹⁵⁴ Helsper et al. (2025).

¹⁵⁵ Clark (2013).

¹⁵⁶ Paus-Hasebrink et al. (2012).

¹⁵⁷ Nichols & Selim (2022).

¹⁵⁸ Livingstone & Blum-Ross (2020); Mascheroni et al. (2018).

In a further survey question, we also inquired into the quality of child–parent communication. This recognised that probably the most common advice to parents is to ensure an open channel of communication with their child so that, if the child encounters a problem (online or offline), they feel safe telling their parents. As research has often shown, children often do not tell anyone, for example because of embarrassment or fear of punishment.¹⁵⁹

We begin our account of the parental mediation findings with this question.

Quality of child–parent communication

Three-quarters of 10- to 16-year-olds find it ‘very’ (39%) or ‘fairly’ (39%) easy to talk to their parents or caregivers about things that upset them. This suggests a positive state of affairs across Europe as regards child–parent communication.

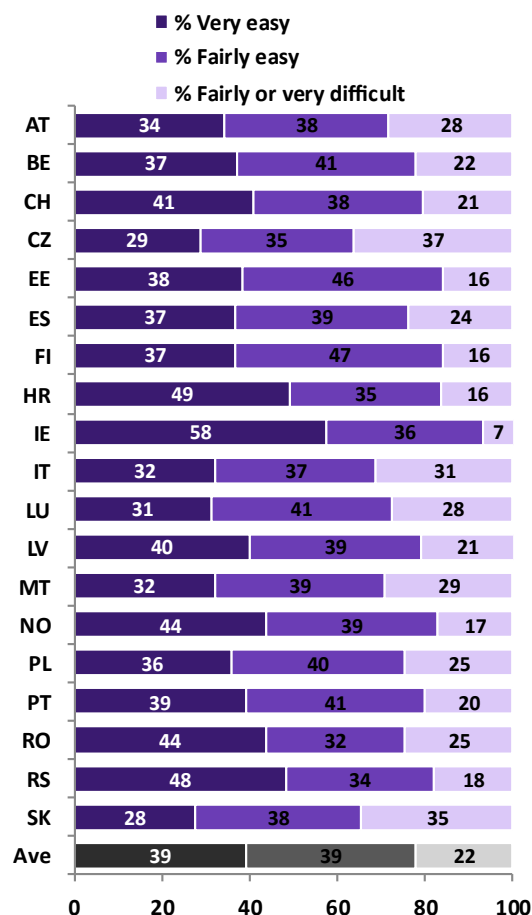
However, 22% of children report finding it ‘fairly’ or ‘very difficult’ to seek out parental support when they need it (see Figure 91). This suggests that, **for one in five children across Europe, advising them to talk to their parents when something upsetting happens is unlikely to help.** This finding both limits digital policies that rely on parenting support and reveals the need for alternative sources of support for these children.

There is a fair degree of variation by country: Children report more difficulties in Czechia (37%), Slovakia (35%) and Italy (31%), while children in Ireland report the least difficulty discussing upsetting things (7%), followed by Estonia, Finland and Croatia (all 16%). Future research could examine why such variation arises across the countries.

A further question for future research is whether easier child–parent communication mitigates any adverse effects of upsetting experiences online or even reduces their number.

Children’s reported ease of discussing upsetting things can be analysed by age, gender and household socioeconomic status (SES). For each breakdown discussed, the overall differences across the countries are statistically significant.

Figure 91: Ease of discussing upsetting things with a parent or caregiver, by country



QC31¹⁶⁰: How easy is it for you to talk to your parent or caregiver about things that upset you? Base: All children 10–16.

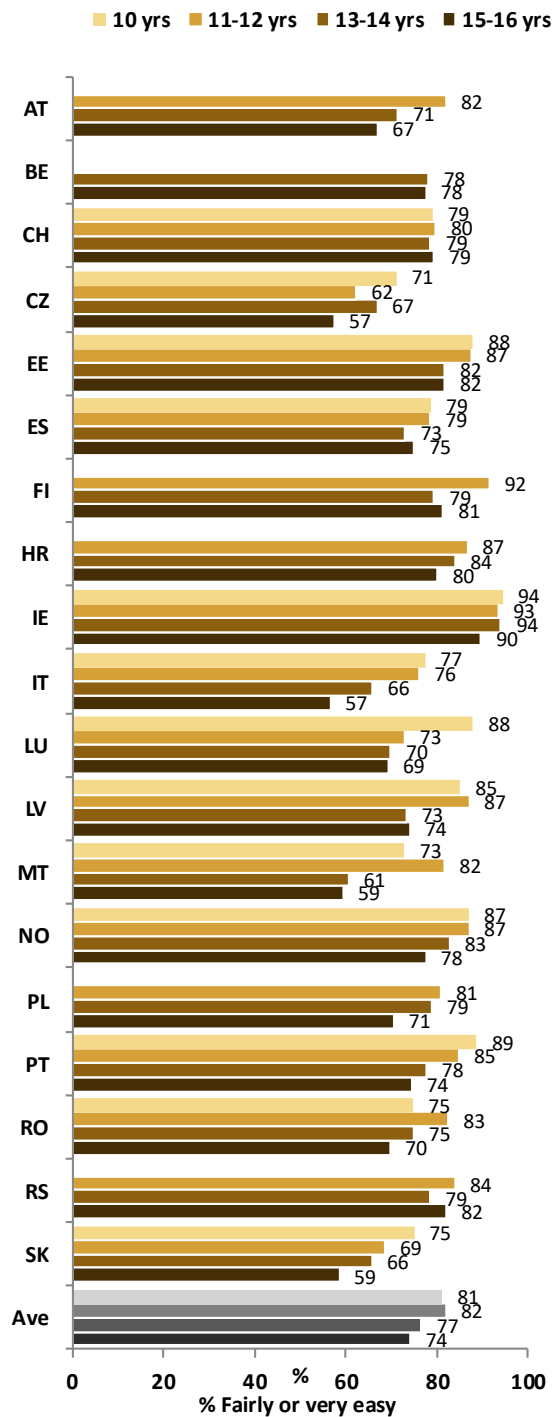
As regards age, **younger children generally find it easier to talk to their parents or caregivers:** Around four in five of the 10-year-olds (81%) and 11- to 12-year-olds (82%) could easily discuss upsetting things with their parents, compared with three-quarters of the teenagers (77% of 13- to 14-year-olds and 74% of 15- to 16-year-olds). It seems that the biggest differences by age are in the countries where children find it harder to talk to parents, notably Czechia, Slovakia and Italy, although also Austria, Luxembourg and Malta.

Another way to put this is that while some four-fifths of younger children can talk to their parents or caregivers in all countries, **over one in three teenagers in some countries report finding talking to parents about upsetting things especially difficult.**

¹⁵⁹ Jensen et al. (2026).

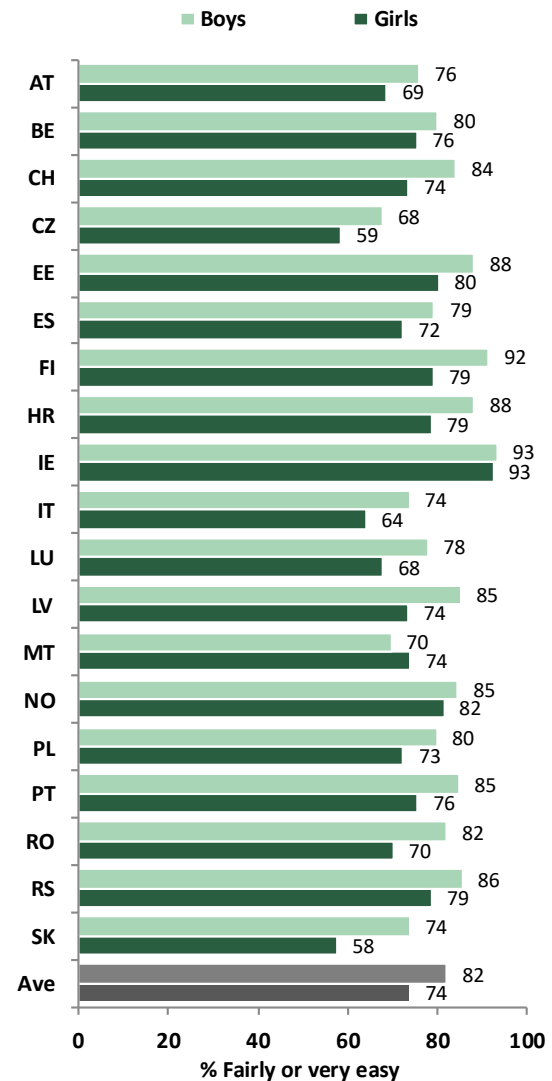
¹⁶⁰ In EUKO2018 (Q11, optional). Framing of parental mediation items conducted in Livingstone et al. (2017).

Figure 92: Ease of discussing upsetting things with a parent or caregiver, by country and age group



QC31: How easy is it for you to talk to your parent or caregiver about things that upset you? (% 'Fairly' or 'very easy'). Base: All children 10–16.

Figure 93: Ease of discussing upsetting things with a parent or caregiver, by country and gender



QC31: How easy is it for you to talk to your parent or caregiver about things that upset you? (% 'Fairly' or 'very easy'). Base: All children 10–16.

Four-fifths of boys (82%) report finding it 'fairly' or 'very easy' to discuss upsetting things with their parents or caregivers compared with 75% of girls.

This gender gap is fairly consistent across Europe, except in Malta. The largest gender gaps in which girls are much less likely to be able to talk to their parents are in Italy, Luxembourg and Switzerland (a 10% gap), Latvia (11%), Romania (12%), Finland (13%) and Slovakia (16%). This is an overlapping but different list of countries from the former list in which teenagers, rather than girls, reported difficulties confiding in parents. Still, these difficulties bear further investigation.



As elsewhere in this report, the findings show marked differences by SES: **Children from high SES homes (81%) are more likely to find it fairly or very easy discuss upsetting things with their parents than those from medium (72%) or low (63%) SES homes.** The pattern of findings is consistent across the countries, although the differences are larger in some countries than others. For example, fewer than two-thirds of low SES children can easily talk to their parents in Czechia, Estonia, Spain, Italy, Latvia, Romania and Slovakia. This finding has clear implications for the value of targeting supportive services for these children, while also recognising the possibly greater pressures that their parents may be experiencing.

Parental activities relating to children's internet use

We first consider the overall findings for **18 questions asked about parental enabling activities**, as reported by their children.

As shown in Figure 95, nearly all the children surveyed were permitted to use the internet by their parents all (45%) or most (30%) of the time. Further analyses found that those who said only sometimes (13%), hardly ever (4%) or never (7%) were more often younger children and those from low SES homes.

Then, **parents' most common actions include:**

- Showing compassion when they make mistakes (72% say 'sometimes' or more often).
- Asking for the child's help when the parent finds something difficult to do online (67% say 'sometimes' or more often).
- Listening to the child when they wish to change what they are and are not allowed to do (66% say 'sometimes' or more often).

Interestingly, **each of these is widely recommended in parenting advice.** Showing compassion is vital because otherwise, research shows that children will not tell parents when they have a problem if they fear a punitive or shaming response. Asking for the child's help may not sound important, but it is often recommended as a way to build a child's trust and respect their expertise on digital matters. Listening to the child and negotiating, rather than imposing rules for internet use, is also crucial to respecting the child's agency and supporting their decisions, as well as providing input to parents who may have misunderstood the motivations behind their child's internet choices. It is thus positive that these are all widely practised.

Showing compassion and listening to children are a little more common in high SES homes, and asking for the child's help is more common among older children. However, it is also noteworthy that **a third of children say their parent hardly ever or never does these things**, hinting at some strict parenting styles that may be more authoritarian than authoritative.

Parents undertake a range of further activities designed to support their child to use the internet safely, at least sometimes. These include suggesting ways to use the internet safely (64%, at least sometimes), explaining why they are not allowed to do certain things online (62%), explaining why some online content is good or bad (62%), helping them do something they find difficult online (61%), helping them when something bothers them online (59%), talking to them about which sources can be trusted (55%), encouraging them to explore and learn online (58%) and talking to them about what they do online (50%).

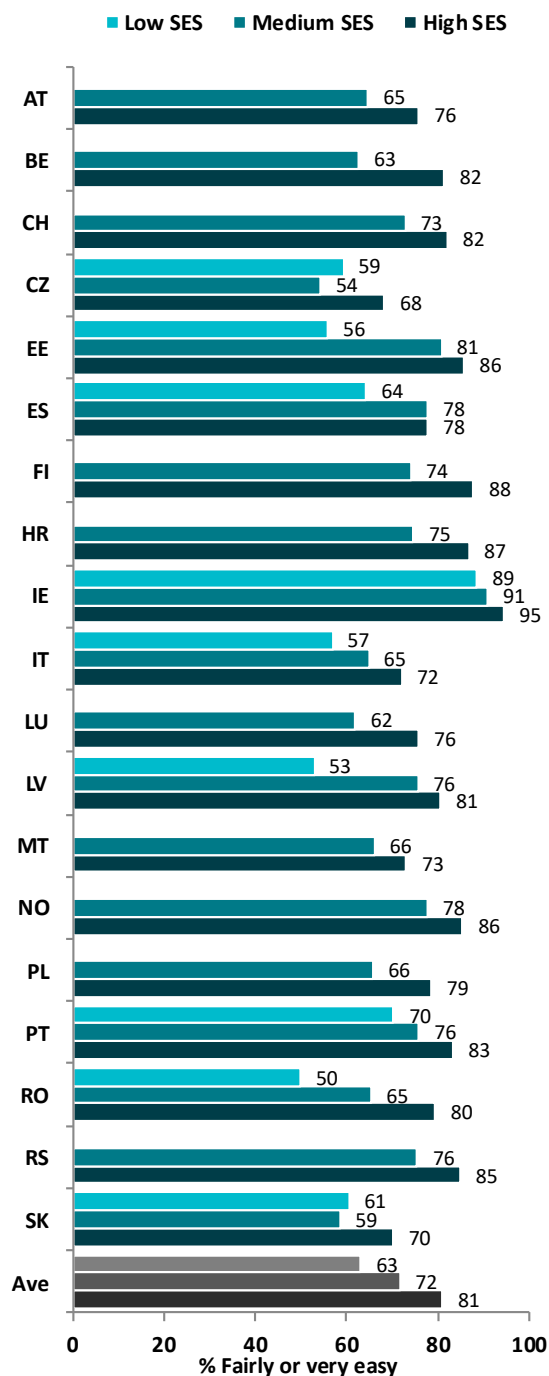
Girls are more likely to say their parents suggest ways to use the internet safely, talk about what they do online, explain why they can't do certain things, and help them when something bothers them. By contrast, it seems that boys receive a little less support of this kind.

Younger children also report receiving more parental help, explanation and evaluative guidance on what content is good or can be trusted, as well as help with time spent online. Older children, by contrast, are more often encouraged to explore and learn online.

Fewer than half of parents, however, at least sometimes talk to their child about mistakes they make online (45%), show them how to use the internet differently (46%), show or suggest interesting content or online activities (42%), or do shared activities together online (33%).

While talking about mistakes or showing different ways to use the internet is more reported by younger children, overall, these relatively lower figures suggest parents' ambivalence, even reluctance, to encourage their child's positive digital experiences. This may be because they are wary of the accompanying risks, concerned about overall screen time, or unsure what a better digital experience for their child could be, beyond trying to keep them safe.

Figure 94: Ease of discussing upsetting things with a parent or caregiver, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC31: How easy is it for you to talk to your parent or caregiver about things that upset you? (% 'Fairly' or 'very easy'). Base: All children 10–16.

Parental enabling mediation activities have reduced rather than increased since 2020. The 2025 survey findings show that parents now, compared with 2020:

Suggest ways to use the internet safely – 64%, down from 69%.

Talk to the child about what they do online – 50%, down from 66%.

Help the child when something bothers them online – 59%, down from 64%.

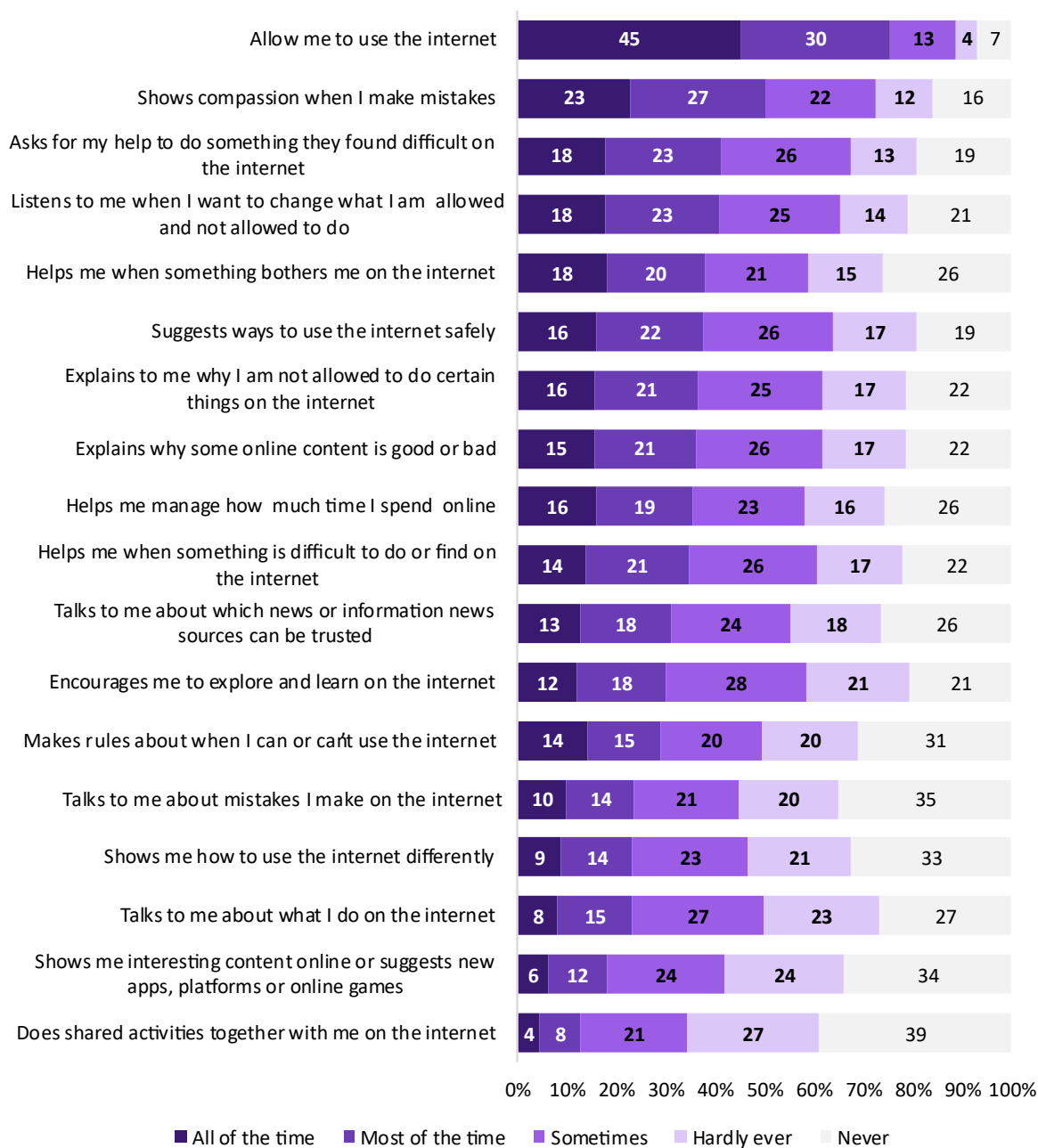
Encourage the child to explore and learn online, no change, at 58%.

These are not big reductions, except when it comes to the decline in parents talking to their child, but they are unexpected given the growth in internet use and the continued efforts of awareness-raising organisations. Possibly, the growth in societal reliance on the internet is itself the explanation, as internet use becomes more taken for granted. Or perhaps parents feel more powerless to influence their children or keep them safe through conversation and guidance.

It is also worth noting that in the 2011 survey, while 63% of children said their parents suggested ways to use the internet safely, only 36% said their parents helped when something bothered them online. Further, 70% said their parent talked to them about what they do online, though only 47% encouraged them to explore and learn. Looking back, it seems that parents' enabling activities rose from 2011 to 2018, with parents especially more likely to help their child when something bothered them online.¹⁶¹ But since then, the 2025 survey found that parental enabling activities have declined a little, with parents especially less willing to talk to their child about what they do online.

¹⁶¹ Kalmus et al. (2022).

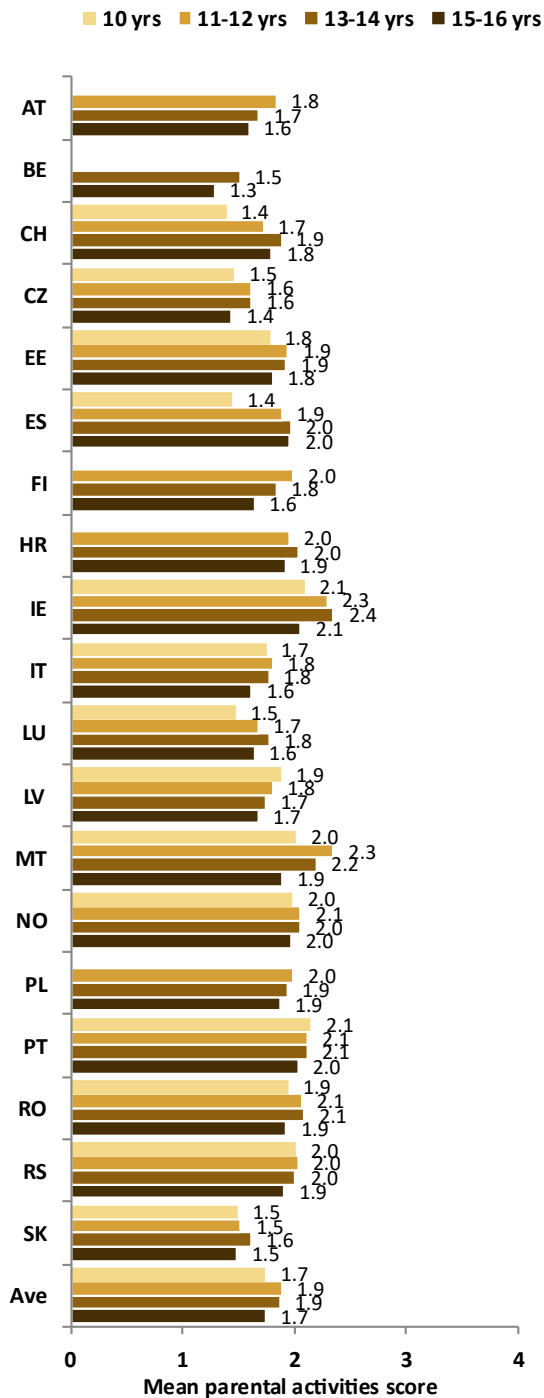
Figure 95: Parental activities relating to the child's internet use



QC32¹⁶²: When you use the internet, how often does your parent or caregiver do any of these things? Base: All children 10–16.

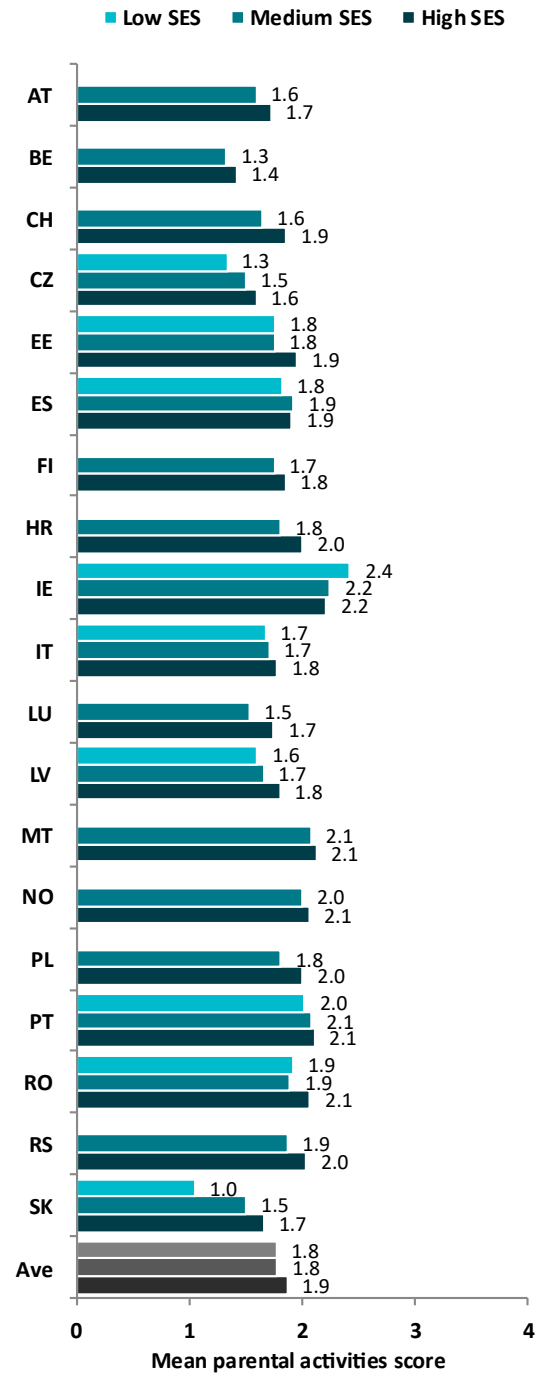
¹⁶² In EUKO2011, EUKO2018 (Q14, core/optional) & GKO2020. EUKO2011 & GKO2020: different wording. EUKO2011: different scale. Source: items “b”, “c”, “d” and “k”: EUKO (2011) adapted. Changes from EUKO2018: Scale - “Very often” changed with “All the time” in scale for EUKO2025.

Figure 96: Combined parental activities relating to the child's internet use, by country and age group



QC32: When you use the internet, how often does your parent or caregiver do any of these things? (18 items are combined and reported on a scale from 0 = never, 1 = hardly ever, 2 = sometimes, 3 = most of the time, 4 = all of the time.). Base: All children 10–16.

Figure 97: Combined parental activities relating to the child's internet use, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC32: When you use the internet, how often does your parent or caregiver do any of these things? (18 items are combined and reported on a scale from 0 = never, 1 = hardly ever, 2 = sometimes, 3 = most of the time, 4 = all of the time.). Base: All children 10–16.



To identify possible country differences, while avoiding 18 sets of figures, **we calculated a parental mediation index** by summing the scores for each of the 18 activities (0 = never, 1 = hardly ever, 2 = sometimes, 3 = most of the time, 4 = all of the time). To ensure the internal consistency of this scale, we checked the inter-item correlations and the overall scale reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.93, which indicates very high internal consistency). We can then report the demographic findings by country, beginning with age.

Across Europe, and averaged across all the 18 activities, parents did these 'sometimes' (scoring 1.8 on the scale shown in Figure 96). More parental activities were reported by children in Ireland and Malta, and fewer in Belgium, Czechia and Slovakia. **Overall, however, country differences are modest.**

More interesting perhaps is that, in some countries, parents do more for their younger children (Austria, Finland, Latvia and Portugal), while in others they do more for children in the middle age groups (Czechia, Ireland and Malta). **Importantly, however, parents are still taking mediating action for their older teens.**

Combining the activities to report the findings across the countries by gender, it appears that any differences are generally modest. In effect, **parents support their sons and daughters equally**, with slightly more activity directed toward girls.

Differences by SES are marked in some countries. In Switzerland, Czechia and Slovakia, high SES parents do more parental mediation, while in Ireland, low SES parents do more. Although across the countries the SES differences are minimal, it may be worth ensuring that parental guidance reaches all parents fairly, so that prior inequalities in children's lives are not further compounded.

Use of parental tools

The range of possible technical tools available to parents is expanding continuously, reflecting both consumer demand and regulatory pressures.¹⁶³ Although they do not always work effectively¹⁶⁴ or receive parental trust,¹⁶⁵ **the survey findings show that parental tools are substantially used by parents**, albeit none were reported by a majority of children about their parents. These likely include 'Family Sharing', 'Screen Time' or 'Find My' tools now included in many phones.

- The most common parental tool was software that alerts the parent when the child wants to buy content via an in-app purchase (44%). Next was use of GPS technology to track children's location (42%), followed by software to track which content or apps children use online (40%).
- A little less common were blocking or filtering services (38%), controls over which apps the child can download (34%) or technical means to limit the child's screen time (34%).
- Even less used were programs to block advertising (21%) or the child's use of voice calls and messages (19%).

Parental use of technical control tools has increased substantially since 2020. The 2025 survey findings show that parents now, compared with the previous survey:

- Block or filter some types of content – 38%, up from 22%.
- Keep track of the internet content the child looks at or apps they use – 40%, up from 21%.
- Use technology to track where they are (such as GPS) – 42%, up from 15%.

These represent sizeable changes, and contrast significantly with the reduction in parental enabling mediation. In effect, in recent years there appears to have seen a shift in parental activities, from social to technical management of their children's internet use. Whether this is due to improvements in the available tools, to a reduction in parents' disposable time or to changing cultural norms that make filtering and tracking more socially acceptable will take more research. So, too, will the question of whether this changed approach works, given that other shifts in children's experience over the same period have seen greater risk exposure and a reduction in children feeling safe online, as documented earlier in this report.

Note that, in the 2011 survey, 28% of children reported that their parents used blocking or filtering tools, and 24% reported their parents used parental controls to keep track of what they do online. Today's increased use of such tools is clearly both recent and distinctive.

Recognising that governments across Europe are variously advising the public on these different tools, we present these findings by country in Table 23. To summarise the detailed findings, **we calculated a parental tool index** by summing the scores for each of the eight activities (scored 0 = no, 1 = yes). To measure the internal consistency of this scale, we checked the

¹⁶³ Wood (2026).

¹⁶⁴ Matsumoto et al. (2026).

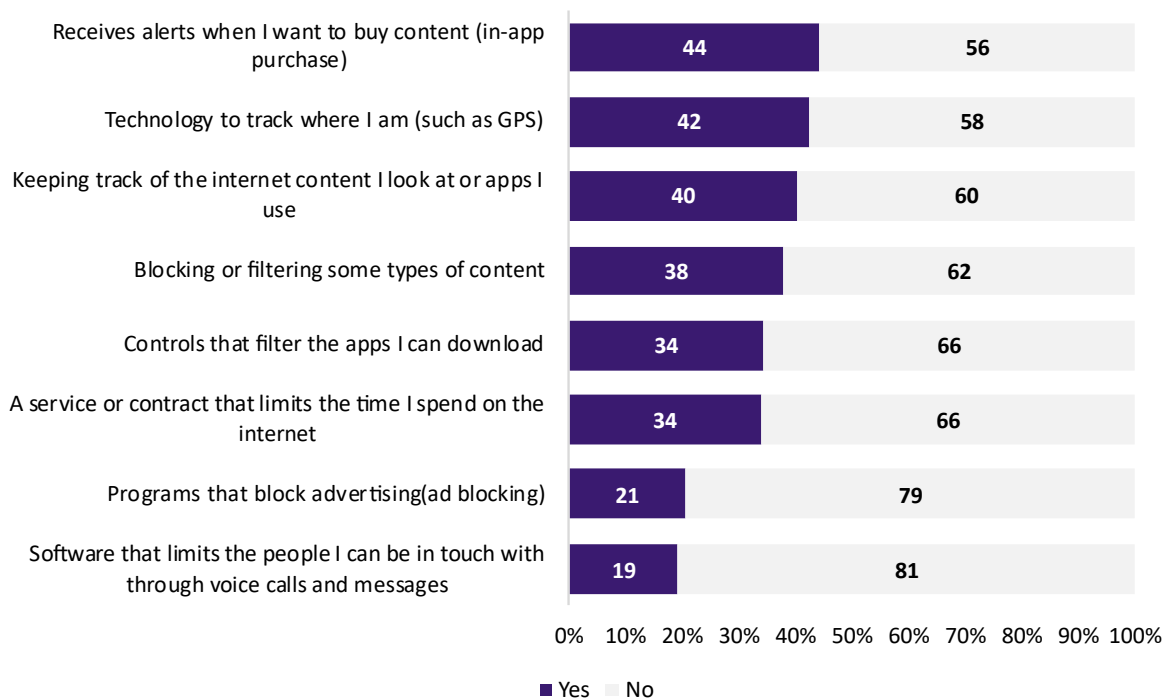
¹⁶⁵ Stoilova et al. (2024).

inter-item correlations and the overall scale reliability (using the Kuder-Richardson formula 20 [interpreted in the same way as Cronbach alpha] = 0.875, which indicates high internal consistency for the combined variable).

Overall, parents use on average two or three of the eight tools we asked about. Use of technical tools is greater in some countries than others (see Figure 99) – notably in Spain, Ireland, Malta, Estonia and Norway.

Parents use technical tools considerably more for younger than older children, with striking age differences in most countries. Spain is unusual in using more tools for its older teenagers.

Figure 98: Parental use of technical tools relating to the child's internet use



QC33¹⁶⁶: Does your parent or caregiver make use of any of the following...? Base: All children 10–16.

Use of technical tools suggests little difference by gender (see Figure 100). It seems that, even more than for parental enabling mediation, parents use tools to protect their sons and daughters more or less equally.

Household SES makes more of a difference in a few countries. In Czechia, low SES parents make more use of parental tools. In Ireland and Luxembourg, high SES parents make more use of parental tools. In most countries, however, there is little difference, and no overall pattern.

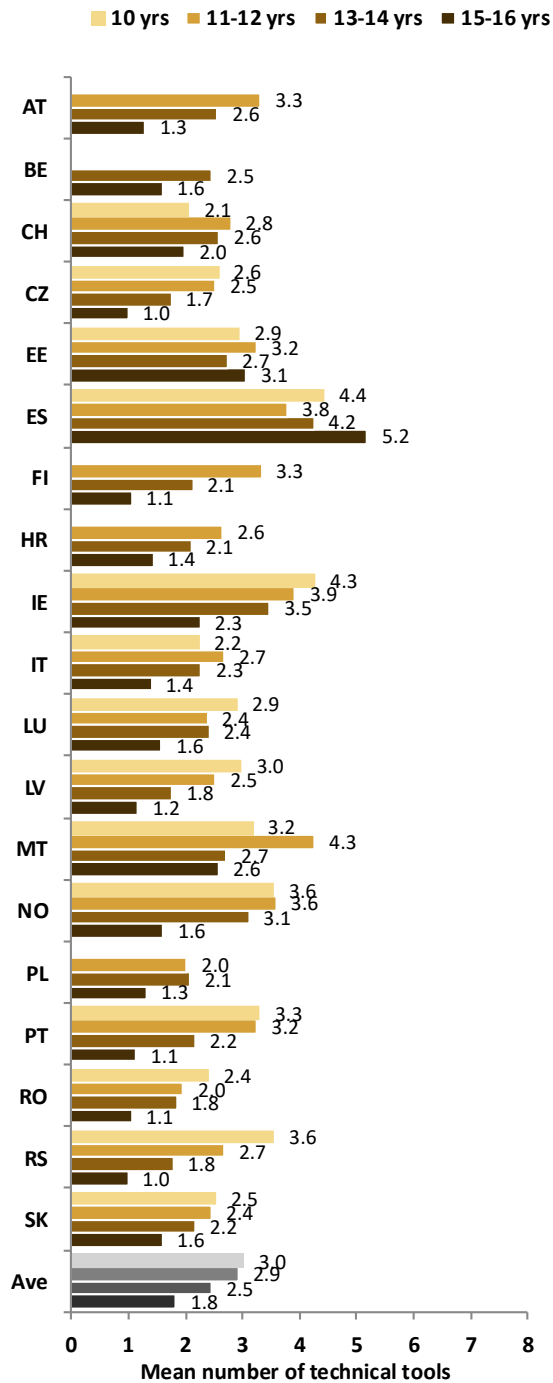
¹⁶⁶ In EUKO2011, EUKO2018 (Q17, core/optional) & GKO2020. EUKO2011: different wording. Source: items “a”, “b” & “h”: EUKO (2011) adapted.

Table 23: Child's account of whether parent uses tools to restrict their internet use

	Blocking or filtering some types of content	Keeping track of the internet content I look at or apps I use	A service or contract that limits the time I spend on the internet	Controls that filter the apps I can download	Receives alerts when I want to buy content (in-app purchase)	Software that limits the people I can be in touch with through voice calls and messages	Programs that block advertising (ad blocking)	Technology to track where I am (such as GPS)
AT	30	44	32	30	47	11	15	35
BE	30	26	24	24	45	10	13	49
CH	34	60	36	34	51	11	13	36
CZ	32	27	28	29	30	11	15	33
EE	41	41	41	39	41	31	33	49
ES	63	61	65	60	50	80	80	53
FI	43	36	37	35	33	13	10	43
HR	35	41	29	28	45	16	20	35
IE	57	61	42	51	65	31	24	47
IT	36	29	30	35	46	14	11	46
LU	40	53	27	36	50	13	13	47
LV	34	32	39	27	37	12	18	44
MT	51	59	40	49	67	35	32	52
NO	48	52	27	48	63	20	17	52
PL	32	31	32	23	29	11	15	41
PT	39	36	25	31	38	16	17	44
RO	26	24	19	23	29	13	18	37
RS	26	35	34	21	41	11	14	25
SK	31	33	34	31	48	15	17	37
Ave	38	40	40	34	44	19	21	42

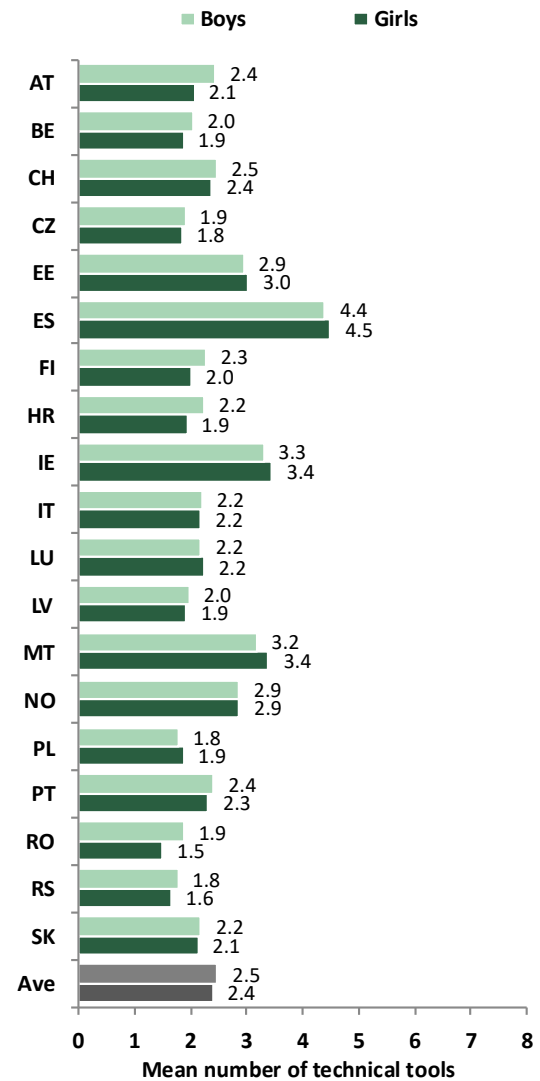
QC33: Does your parent or caregiver make use of any of the following...? Base: All children 10–16

Figure 99: Combined parental use of technical tools relating to the child's internet use, by country and age group



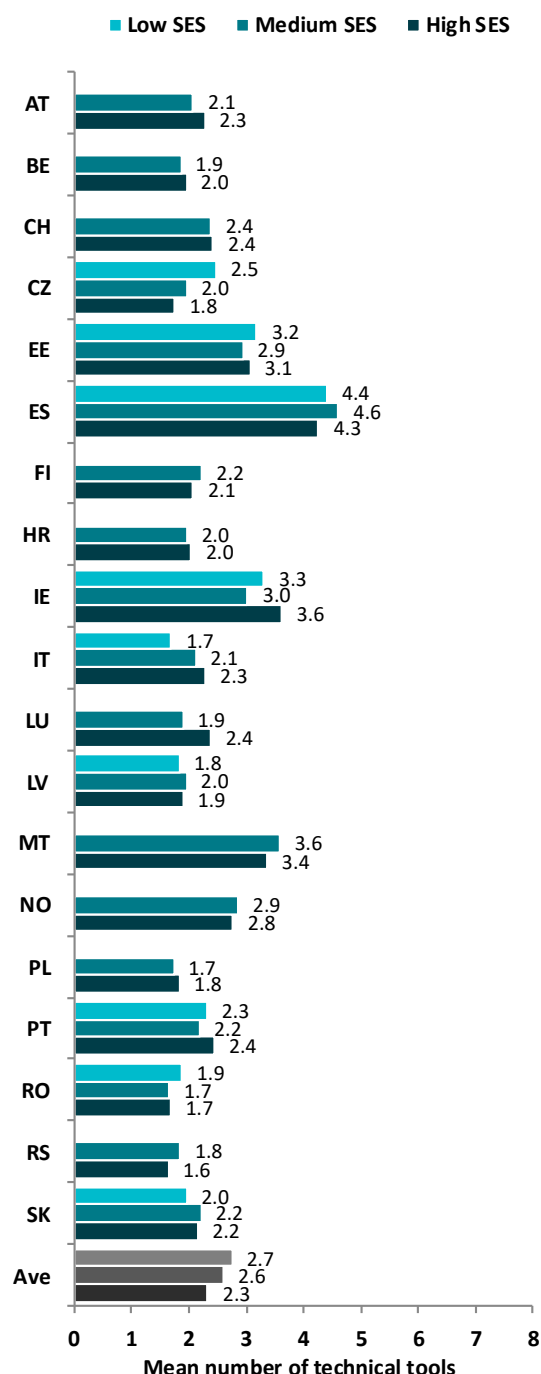
QC33: Does your parent or caregiver make use of any of the following...? (Eight 'yes/no' items are combined, resulting in a scale that reports the number of tools [out of eight] that are used by parents.). Base: All children 10–16.

Figure 100: Combined parental use of technical tools relating to the child's internet use, by country and gender



QC33: Does your parent or caregiver make use of any of the following...? (Eight 'yes/no' items are combined, resulting in a scale that reports the number of tools [out of eight] that are used by parents.). Base: All children 10–16.

Figure 101: Combined parental use of technical tools relating to the child's internet use, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC33: Does your parent or caregiver make use of any of the following...? (Eight 'yes/no' items are combined, resulting in a scale that reports the number of tools [out of eight] that are used by parents.). Base: All children 10–16.

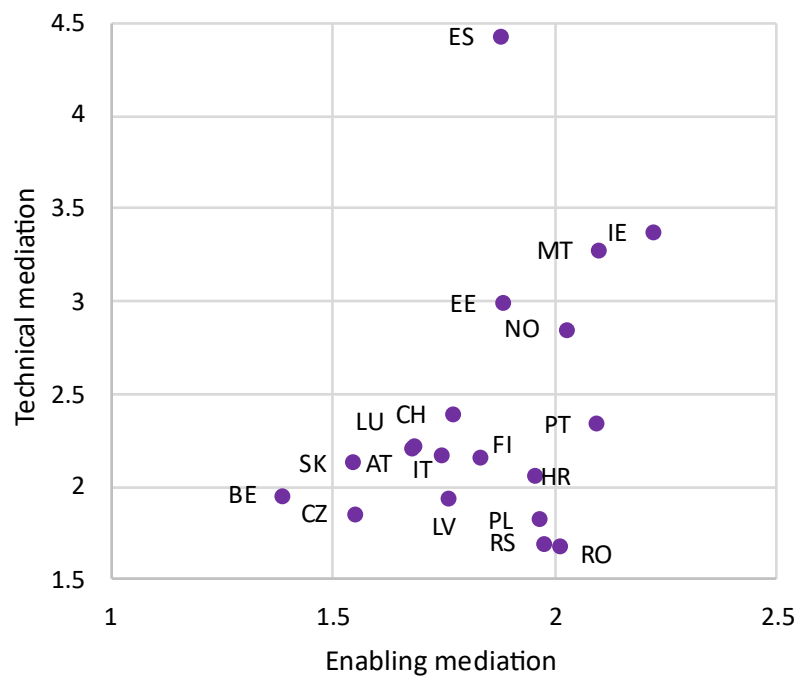
Relating parental activities and use of technical tools

Even within Europe, parents are striking a very different balance between enabling mediation and technical mediation. Many cultural and political factors may explain the country differences shown in Figure 102.

Ireland and Malta stand out in favouring both forms of mediation. Spain makes by far the greatest use of technical mediation, even though it is also fairly high on enabling mediation. A cluster of countries at the bottom right of the figure appears to prefer enabling mediation over the use of technical tools (Romania, Serbia, Poland, Latvia and Croatia). Another cluster of countries (bottom left) appears to lack enthusiasm for either form of mediation (Belgium, most notably, although also Czechia, Slovakia and Austria). It is noteworthy that the top left portion of the figure is empty – no country is strongly choosing technical mediation alone without also undertaking enabling mediation.

The reasons for the cultural differences suggested in Figure 102 invite further exploration. What also matters is how these parenting patterns relate to children's experiences of online risks and opportunities. It does seem encouraging, however, that parents are generally not handing over responsibility for parenting to the technical tools on offer. Rather, as we have shown, they are exploring the potential of a wide range of enabling activities to guide their children in the digital age.

Figure 102: The balance between enabling mediation and technical mediation, by country





PART IV

Looking forward: children and the digital future

Looking ahead, how do children themselves view new technologies, their rights and their place in an increasingly digital society?



15. Children's views, hopes and worries about platforms and AI

How children incorporate digital media in their everyday lives, and the experiences they live online, not depend only on the affordances of technologies, but also on the complex and intersecting influences of families, peer cultures, school, the social and cultural context, political institutions and the market. The discourses around technologies circulating in the public debate, the media, advertisements, conversations with family, teachers and peers are part of such influences, and contribute to shape children's own expectations, fears and hopes around technologies¹⁶⁷ – which, in turn, shape their online practices and experiences.

Therefore, in this final chapter, we go beyond the actual experiences, opportunities and risks of children in the digital world to explore how they imagine the role of digital media, including emergent technologies, in their present and future lives, their expectations about the current and long-term impact it might have; and how these views vary across the countries, by age, gender and socioeconomic status (SES). Examining children's views helps understand also their expectations towards governments and industry, and can be translated into recommendations for policy, designers and developers.

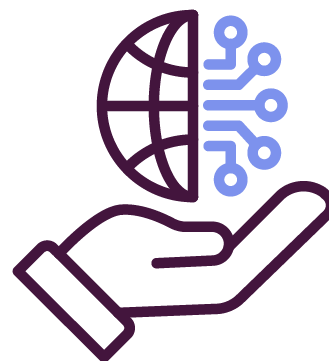
Measuring children's hopes and worries for their present and future with technologies

In our 2018 survey we had already included a question on children's understanding of how platforms collect and monetise their data, whether they are concerned for their privacy, and how their digital dossiers may impact their future opportunities. In our 2025 survey, we expanded this to investigate children's attitudes towards AI and other emergent technologies including social robots and interactive toys. These were based on young people's answers to the open-ended questions in a report by Hopelab, Common Sense Media and Center for Digital Thriving at Harvard Graduate School of Education.¹⁶⁸ Their answers reflected both utopian and dystopian imaginaries about the disruptive consequences of AI,¹⁶⁹ such as its revolutionary contribution to the progress of medicine, or the

promise to free human labour from repetitive or manual tasks, to the opposite view of AI replacing human jobs and surpassing human intelligence in the near future. Respondents also raised concerns for short-term impacts of AI, including its environmental impact and its time-consuming nature; or the concerns arising from artificially manipulated images and videos, including disinformation and hate speech. The 2025 survey, therefore, includes 13 items.

Children's hopes and worries for their present and future with technologies

As Figure 103 illustrates, **the most widespread digital worries** are related to **the impact of AI** on the present and the future. Specifically, **41%** of the respondents express high or some concern that AI-based technologies **damage the environment** and consume too much natural resources,¹⁷⁰ and that AI may **surpass human intelligence** in a way that makes it impossible for humans to maintain control over it.



Similarly, **datafication**¹⁷¹ is a concern for many children: **five in ten children** are very or somewhat concerned for the use of their data for **personalised advertising**, and **four in ten** say they are very or quite worried about companies **sharing their personal information with third parties without their consent**. About the same proportion (39%) say they do not believe that companies keep the information collected about them (their online behaviour and preferences) safe, although 30% trust companies to protect their privacy. Less widespread are worries for **dataveillance**

¹⁶⁷ Mascheroni et al. (2014).

¹⁶⁸ Hopelab et al. (2024).

¹⁶⁹ Crawford (2021).

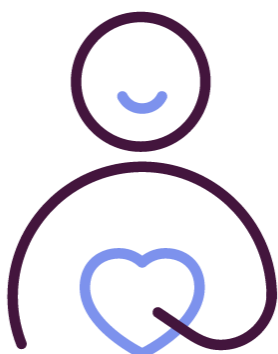
¹⁷⁰ Siibak & Mascheroni (2026).

¹⁷¹ Mascheroni & Siibak (2021).



– that is, surveillance through datafication – by governments or the police, with 28% saying they are very or quite concerned that data collected by apps or websites might be used by the police to decide who to search or arrest; while only **20%** consider legitimate the use of data, algorithms and AI by institutions to make **predictions about their future jobs or admission to schools** etc. At the same time, one in two children say they strongly or somewhat agree with the statement ‘I feel included or treated fairly when using digital apps’.

Children’s agreement or disagreement with these items also captures some their **hopes** towards emergent technologies: **51%** of 11- to-16-year-olds say they strongly or somewhat believe that new technologies will **make access to knowledge easier** for everyone, **37%** children hope that **AI will boost human creativity**, and **33%** say they are very or somewhat confident new technologies will **free students and workers from spending time on boring activities**. On the other side, they express **concern for fake pictures and untrue stories** made using apps and online technologies and the problems they might cause (cyberbullying or hate, misinformation and polarization) (**36%**), and say they are worried **that new technologies will be too time-consuming** (**28%**).



As Table 24 and Table 25 show, there are some **country differences in children’s worries and expectations towards technologies**. The proportion of children who worry that **companies may disclose their data to third parties without their consent** ranges from **57% in Spain to 25% in Poland**. Curiously, then, **concern for data-driven advertising is highest in Poland**, where only 11% of the children agree that it is okay for companies to use data about them to send them personalized advertising, and lowest in Malta, Portugal and Serbia, where one in three children consider online tracking of their behaviour legitimate. Confidence that companies will keep their data safe ranges from 21% in Luxembourg to 46% in Norway. These discrepancies may suggest that, while awareness of the risks of datafication for privacy is increasing, how datafication

operates remains opaque and beyond control for many children.

Concern for deepfakes ranges from 19% in Switzerland, where children were least likely to agree that these are problematic consequences of AI and new technologies, **to 58% in Spain and 52% in Italy and Portugal**, where children are most likely to agree that these are problematic consequences of AI.

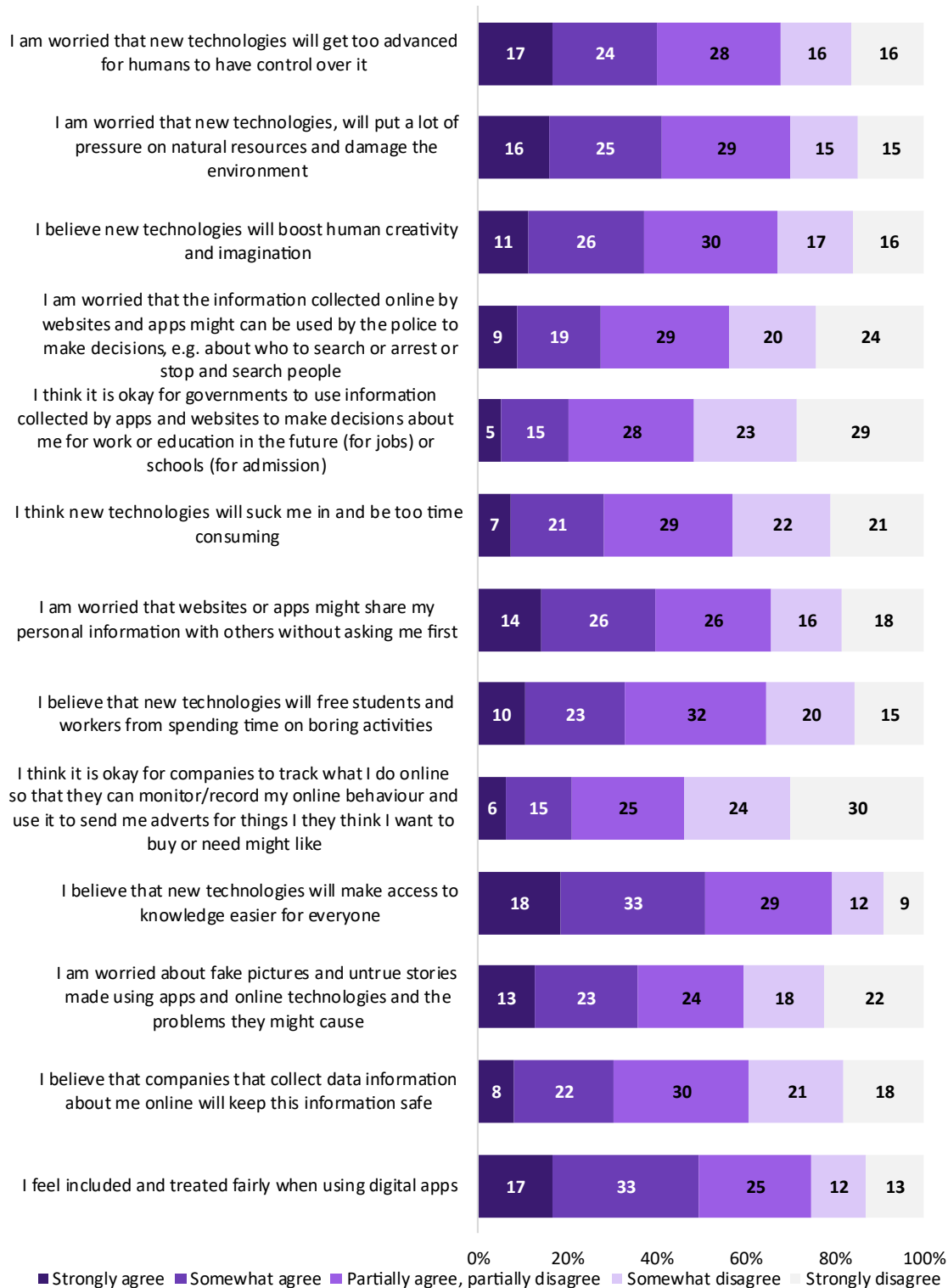
Among expectations and hopes, the proportion of children who **feel included and treated fairly when using digital apps** ranges from **71% in Belgium to 27% in Serbia**. The belief **that technology will democratise access to knowledge** is **highest in Norway (69%) and lowest in Serbia (32%)**. Finally, the proportion of children who strongly or somewhat agree that **technology will free students and workers from repetitive and boring tasks** is well above average in **Norway and Portugal (51%)** and a minimum of 21% in Finland.

Worries for the environmental impact of AI range from 57% in Ireland to 31% in Finland and Switzerland (see Table 25). Similarly, the preoccupation **that AI might surpass human intelligence and evade our control** is **highest in Ireland (55%)** while lowest in Belgium.

Predictive policing and algorithmic classifications used to determine access to jobs and education raise greater concern respectively in Ireland and Portugal, and Switzerland and Austria.

Confidence that AI will support human creativity and imagination is highest in Ireland, Malta and Portugal. Conversely, Portuguese and Irish children are more likely to say they are worried that new technologies will consume their time.

Figure 103: Children's hopes and worries about their future with technologies



QC40, QC41:¹⁷² How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? Base: All children 11–16

¹⁷² Source: Items created based on (a rephrasing of) EUKO 2018 IoTs section and the answers to open-ended questions in Hopelab et al. (2024).

Table 24: Hopes and fears about technologies, by country, Part I

					I think it is okay for companies to track what I do online so that they can monitor or record my online behaviour and use information such as my likes and interests to send me adverts for things they think I want to buy or might like	I believe that new technologies will free students and workers from spending time on boring activities	I am worried that websites or apps might share my personal information with others without asking me first
	I feel included and treated fairly when using digital apps	I believe that companies that collect data about me online will keep this information safe	I am worried about fake pictures and untrue stories made using apps and online technologies and the problems they might cause	I believe that new technologies will make access to knowledge easier for everyone			
AT	43	25	23	40	15	23	35
BE	71	37	26	53	19	35	34
CH	61	29	19	40	12	17	26
CZ	33	26	38	56	23	33	49
EE	54	30	33	55	23	32	39
ES	52	26	58	59	19	30	57
FI	61	36	28	50	17	21	31
HR	46	36	35	54	27	41	35
IE	68	39	40	68	20	42	46
IT	41	28	52	55	24	33	49
LU	42	21	25	39	14	27	32
LV	36	22	29	43	19	27	34
MT	63	35	43	59	31	44	36
NO	73	46	34	69	28	51	54
PL	32	22	29	47	11	27	25
PT	54	35	52	57	31	51	54
RO	36	25	38	44	25	33	41
RS	27	30	32	32	31	34	32
SK	29	25	49	48	17	31	38
Ave	50	31	36	51	21	33	40

QC40: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? Base: All children 11–16.

Table 25: Hopes and fears about technologies, by country, Part II

	I think new technologies will suck me in and be too time-consuming	I think it is okay for governments to use information collected by apps and websites to make decisions about me for work or education in the future (for jobs) or schools (for admission)	I am worried that the information collected online by websites and apps might be used by the police to make decisions, e.g., about who to search or arrest or stop and search	I believe new technologies will boost human creativity and imagination	I am worried that new technologies will put a lot of pressure on natural resources and damage the environment	I am worried that new technologies will get too advanced for humans to have control over them
AT	15	12	20	25	30	35
BE	28	21	25	40	37	28
CH	13	11	15	28	31	29
CZ	31	22	32	41	51	52
EE	29	29	22	37	40	33
ES	27	22	34	45	50	52
FI	21	18	17	32	31	28
HR	31	18	23	41	38	37
IE	43	26	40	53	57	55
IT	28	18	32	37	44	49
LU	17	13	20	23	41	38
LV	19	19	22	28	35	34
MT	30	24	25	51	50	48
NO	39	30	34	40	53	42
PL	28	15	31	35	36	41
PT	45	27	40	50	45	51
RO	26	16	29	38	47	45
RS	35	30	32	29	37	41
SK	25	16	24	38	33	34
Ave	28	20	28	37	41	40

QC41: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? Base: All children 11–16.

Children's AI imaginaries

The fear that AI will exceed human intelligence and capabilities to the point it eventually exceeds our control is what is usually called a 'strong AI narrative', which has pervaded research and development of AI since its origins in the post-war era, and is currently shaping much of the debate surrounding large language models (LLMs).¹⁷³ Children and young people have appropriated such narratives: qualitative research shows that their main AI misconception lies

precisely in the anthropomorphisation of chatbots,¹⁷⁴ while, as we have seen, our data show that concerns for the risk that AI gains a superintelligence top the list of children's digital worries, with some variations across the countries (see Figure 104).

Looking at age differences, these seems modest and negligible in the overall sample, but with inconsistent patterns emerging across the countries. In fact, in some countries, including Austria, Czechia, Luxembourg, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia, it is mainly 15- to-16-year-olds who say they

¹⁷³ Bory et al. (2025).

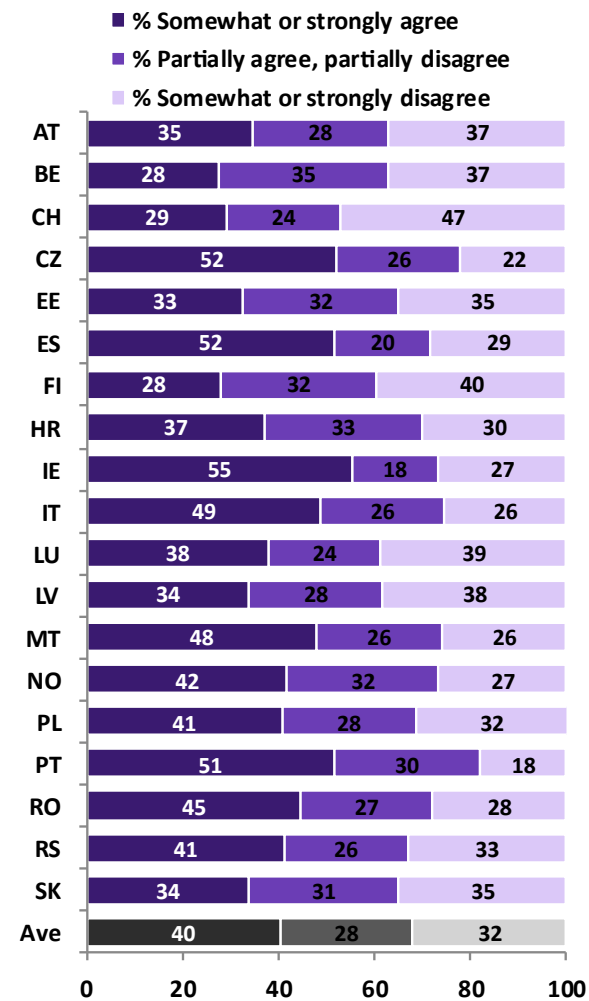
¹⁷⁴ Siibak & Mascheroni (2026).

are worried that new technologies will become too advanced for humans to have control over them, with a difference with 11- to-12-year-olds ranging from 17 percentage points in Romania to only 7 in Serbia. This finding contrasts with qualitative research showing how anthropomorphic misconception tend to decrease with age, as children gain more AI literacies. Conversely, in Portugal and Switzerland this concern is more common among younger respondents, while in the remaining countries differences by age are smaller or more difficult to interpret (e.g., with younger and older children equally likely to say they are worried, and 13- to-14-year-olds least likely to say so).

Gender differences are more consistent (see Figure 106), with **girls more likely to say that they are worried** for the risk that technology may advance to the point we can no longer control it. Across the sample, the difference between girls and boys consists of 11 percentage points (35% boys vs 46% girls), ranging from 18 percentage points in Italy to 4 percentage points in Norway.

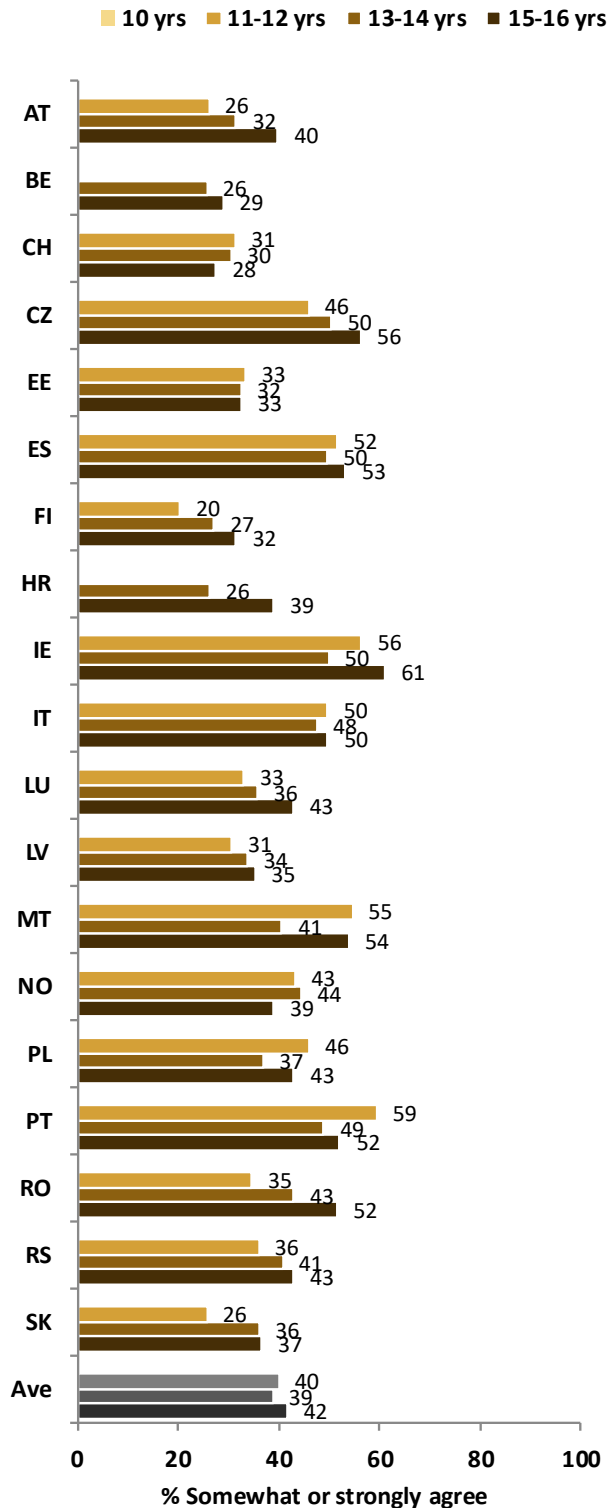
Looking at socioeconomic differences in the likelihood that children express concern for the risk of technology evading human control, across the sample the gap between children in the **lower SES (49%)** group and those in the **higher SES (39%)** group amounts to 10 percentage points (see Figure 107). However, this socioeconomic pattern, while dominant, is far from consistent across the countries. In most countries children from more advantaged backgrounds are less likely to say they are concerned for the AI's progress towards a superintelligence, the difference with children from lower SES background ranging from 18 percentage points in Italy to 1 percentage point in Finland, Malta and Norway. This pattern brings support to the thesis that the anthropomorphic misconception decreases as AI literacy increases, if we assume that AI literacies are also unevenly distributed and stratified by SES as digital literacy. In Czechia, Romania and Slovakia, conversely, lower SES children are less likely to express concern for this 'strong AI narrative'.

Figure 104: Fear that humans will lose control over AI and technologies, by country



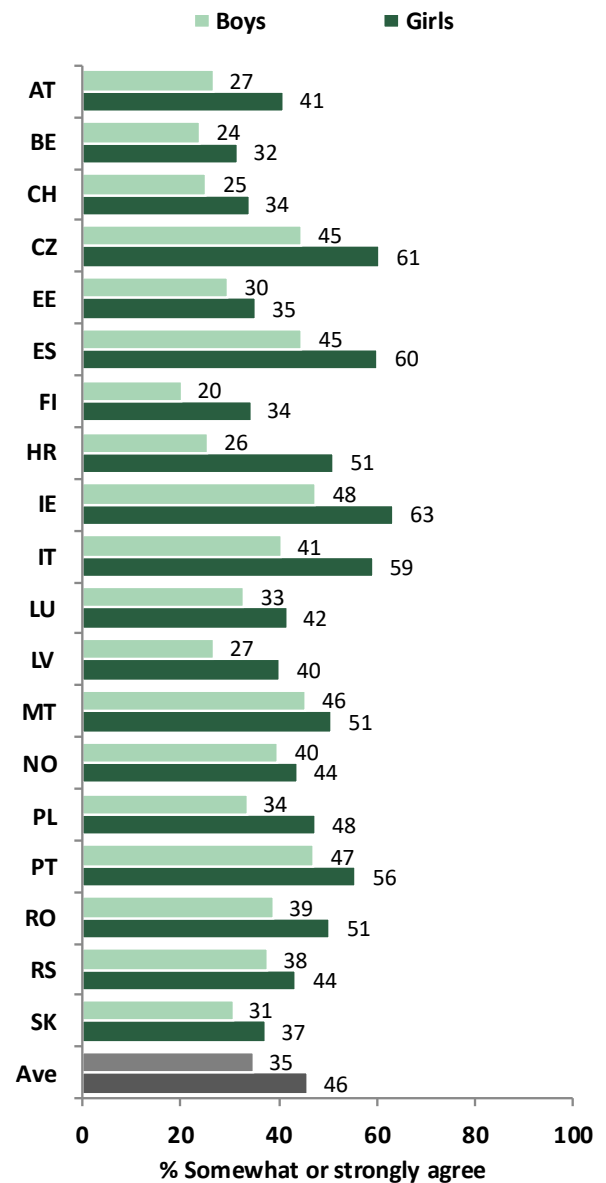
QC41: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? (I am worried that new technologies will get too advanced for humans to have control over it.).
Base: All children 11–16.

Figure 105: Fear that humans will lose control over AI and technologies, by country and age group



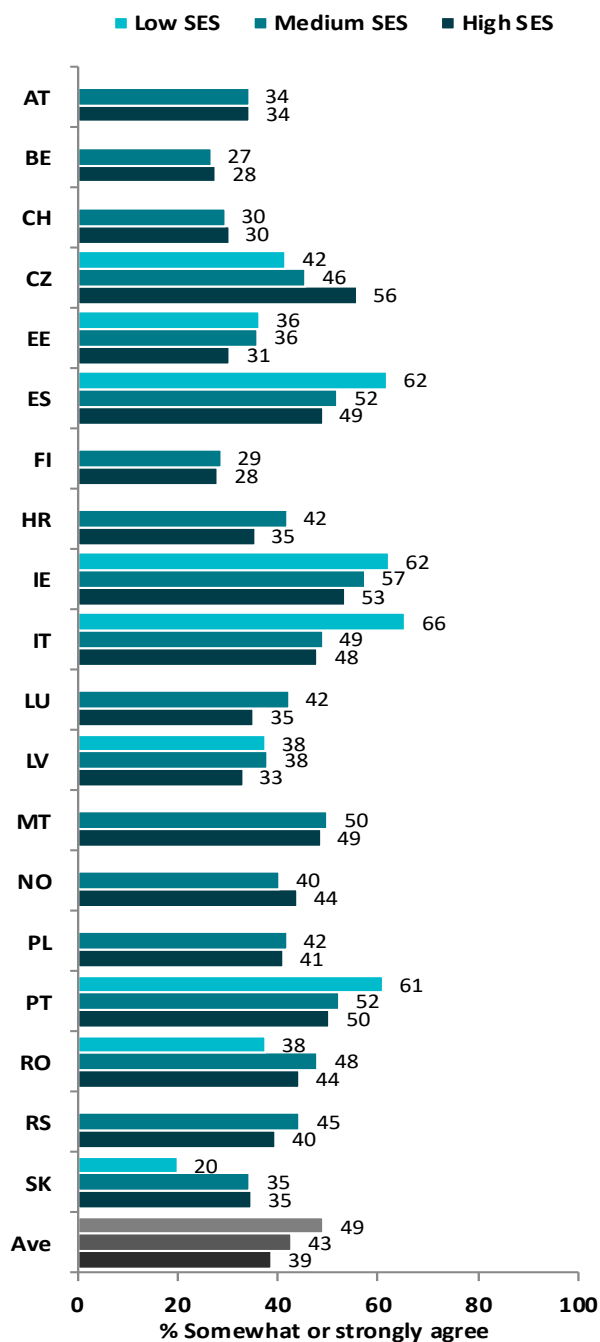
QC41: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? (I am worried that new technologies will become too advanced for humans to have control over them.). Base: All children 11–16.

Figure 106: Fear that humans will lose control over AI and technologies, by country and gender



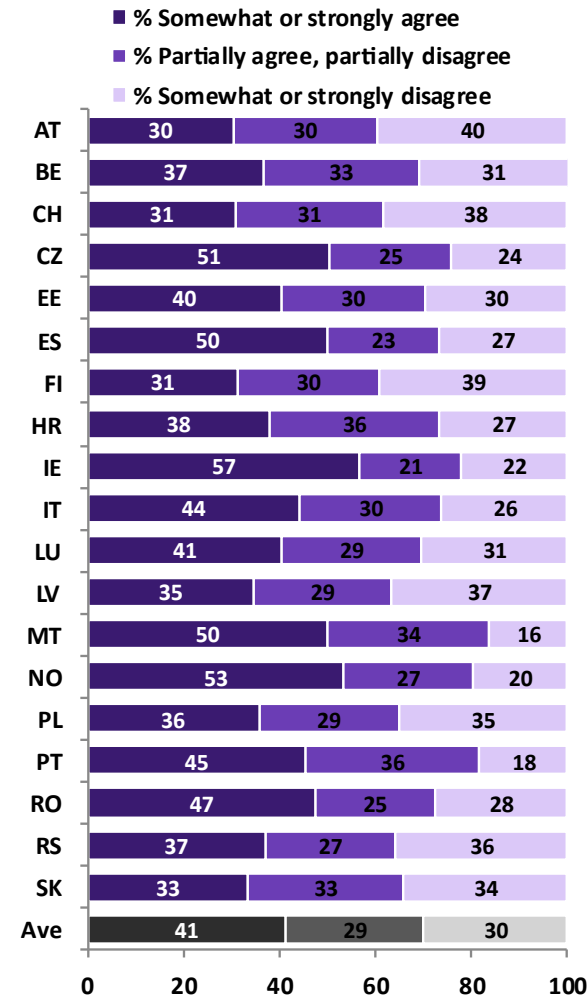
QC41: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? (I am worried that new technologies will become too advanced for humans to have control over them.). Base: All children 11–16

Figure 107: Fear that humans will lose control over AI and technologies, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC41: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? (I am worried that new technologies will become too advanced for humans to have control over them.) Base: All children 11–16

Figure 108: Worries for AI’s impact on the environment, by country



QC41: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? (I am worried that new technologies will put a lot of pressure on natural resources and damage the environment.). Base: All children 11–16.

Strong AI narratives are often blamed for diverting users’ attention from already tangible risks posed by the development of AI technologies,¹⁷⁵ including the risks of stereotypes, discrimination and safety¹⁷⁶ as well as its environmental impact.¹⁷⁷ However, as we have seen, concern about the environmental impact of AI is equally common among 11- to-16-year-old children in Europe, ranging from one in three children in Finland and Switzerland to over half of Irish and Czech children.

¹⁷⁵ Bory et al. (2025).

¹⁷⁶ Siibak & Mascheroni (2026).

¹⁷⁷ Crawford (2021); Siibak & Mascheroni (2026).

Looking at the overall sample, and in countries like Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Latvia, Poland and Serbia (see Figure 109), the proportion of children who say they worry that technology will put significant pressure on natural resources and the environment does not vary across age groups. Indeed, age differences are modest when not null. In countries where age differences are more pronounced, the pattern is nonetheless inconsistent. **Concern for the environmental costs** of technology increases with age in Austria, Czechia, Ireland, Malta, Romania and Slovakia, and is **highest among Irish 15- to 16-year-olds**. Conversely, in Norway, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland 11- to 12-year-old children are more likely to say they are worried for the environmental impact of AI and its infrastructures.

Conversely, gender differences are more consistent across the countries, with **girls (45%) more likely than boys (37%) to say they are worried for the environmental costs of technology**. The gender difference, which is 8 percentage points overall, ranges from 13 percentage points in Spain to only 1 percentage point in Serbia. The only countries where we observe a reversed gender pattern are Malta and Norway, where boys are slightly more likely than girls to express concern for the environment, with a difference of 4 percentage points.

Socioeconomic differences are generally smaller and inconsistent: in the overall sample, 44% of lower and medium SES children say they are worried for the impact of technology on the environment, compared to 40% of higher SES children. The same pattern can be observed in Austria, Italy, Spain and Serbia. In other countries, SES differences are negligible or less clear.

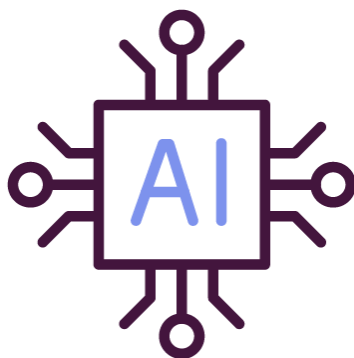
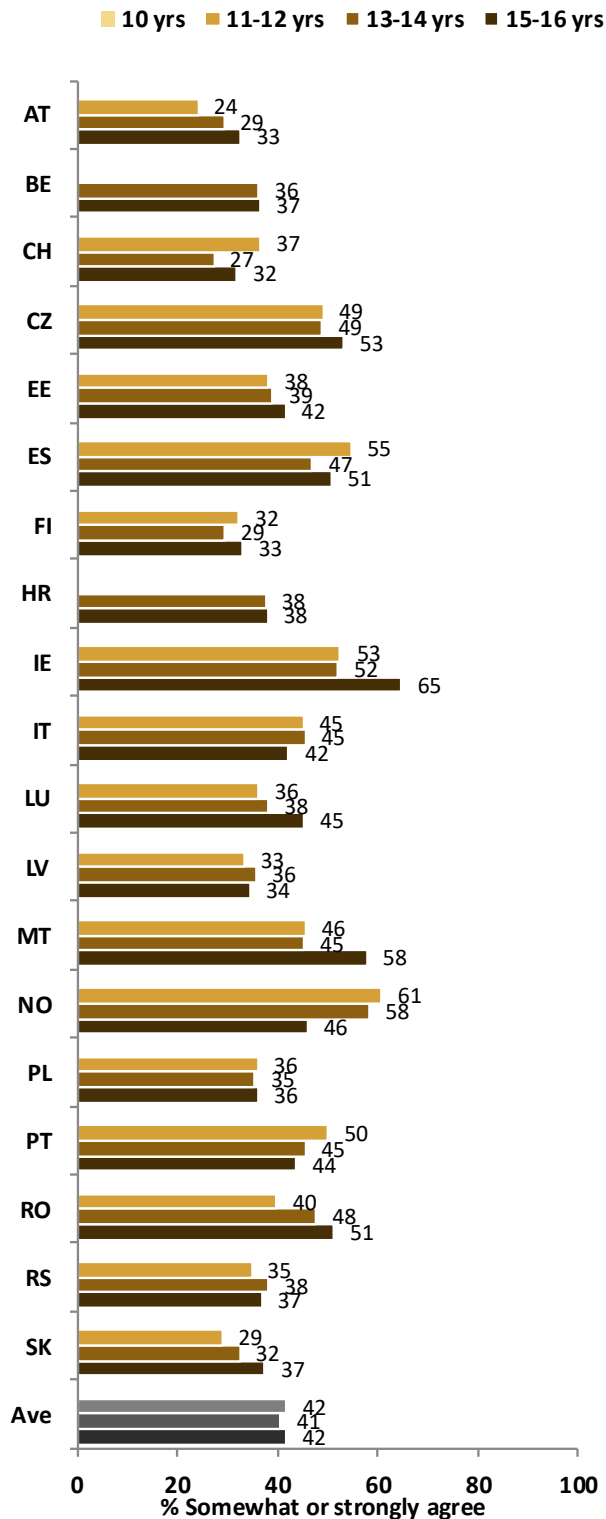
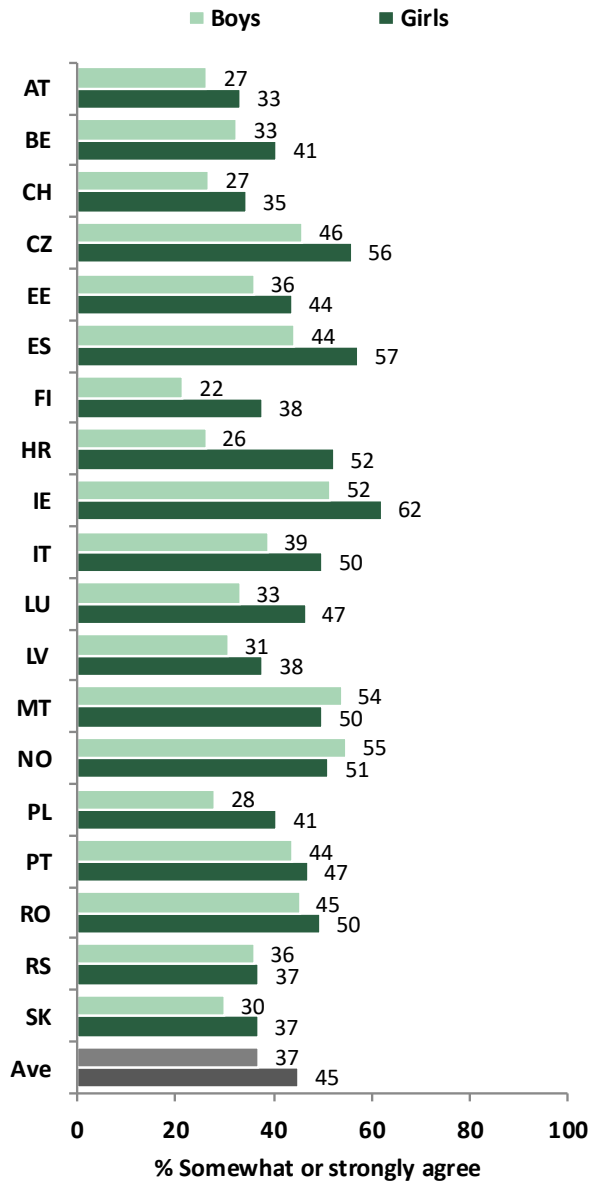


Figure 109: Worries for AI's impact on the environment, by country and age group



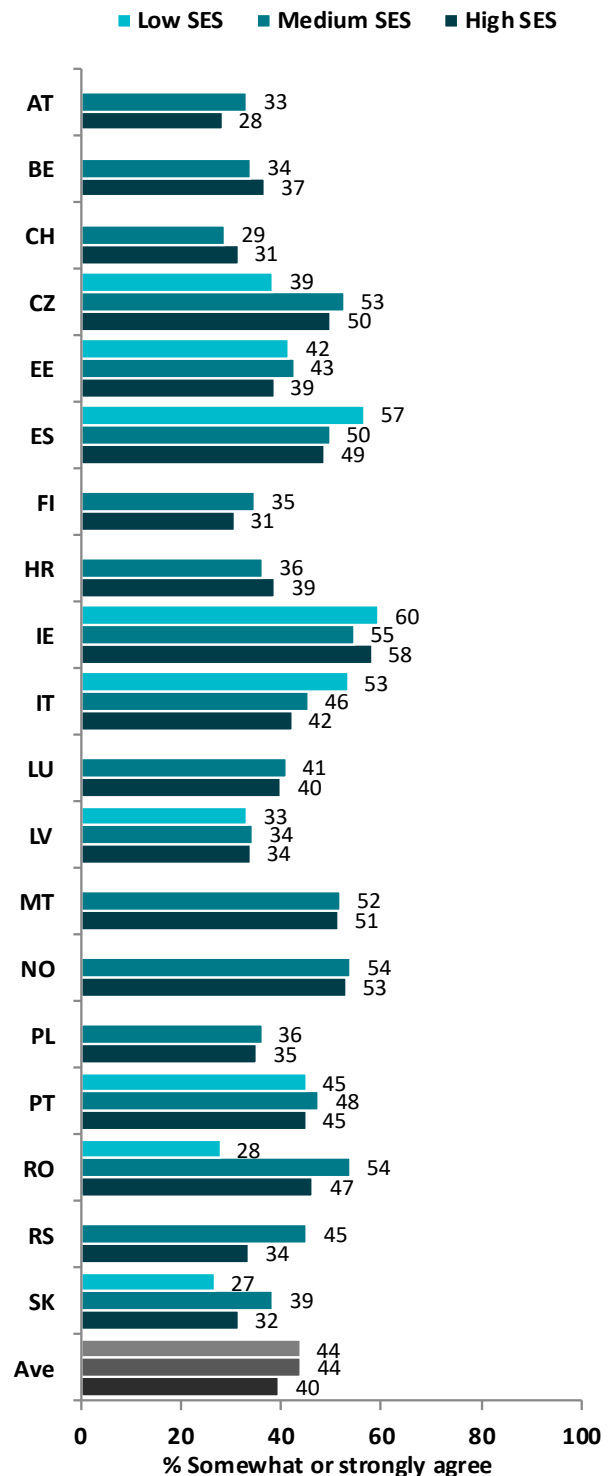
QC41: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? (I am worried that new technologies will put a lot of pressure on natural resources and damage the environment.) Base: All children 11–16

Figure 110: Worries for AI's impact on the environment, by country and gender



QC41: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? (I am worried that new technologies will put a lot of pressure on natural resources and damage the environment.). Base: All children 11–16.

Figure 111: Worries for AI's impact on the environment, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC41: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? (I am worried that new technologies will put a lot of pressure on natural resources and damage the environment.). Base: All children 11–16.

Children’s understanding of datafication

Contrary to common-sense discourses that blame youth for carelessly devaluing their privacy, **half of European children say they do not believe companies would keep the data extracted from them safe**. But country variations remain huge, with half of 11- to-16-year-old children in Malta and Spain, and nearly half in Ireland, expressing confidence that companies would treat their data safely. Conversely, higher scepticism is expressed by their Finnish and Belgian peers.

Somewhat surprisingly, **15- to-16-year-olds are slightly more likely than 11- to-12-year-olds to say they trust companies will keep their data safe**. This pattern can be observed in most countries except for Austria, Norway and Serbia, where greater trust is expressed by children in the younger age group. However, we must be wary in assuming that higher self-reported scepticism towards platforms indicates greater algorithmic literacy and deeper understanding of datafication. The way people make sense of how companies treat their data and how algorithmic classification work is often based on ‘folk theories’.¹⁷⁸

Similarly to age differences, gender differences are also inconsistent: overall boys (33%) are slightly more likely than girls (29%) to believe that companies will keep their data safe, with the gender difference being wider in Norway (20 percentage points), Estonia (14 percentage points) and Ireland (11). In other countries, however, gender differences are quite small or even reversed.

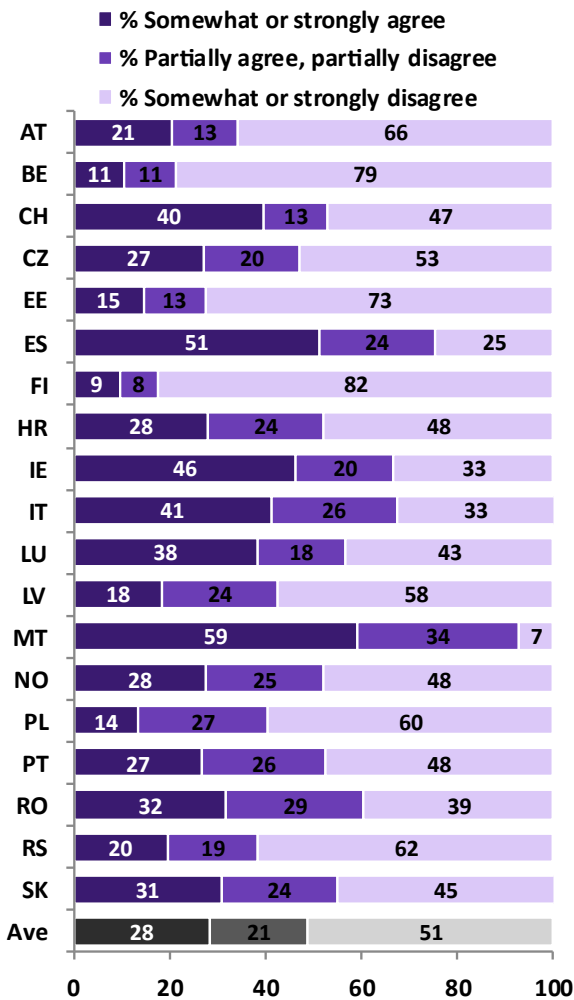
Socioeconomic patterns are also difficult to identify in the overall sample and vary between countries across the countries, except for Estonia and Portugal, where lower SES children are more likely than the other two groups to say they are confident that companies will keep their data safe.

Although the collection, analysis and manipulation of everything we do online is taken for granted and normalised by many¹⁷⁹, **54% of European children say they do not think it is okay for companies to track their online behaviour and to use these data to send them personalised adverts**, ranging from two in three 11- to-16-year-olds in Poland to 35% of Portuguese children.

The belief **that datafication is desirable**, as it enables the provision of personalised content and ads, **tends to increase with age**, although differences in the

overall sample are only 4 percentage points. Age differences are higher in Estonia (17 percentage points) and modest or null in some countries.

Figure 112: Trust that companies will keep their data safe, by country

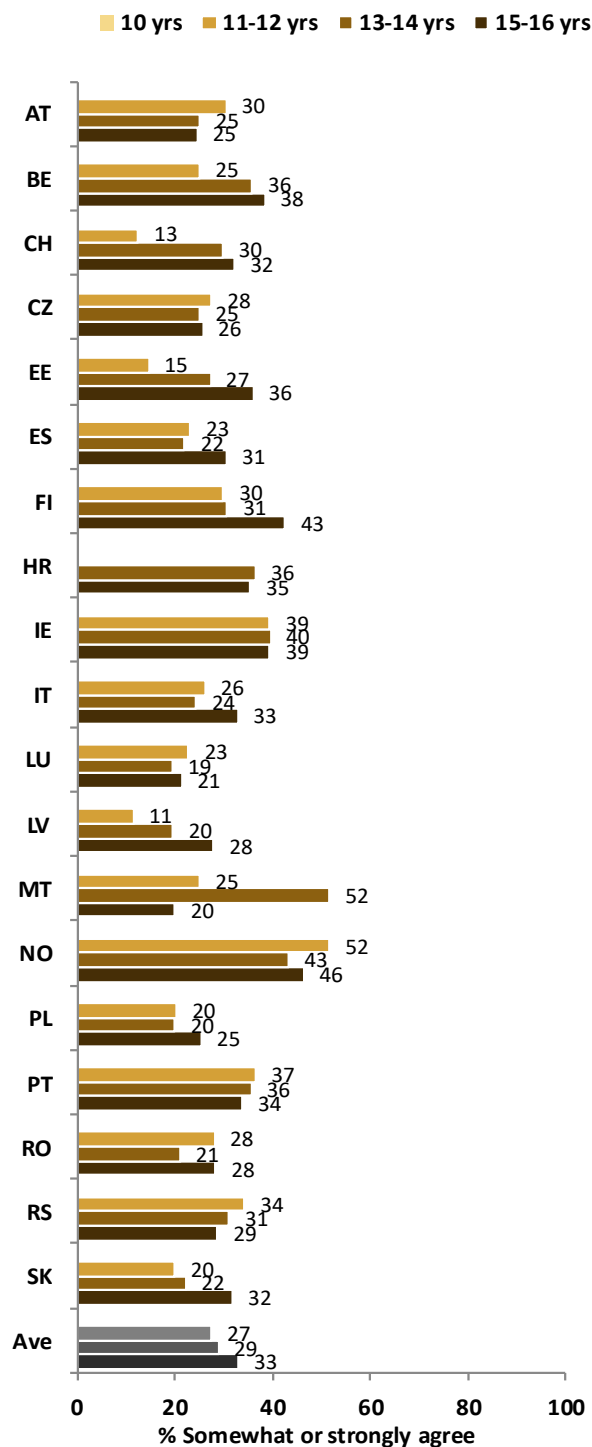


QC40: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? (I believe that companies that collect data about me online [e.g., to record my online behaviour, listen to me or collect information about where I am] will keep this information safe.). Base: All children 11–16.

¹⁷⁸ Bucher (2017); Ytre-Arne and Moe (2021).

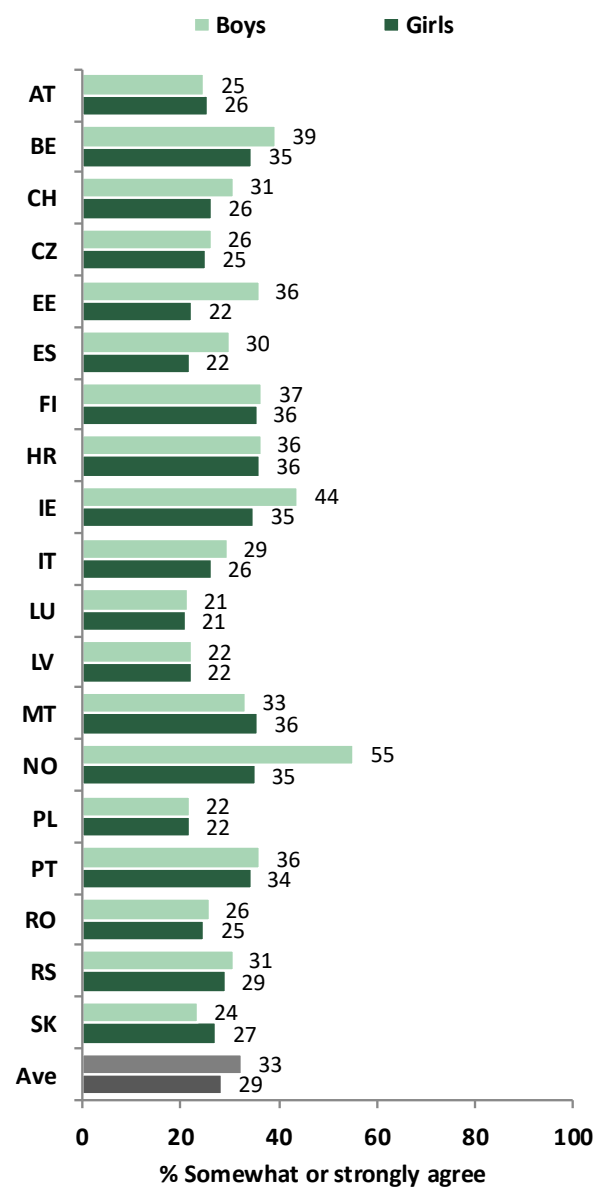
¹⁷⁹ Mascheroni & Siibak (2021).

Figure 113: Trust that companies will keep their data safe, by country and age group



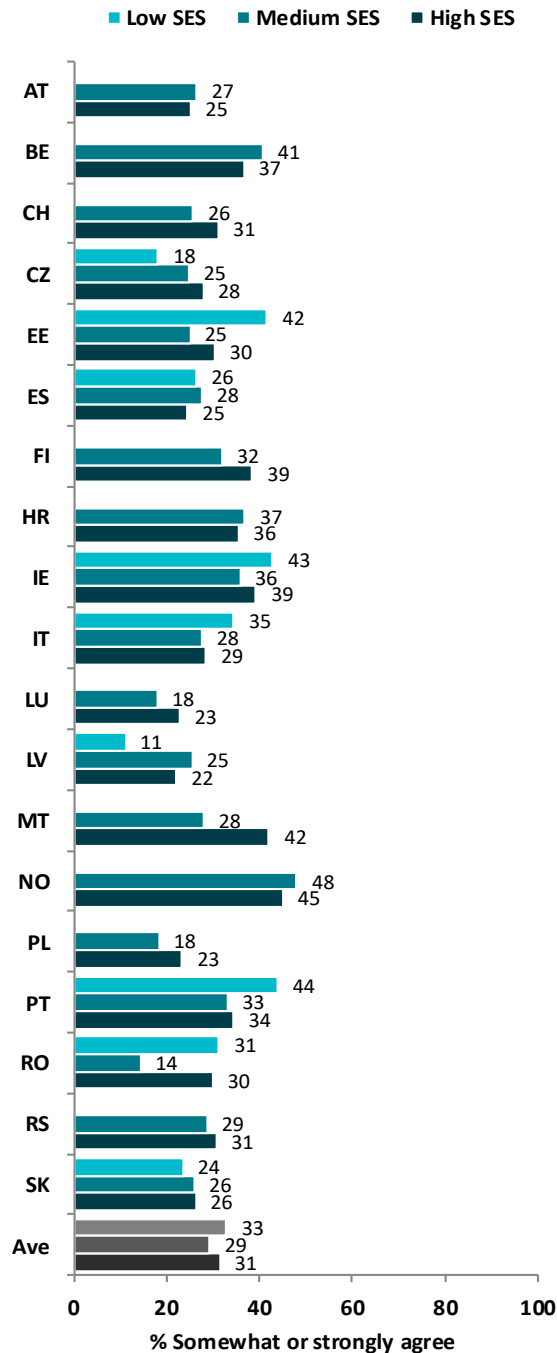
QC40: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? (I believe that companies that collect data about me online [e.g., to record my online behaviour, listen to me, or collect information about where I am] will keep this information safe.). Base: All children 11–16

Figure 114: Trust that companies will keep their data safe, by country and gender



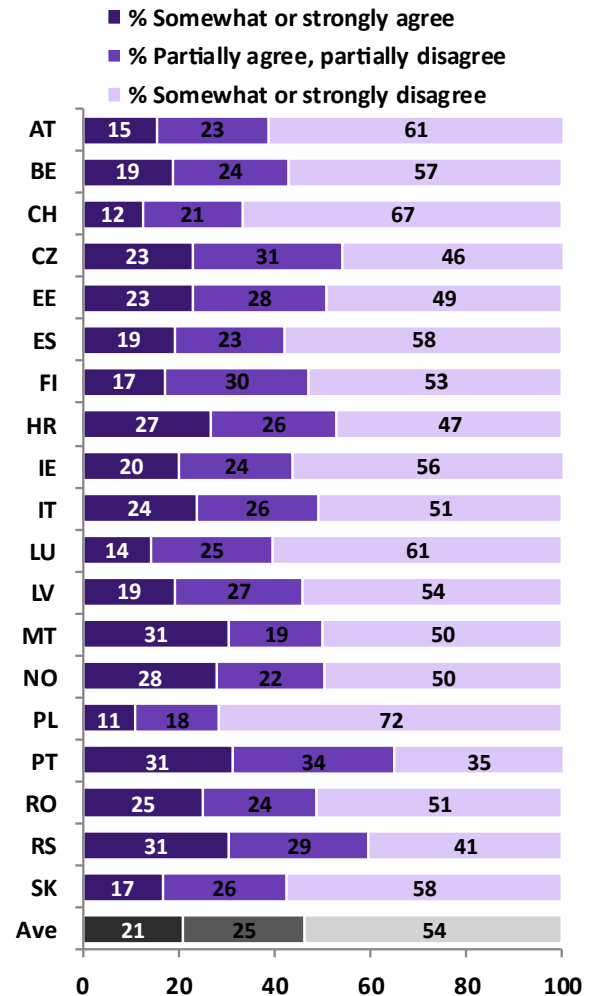
QC40: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? (I believe that companies that collect data about me online [e.g., to record my online behaviour, listen to me, or collect information about where I am] will keep this information safe.). Base: All children 11–16.

Figure 115: Trust that companies will keep their data safe, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC40: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? (I believe that companies that collect data about me online [e.g., to record my online behaviour, listen to me, or collect information about where I am] will keep this information safe.) Base: All children 11–16

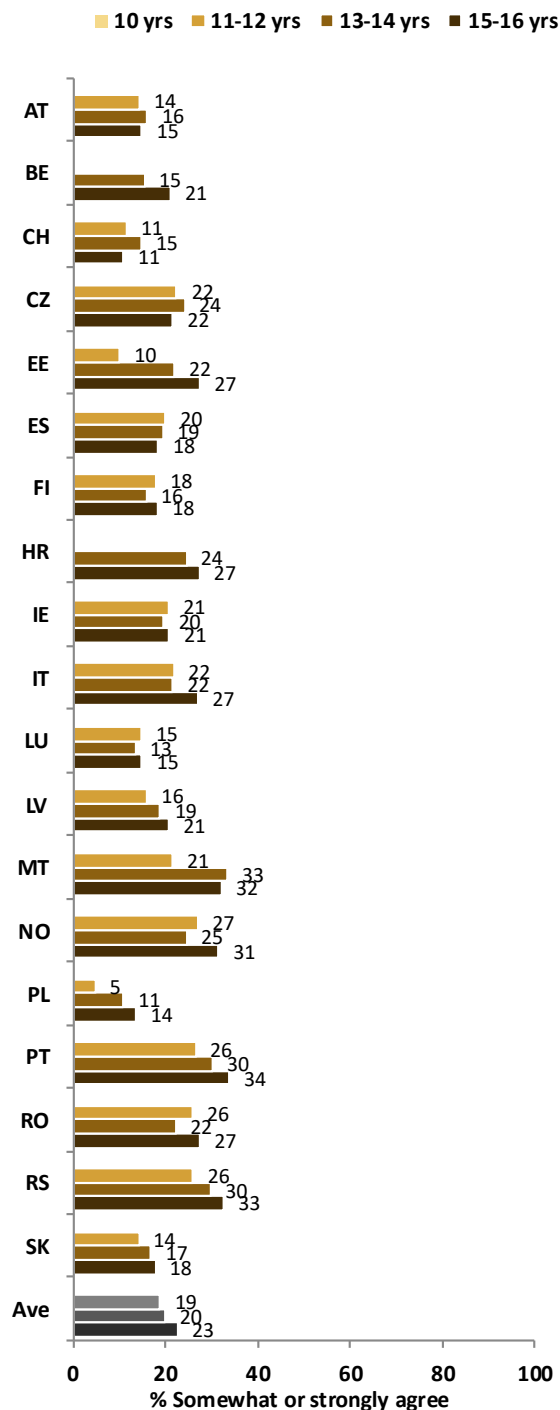
Figure 116: Belief that algorithmic classifications and personalised ads are okay, by country



QC40: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? (I think it is okay for companies to track what I do online so that they can monitor or record my online behaviour and use information such as my likes and interests to send me adverts for things they think I want to buy or might like.) Base: All children 11–16.



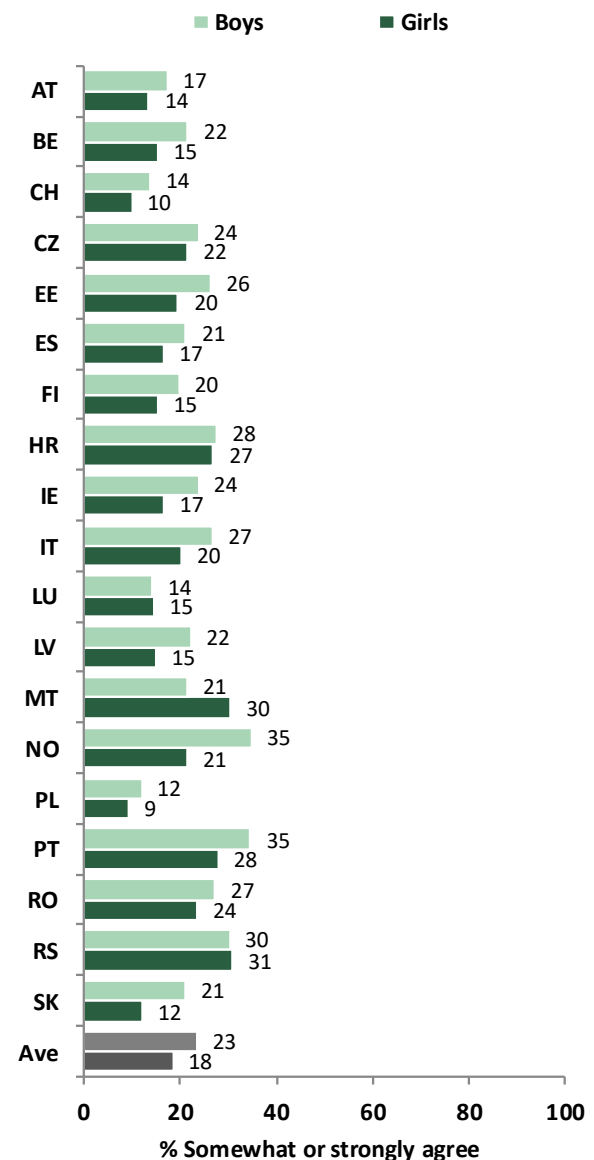
Figure 117: Belief that algorithmic classifications and personalised ads are okay, by country and age group



QC40: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? (I think it is okay for companies to track what I do online so that they can monitor or record my online behaviour and use information such as my likes and interests to send me adverts for things they think I want to buy or might like.). Base: All children 11–16.

More consistent across the countries are patterns of gender differences, showing that **boys are more likely than girls to believe that the tracking and monitoring of their online behaviour is okay**. The difference between boys (23%) and girls (18%) is 5 percentage points overall, but higher in Norway (14%), Slovakia (9%), Belgium, Italy and Portugal (7%). Malta is the only country where this gender pattern is clearly reversed.

Figure 118: Belief that algorithmic classifications and personalised ads are okay, by country and gender



QC40: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? (I think it is okay for companies to track what I do online so that they can monitor or record my online behaviour and use information such as my likes and interests to send me adverts for things they think I want to buy or might like.). Base: All children 11–16.

Looking at socioeconomic differences, **lower SES children (26%) are more likely than higher SES children (21%)** to say that they agree with the idea of data-driven advertising is okay. The gap is higher in Estonia and Latvia (13 percentage points). Remarkably, Croatia and Malta present a reversed socioeconomic pattern with children from more affluent backgrounds reportedly being more inure to datafication.

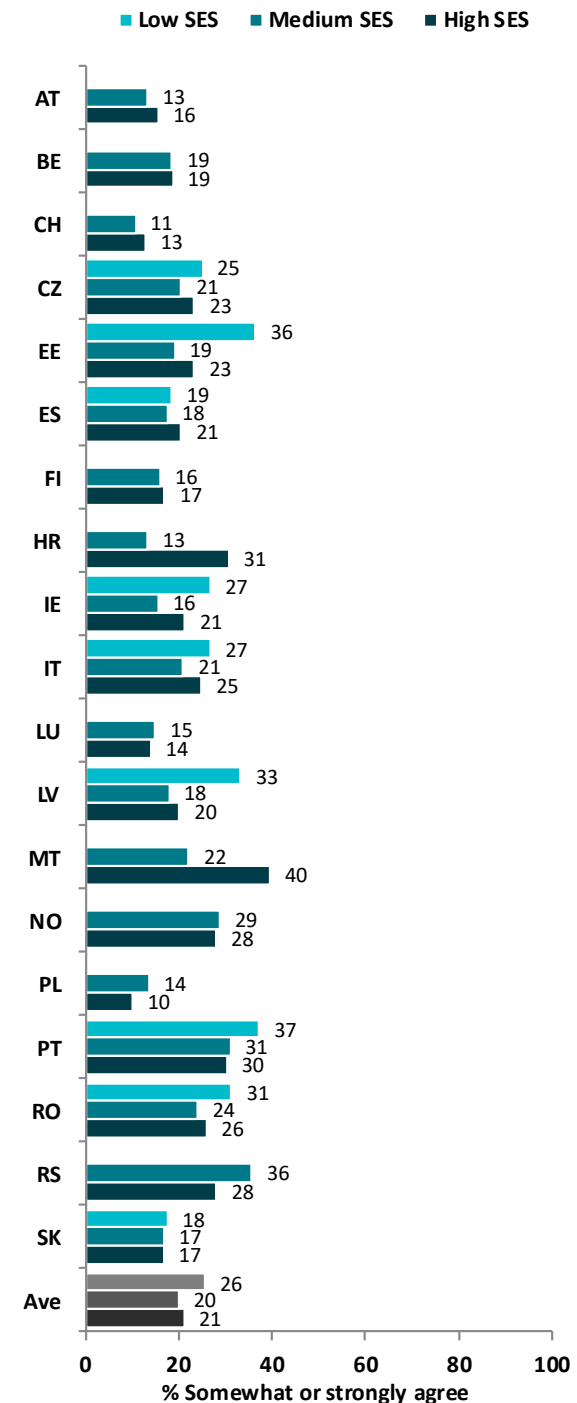
Points to consider

Children are generally early and enthusiastic adopters of new technologies, including AI. Nonetheless, as this chapter documents, they express concerns for their present and future with technology.

AI-related digital worries – namely, concerns for the risks it could evade human control by becoming too advanced, and for its environmental costs – are the most common. Against the assumption that, having grown up digitally, children are inure to datafication and trade their personal data for convenience (i.e., accessing content and advertisements that match their tastes and online behaviour), our findings show that half of 11- to-16-year-old children say that they do not trust companies will keep their data safe, and a slightly higher proportion say they agree with their data being tracked and monitored by companies in exchange for personalised advertisements.

Inconsistencies in the age, gender and socioeconomic distribution of these items are nonetheless difficult to interpret. Some findings, for example that girls and children from lower SES backgrounds are more likely to say that they are worried about the risk that AI will evade human control, may suggest that children do not feel equally vulnerable to the problematic outcomes of AI use, depending on their AI literacies, as well as incorporation of strong AI narratives and misconceptions leading to anthromorphism. At the same time, however, older children and those from higher SES are less likely worried, indicating that higher digital, data and algorithmic literacy counter the likelihood of making sense of complex and opaque technologies by relying on misconceptions.

Figure 119: Belief that algorithmic classifications and personalised ads are okay, by socioeconomic status (SES) and country



QC40: How much do you agree with the following statements about how you think or feel about new technologies (such as generative AI, interactive toys, robots)? (I think it is okay for companies to track what I do online so that they can monitor or record my online behaviour and use information such as my likes and interests to send me adverts for things they think I want to buy or might like.) Base: All children 11–16.



Inconsistencies across the countries further caution from making any generalisations. Rather, what these findings reflect, and our qualitative research on children's understanding of AI confirms,¹⁸⁰ is that in making sense of the opaque functioning of AI and algorithmic systems, children, like every other user, rely on their technological imaginaries and 'folk theories'.¹⁸¹ **Greater worries may indicate both higher or lower knowledge.**

Children also share **expectations and hopes that technology may have a positive impact** on society and their future, provided it makes knowledge to access easier, alleviates students and workers from more repetitive and boring tasks, and boosts human creativity and imagination.

Taken together, then, these **expectations, worries and hopes suggest priorities for policymakers**: from minimising the environmental costs of AI to ensuring human oversight in every algorithmic and AI process, to ensuring that safer, more private and empowering digital spaces and technologies are designed.

How children incorporate digital media in their everyday lives, and the experiences they have online,

depend not only on the affordances of technologies, but also on the complex and intersecting influences of families, peer cultures, school, the social and cultural context, political institutions and the market. The discourses around technologies circulating in the public debate, the media, advertisement, conversations with family, teachers and peers, are part of such influences and contribute to shape children's own expectations, fears and hopes around technologies¹⁸² – which, in turn, shape their online practices and experiences.

Therefore, in this final chapter, we have gone beyond the actual experiences, opportunities and risks of children in the digital world to explore how they imagine the role of digital media, including emergent technologies, in their present and future lives, their expectations about the current and long-term impact it might have, and how these views vary across the countries, by age, gender and socioeconomic status. Examining children's views helps understand also their expectations towards governments and industry, and can be translated into recommendations for policy, designers and developers.

¹⁸⁰ Staksrud et al. (2026b).

¹⁸¹ Bucher (2017); Ytre-Arne and Moe (2021).

¹⁸² Mascheroni et al. (2014).

References

- Baker, C., Ging, D., & Brandt Andreassen, M. (2024). *Recommending toxicity: The role of algorithmic recommender functions on YouTube Shorts and TikTok in promoting male supremacist influencers*. DCU Anti-Bullying Centre, Dublin City University https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/advanced_processing_technology_editor/2025-12/1.-recommending-toxicity-the-role-of-algorithmic-recommender-functions-on-youtube-shorts-and-tiktok-in-promoting-male-supremacist-influencers-2.pdf
- Barbovschi, M., Ní Bhroin, N., Chronaki, D., Ciboci, L., Farrugia, L., Lauri, M. A., ... & Velicu, A. (2021). *Young people's experiences with sexual messages online: Prevalence, types of sexting and emotional responses across European countries*. EU Kids Online and the Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo.
- Bedrosova, M., Mylek, V., Dedkova, L., & Velicu, A. (2023). Who is searching for cyberhate? Adolescents' characteristics associated with intentional or unintentional exposure to cyberhate. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 26(7). <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2022.0201>
- Bory, P., Natale, S., & Katzenbach, C. (2025). Strong and weak AI narratives: An analytical framework. *AI & Society*, 40(4), 2107–2117. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-024-02087-8>
- Bowes, L., Wolke, D., Joinson, C., Lereya, S. T., & Lewis, G. (2014). Sibling bullying and risk of depression, anxiety, and self-harm: A prospective cohort study. *Pediatrics*, 134(4), e1032–e1039. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2014-0832>
- Browne, D. T., May, S. S., Colucci, L., Hurst-Della Pietra, P., Christakis, D., Asamoah, T., ... & MIST Working Group. (2021). From screen time to the digital level of analysis: a scoping review of measures for digital media use in children and adolescents. *BMJ Open*, 11(5), e046367. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-046367>
- Bucher, T. (2017). The algorithmic imaginary: Exploring the ordinary affects of Facebook algorithms. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(1), 30–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1154086>
- Canty, J., Stubbe, M., Steers, D., & Collings, S. (2016). The trouble with bullying – Deconstructing the conventional definition of bullying for a child-centred investigation into children's use of social media. *Children & Society*, 30(1), 48–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12103>
- Carnelli, M., & Dreesen, T. (2022). *Reopening with resilience: Europe and Central Asia*. UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence – Innocenti. www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/reopening-with-resilience-europe-and-central-asia
- Chen, L., & Shi, J. (2019). Reducing harm from media: A meta-analysis of parental mediation. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 96(1), 173–193. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699018754908>
- Chen, L., Liu, X., & Tang, H. (2023). The interactive effects of parental mediation strategies in preventing cyberbullying on social media. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 16, 1009–1022. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S386968>
- Cino, D., Lacko, D., Mascheroni, G., & Smahel, D. (2023). Predictors of children's and young people's digital engagement in informational, communication, and entertainment activities: Findings from ten European countries. *Journal of Children and Media*, 17(1), 37–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2022.2123013>
- Clark, L. S. (2013). *The parent app: Understanding families in the digital age*. Oxford University Press.
- Courtois, C., & Verdegem, P. (2016). With a little help from my friends: An analysis of the role of social support in digital inequalities. *New Media & Society*, 18(8), 1508–1527. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814562162>
- Crawford, K. (2021). *The atlas of AI: Power, politics, and the planetary costs of artificial intelligence*. Yale University Press.
- Créteur, S., Dunajeva, J., Frydman, B., Berg Mulvik, I., Del Cogliano, D., ... & Sankalaite, S. [European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture,] (2026). *Mobile phone bans in schools across the EU : ENESet analytical report*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/2403181>

- Dantchev, S., Hickman, M., Heron, J., Zammit, S., & Wolke, D. (2019). The independent and cumulative effects of sibling and peer bullying in childhood on depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and self-harm in adulthood. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 10, 651. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2019.00651>
- De Marco, S., Dumont, G., & Helsper, E. J. (2026). The reproduction of structural inequalities in online job search strategies and outcomes. *New Media & Society*, 28(3), 1125–1147. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448241310497>
- d’Haenens, L., Joris, W., & Bossens, E. (2023). *Synthesis of ySKILLS results*. ySKILLS, KU Leuven. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10255614>
- Directive (EU) 2018/1808 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 November 2018 amending Directive 2010/13/EU on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive) in view of changing market realities. (2018). *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 303, 69–92 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/HIS/?uri=CELEX:32018L1808>
- EU Kids Online (EUKO). (2011). Research toolkit. London School of Economics and Political Science. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/research/research-projects/eu-kids-online/toolkit>
- EU Kids Online (EUKO). (2018). Research toolkit. London School of Economics and Political Science. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/research/research-projects/eu-kids-online/toolkit>
- European Commission. (no date). Digital and Information Society. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/digital-and-information-society_en
- European Commission. (2022). *A digital decade for children and youth: The new European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+)*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2022:212:FIN>
- European Commission. (2025). Commission publishes guidelines on the protection of minors. Policy and Legislation, 14 July. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/commission-publishes-guidelines-protection-minors>
- Gee, E., Takeuchi, L., & Wartella, E. (2018). *Children and Families in the Digital Age: Learning Together in a Media Saturated Culture* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Global Kids Online. (2020). Tools for researchers. Global Kids Online. <http://globalkidsonline.net/tools/>
- Ferguson, C. J., & Faye, C. (2018). A history of panic over entertainment technology. *Behavioral Scientist*, 1 January. <https://behavioralscientist.org/history-panic-entertainment-technology>
- Green, L., Lumby, C., McKee, A., & Ólafsson, K. (2020). National contexts for the risk of harm being done to children by access to online sexual content. In L. Tsaliki & D. Chronaki (Eds), *Discourses of anxiety over childhood and youth across cultures* (pp. 261–278). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-46436-3_11
- Griffiths, M. (2000). Does internet and computer ‘addiction’ exist? Some case study evidence. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 3(2), 211–218. <https://doi.org/10.1089/109493100316067>
- Hale, L., & Guan, S. (2015). Screen time and sleep among school-aged children and adolescents: A systematic literature review. *Sleep Medicine Reviews*, 21, 50–58. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smrv.2014.07.007>
- Helsper, E. (2021). *The digital disconnect: The social causes and consequences of digital inequalities*. SAGE Publications.
- Helsper, E. J., & Smahel, D. (2020). Excessive internet use by young Europeans: Psychological vulnerability and digital literacy? *Information, Communication & Society*, 23(9), 1255–1273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1563203>
- Helsper, E. J., Schneider, L. S., van Deursen, A. J. A. M., & van Laar, E. (2021a). *The youth Digital Skills Indicator questionnaire*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4620874>
- Helsper, E. J., Schneider, L. S., van Deursen, A. J. A. M., & van Laar, E. (2021b). *The youth Digital Skills Indicator: Report on the conceptualisation and development of the ySKILLS digital skills measure*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4608010>
- Helsper, E. J., Van Deursen, A. J. A. M., & Eynon, R. (2015). *From digital skills to tangible outcomes: Full questionnaire*. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/assets/documents/research/projects/disto/From-Digital-Skills-to-Tangible-Outcomes-Full-Questionnaire..pdf>

- Helsper, E. J., Veltri, G. A., & Livingstone, S. (2025). Parental mediation of children's online risks: The role of parental risk perception, digital skills and risk experiences. *New Media & Society*, 27(11), 5986–6005. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448241261945>
- Hisler, G., Twenge, J. M., & Krizan, Z. (2020). Associations between screen time and short sleep duration among adolescents varies by media type: Evidence from a cohort study. *Sleep Medicine*, 66, 92–102. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sleep.2019.08.007>
- Hopelab, Common Sense Media & Center for Digital Thriving at Harvard Graduate School of Education. (2024). *Teen and young adult perspectives on generative AI: Patterns of use, excitements, and concerns*. www.common sense media.org/sites/default/files/research/report/teen-and-young-adult-perspectives-on-generative-ai.pdf
- Jensen, T. K., Indrevoll Stånicke, L., Stoilova, M., Schei Jessen, R., Graham, R., Staksrud, E., & Livingstone, S. (2026). There is no point in telling: Disclosing negative online experiences among youth with mental health challenges. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-026-00945-9>
- Kalmus, V., Sukk, M., & Soo, K. (2022). Towards more active parenting: Trends in parental mediation of children's internet use in European countries. *Children & Society*, 36(5), 1026–1042. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12553>
- Kansok-Dusche, J., Ballaschk, C., Krause, N., Zeißig, A., Seemann-Herz, L., Wachs, S., & Bilz, L. (2023). A systematic review on hate speech among children and adolescents: Definitions, prevalence, and overlap with related phenomena. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 24(4), 2598–2615. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380221108070>
- Kharazi, S., Sala, A., Bostelmann, G., & Kotseva, B. (2026). *Banning mobile phones in schools: A comprehensive analysis of media coverage across countries*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/4493100>
- Kofoed, J., & Staksrud, E. (2019). 'We always torment different people, so by definition, we are no bullies': The problem of definitions in cyberbullying research. *New Media & Society*, 21(4), 1006–1020. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818810026>
- Kucirkova, N. I., Livingstone, S., & Radesky, J. S. (2023). Faulty screen time measures hamper national policies: Here is a way to address it. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1243396. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1243396>
- Lee, C., Park, S., & Lee, J. (2024). Familial abuse during childhood and later-life health: Exploring the role of victim–perpetrator relationships. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 79(7). <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbae065>
- Livingstone, S., & Blum-Ross, A. (2020). *Parenting for a digital future: How hopes and fears about technology shape children's lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Livingstone, S., & Görzig, A. (2014). When adolescents receive sexual messages on the internet: Explaining experiences of risk and harm. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 33, 8–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.12.021>
- Livingstone, S., & Helsper, E. J. (2007) Gradations in digital inclusion: Children, young people and the digital divide. *New Media & Society*, 9(4), 671–696. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444807080335>
- Livingstone, S., & Stoilova, M. (2021). *The 4Cs: Classifying online risk to children*. CO:RE – Children Online: Research and Evidence. <https://doi.org/10.21241/ssor.71817>
- Livingstone, S., Mascheroni, G., & Staksrud, E. (2018). European research on children's internet use: Assessing the past and anticipating the future. *New Media & Society*, 20(3), 1103–1122. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816685930>
- Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., & Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children: Full findings and policy implications from the EU Kids Online survey of 9- to 16-year-olds and their parents in 25 countries*. Technical report. EU Kids Online, London School of Economics and Political Science. <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/33731>
- Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K., Helsper, E. J., Lupiáñez-Villanueva, F., Veltri, G. A., & Folkvord, F. (2017). Maximizing opportunities and minimizing risks for children online: The role of digital skills in emerging strategies of parental mediation. *Journal of Communication*, 67(1), 82–105. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12277>

- Livingstone, S., Kardefelt-Winther, D., Kanchev, P., Cabello, P., Claro, M., Burton, P., & Phyfer, J. (2019). *Is there a ladder of children's online participation? Findings from three Global Kids Online countries*. UNICEF Innocenti Research Brief. www.un-ilibrary.org/content/papers/26642166/54/read
- Machackova, H., Jaron Bedrosova, M., Tolochko, P., Muzik, M., Waechter, N., & Boomgaarden, H. (2023). *Digital skills among children and youth: A report from a three-wave longitudinal study in six European countries*. ySKILLS, KU Leuven. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10450780>
- Mascheroni, G., & Ólafsson, K. (2016) The mobile Internet: Access, use, opportunities and divides among European children. *New Media & Society*, 18(8), 1657–1679 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814567986>
- Mascheroni, G., & Siibak, A. (2021). *Datafied childhoods: Data practices and imaginaries in children's lives*. Peter Lang.
- Mascheroni, G., Jorge, A., & Farrugia, L. (2014). Media representations and children's discourses on online risks: Findings from qualitative research in nine European countries. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 8(2), 2. <https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2014-2-2>
- Mascheroni, G., Ponte, C., & Jorge, A. (Eds) (2018). *Digital parenting: The challenges for families in the digital age*. Nordicom. www.nordicom.gu.se/en/publications/digital-parenting
- Matsumoto, L., Béjar, A., Arar, A., McCoy, D., & Edelson, L. (2026). *Broken, buried, or missing: Anatomies of failure (and success) of social media child safety features*. Heat Initiative & Cybersafety Research Center. https://cybersafetyresearch.org/broken_buried_missing.pdf
- Mikuška, J., Smahel, D., Dedkova, L., Staksrud, E., Mascheroni, G., & Milosevic, T. (2020). Social relational factors of excessive internet use in four European countries. *International Journal of Public Health*, 65(8), 1289–1297. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-020-01484-2>
- Nichols, S., & Selim, N. (2022). Digitally mediated parenting: A review of the literature. *Societies*, 12(2), 60. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc12020060>
- Olweus, D. (1994). Bullying at school: Basic facts and effects of a school based intervention program. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 35(7), 1171–1190. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1994.tb01229.x>
- Pasquier, D., Simões, J. A., & Kredens, E. (2012). Agents of mediation and sources of safety awareness: A comparative overview. In S. Livingstone, L. Haddon, & A. Görzig (Eds), *Children, risk and safety on the internet: Research and policy challenges in comparative perspective* (pp. 219–230). Policy Press. <https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781847428837.001.0001>
- Paus-Hasebrink, I., Bauwens, J., Dürager, A. E., & Ponte, C. (2012). Exploring types of parent–child relationship and internet use across Europe. *Journal of Children & Media*, 7(1), 114–132. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2012.739807>
- Pothong, K., Ringmar Sylwander, K., Livingstone, S., & El Gemayel, S. (2026) *Assessing the impact of using EdTech on children's learning: A scoping review of meta-analyses*. Technical report. Digital Futures for Children centre, London School of Economics & 5Rights Foundation.
- Ringrose, J., & Rawlings, V. (2015). Posthuman performativity, gender and 'school bullying': Exploring the material-discursive intra-actions of skirts, hair, sluts, and poofs. *Confero*, 3(2), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.3384/confero.2001-4562.150626>
- Robinson, L., & Gran, B. K. (2018). No Kid Is an Island: Privacy Scarcities and Digital Inequalities. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62(10), 1413–1430. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218787014>
- Scott, H., Biello, S. M., & Woods, H. C. (2019). Social media use and adolescent sleep patterns: Cross-sectional findings from the UK millennium cohort study. *BMJ Open*, 9(9), e031161. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2019-031161>
- Siibak, A., & Mascheroni, G. (2026). *Children and AI: Changing digital childhoods?* Palgrave.
- Škařupová, K., Ólafsson, K., & Blinka, L. (2015). Excessive internet use and its association with negative experiences: Quasi-validation of a short scale in 25 European countries. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 53, 118–123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.06.047>

- Smahel, D., Helsper, E.J., Green, L., Kalmus, V., Blinka, L. & Ólafsson, K. (2012). *Excessive internet use among European children. (EU Kids Online)*. London School of Economics and Political Science. <https://researchonline.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/47344>
- Smahel, D., Machackova, H., Mascheroni, G., Dedkova, L., Staksrud, E., Ólafsson, K., ... & Hasebrink, U. (2020). *EU Kids Online 2020: Survey results from 19 countries*. EU Kids Online. <https://doi.org/10.21953/lse.47fdeqj010fo>
- Smahel, D., Šaradín Lebedíková, M., Lacko, D., Kvardová, N., Mýlek, V., Tkaczyk, M., ... & Dědková, L. (2025). *Tech & teens: Insights from 15 studies on the impact of digital technology on well-being*. EU Kids Online, London School of Economics and Political Science. <https://doi.org/10.21953/lse.g4asyqkcrum7>
- Staksrud, E., Livingstone, S., & Ólafsson, K. (2026a). *Use, views and worries on age bans on social media: Responses from 29,169 children in 19 European countries*. EU Kids Online, University of Oslo, London School of Economics and Political Science. <https://doi.org/10.21953/researchonline.lse.ac.uk.00138705>
- Staksrud, E., Mascheroni, G., Milosevic, T., Ní Bhroin, N., Ólafsson, K., Şengül-İnal, G., & Stoilova, M. (2026b). *European children's use and understanding of generative AI*. EU Kids Online, London School of Economics and Political Science. <https://doi.org/10.21953/researchonline.lse.ac.uk.00137132>
- Staksrud, E., Helsper, E., Kalin, V., Livingstone, S., Lobe, B., Mascheroni, G., ... with members of EU Kids Online. (Eds) (2026c). *The EU Kids Online V Children's Questionnaire*. EU Kids Online.
- Stoilova, M., Bulger, M., & Livingstone, S. (2024). Do parental control tools fulfil family expectations for child protection? A rapid evidence review of the contexts and outcomes of use. *Journal of Children and Media*, 18(1), 29–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2023.2265512>
- Stoilova, M., Livingstone, S., & Atabey, A. (2025). *Children's rights in the age of generative AI: Perspectives from the Global South*. Digital Futures for Children centre & 5Rights Foundation.
- Twenge, J. M., Hisler, G. C., & Krizan, Z. (2019). Associations between screen time and sleep duration are primarily driven by portable electronic devices: Evidence from a population-based study of US children ages 0–17. *Sleep Medicine*, 56, 211–218. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sleep.2018.11.009>
- UN (United Nations) Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). *General comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment*. United Nations. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3906061>
- Van Den Bulck, J., & Van Den Bergh, B. (2005). The child effect in media and communication research: A call to arms and an agenda for research. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 29(1), 35–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2005.11679043>
- van Laar, E., van Deursen, A. J. A. M., van Dijk, J. A. G. M., & de Haan, J. (2017) The relation between 21st-century skills and digital skills: A systematic literature review. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 72, 577–588. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.03.010>
- Vissenberg, J., d'Haenens, L., & Livingstone, S. (2022). Digital literacy and online resilience as facilitators of young people's well-being? A systematic review. *European Psychologist*, 27(2), 76–85. doi: 10.1027/1016-9040/a000478
- WHO (World Health Organization) Regional Office for Europe. (2023). *Coping through crisis: COVID-19 pandemic experiences and adolescent mental health and well-being in the WHO European Region*. Technical document, 27 June. www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/WHO-EURO-2023-7680-47447-69735
- Williams, D. R., González, H. M., Williams, S., Mohammed, S. A., Moomal, H., & Stein, D. J. (2008). Perceived discrimination, race and health in South Africa. *Social Science and Medicine*, 67(3), 441–452. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2008.03.021>
- Wood, S. (2026). *Impact of regulation of children's digital lives: Phase II*. Digital Futures for Children centre, London School of Economics and Political Science & 5Rights Foundation. <https://researchonline.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/138377>
- Ytre-Arne, B., & Moe, H. (2021). Folk theories of algorithms: Understanding digital irritation. *Media, Culture & Society*, 43(5):807–824. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443720972314>

Annexes

National contacts for the EU Kids Online child survey

Country	Main contact/national PI	Funder
Austria (AU)	Associate Professor Sascha Trültzsch-Wijnen, Department of Communication, University of Salzburg, Professor Christina Ortner, Department of Communication and Knowledge Media, University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria and Professor Christine Trültzsch-Wijnen, Salzburg University of Education Stefan Zweig	Own research funds
Belgium (BE)	Professor Leen d'Haenens, Faculty of Social Sciences, Media Culture & Policy Lab, KU Leuven	Own research funds
Croatia (HR)	Assistant Professor Lana Ciboci Perša, Association for Communication and Media Culture, Catholic University of Croatia	Association for Communication and Media Culture (NGO organisation), Agency for Electronic Media
Czechia (CZ)	Associate Professor Hana Machackova, Interdisciplinary Research Team on Internet and Society, Masaryk University	Programme Johannes Amos Comenius under the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of Czechia from the project 'Research of Excellence on Digital Technologies and Wellbeing CZ.02.01.01/00/22_008/0004583', co-financed by the European Union
Estonia (EE)	Professor Veronika Kalmus, Institute of Social Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tartu Dr Iiris Tuvi, Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tartu	Ministry of Social Affairs and the Development Fund of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tartu
Finland (FI)	Professor Sirkku Kotilainen, Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences, Tampere University	Media Industry Research Foundation of Finland
Ireland (IE)	Professor Brian O'Neill, Technological University Dublin	Coimisiún na Meán
Italy (IT)	Professor Giovanna Mascheroni, OssCom – Research Centre on Media and Communication, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore	Own research funds
Latvia (LV)	Researcher Gints Klāsons, Applied Research Project Manager, Latvian Academy of Culture	Latvian Academy of Culture (LKA)
Luxembourg (LU)	Professor Claudine Kirsch, Faculty of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences, Department of Humanities	Own research funds
Malta (MT)	Professor Mary Anne Lauri, Psychology, Faculty for Social Wellbeing, University of Malta	Own research funds
Norway (NO)	Professor Elisabeth Staksrud, Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo	Ministry of Children and Families, Ministry of Education and Research and Ministry of Culture and Equality
Poland (PL)	Professor Jacek Pyżalski, Faculty of Educational Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University	Fundacja Orange
Portugal (PT)	Assistant Professor Susana Batista, Sociology, NOVA FCSH	Gulbenkian, Associação Ponto PT e Fundação Millennium

Romania (RO)	Dr Anca Velicu, Institute of Sociology, Romanian Academy	Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, CCCDI – UEFISCDI, PN-IV-PCB-RO-MD-2024-0424
Serbia (RS)	Assistant Professor Tijana Milošević, Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), OSCE Mission to Serbia [Media Reform Sector] and United Nations Development Programme, Serbia (UNDP Serbia)
Slovakia (SK)	Associate Professor Pavel Izrael, Department of Journalism, Faculty of Arts and Letters, Catholic University in Ružomberok	Slovak Research and Development Agency (Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic)
Spain (ES)	Dr Maialen Garmendia Larrañaga, Faculty of Education, Philosophy, and Anthropology, University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU)	Safer Internet Centre Spain, Call DIGITAL-2023- DEPLOY - 04 - NETWORK OF SICs
Switzerland (CH)	Professor Martin Hermida, Schwyz University of Teacher Education	Federal Social Insurance Office – FSIO, Schweizerische Kriminalprävention and Action Innocence



Country profiles

This section contains profiles of the 19 countries that participated in the survey. The profiles were authored by researchers from the respective national teams, who are listed in each profile.

The country profiles provide a glimpse into the richness of the EU Kids Online data collected, viewed in the context of selected country-specific findings. They focus on key national results and highlight findings that go beyond those presented in the main sections of this report.

Readers are also encouraged to consult the national reports and forthcoming publications based on the EUKO data, which will provide more detailed national analyses as well as further cross-country comparisons and thematic analyses.

Citing country profiles

Please cite the country profiles in the following way:

In-text reference: (names of members of the national EU Kids Online team, 2026).

Full reference: Names of members of the national EU Kids Online team (2026). EU Kids Online 2026: Country. In E. Staksrud, E. Helsper, S. Livingstone, B. Lobe, G. Mascheroni, M. Stoilova & K. Ólafsson, *The EU Kids Online 2026 comparative study: Children's views, experiences, opportunities and risks in a digital world* (pp. XX). EU Kids Online. <https://hdl.handle.net/11250/5561363> <https://doi.org/10.21953/researchonline.lse.ac.uk.00140901>

Austria (AT)

EU Kids Online team

Christina Ortner (Co-PI), Sascha Trültzsch-Wijnen (Co-PI), Christine W. Trültzsch-Wijnen and Anna Eder-Jahn

Contact: Christina Ortner, Research Center Hagenberg, University of Applied Sciences of Upper Austria, Softwarepark 11, 4232 Hagenberg, Austria; Sascha Trültzsch-Wijnen, Department of Communication Studies, University of Salzburg, Rudolfskai 42, 5020 Salzburg, Austria

Email: christina.ortner@fh-hagenberg.at; sascha.trueltzsch-wijnen@plus.ac.at

Thematic reports

Trültzsch-Wijnen, C. W., Eder-Jahn, A. M., Trültzsch-Wijnen, S., & Ortner, C. (2026). *Children, adolescents and AI: Brief report EUKO Austria 2026*. EU Kids Online. <https://doi.org/10.25598/euko-at-2026-3>

- Brief one page overview of use of artificial intelligence [English] (Feb 2026) (PDF) EUKO-AT-AI-OnepagerEN. www.plus.ac.at/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/EUKO-AT-KI-OnepagerEN.pdf

Trültzsch-Wijnen, C. W., Trültzsch-Wijnen, S., Eder-Jahn, A. M., & Ortner, C. (2026). *Heranwachsende und KI: Kurzbericht EUKO Österreich 2026*. EU Kids Online. <https://doi.org/10.25598/euko-at-2026-2>

- Kurzübersicht KI Nutzung Österreich (Feb 2026) (PDF) EUKO-AT_KI-Onepager. www.plus.ac.at/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/EUKO-AT_KI-Onepager.pdf

Key recommendations

- Schools need clear and consistent rules for dealing with generative AI.
- Opportunities, challenges and risks of generative AI must be discussed at school.
- Digital skills must be taught across all subjects and levels of education for children to gain overall skills in using generative AI.
- Adults' AI literacy should also be promoted in professional training and workshops for parents or caregivers.
- A uniform framework is needed for developing, improving and implementing generative AI (e.g., guidelines and transparency regarding the training of generative AI, storage of user data). This must be realised at European level.

Belgium (BE)

EU Kids Online team

Leen d’Haenens (PI), Joke Bauwens, David De Coninck, Willem Joris, Lise-Lore Steeman and Joyce Vissenberg

Contact: Media Culture & Policy Lab, KU Leuven, 3000 Leuven, Belgium

Email: leen.dhaenens@kuleuven.be

Thematic reports

Full reference to the thematic reports (in Dutch): <https://soc.kuleuven.be/afdeling-communicatiewetenschappen/media-culture-policy-lab-1/outreach/outreach>

De Coninck, D., d’Haenens, L., & Steeman, L.-L. (2026). *Cyberpesten: Geraakt via het scherm*. EU Kids Online.

Joris, W., Bauwens, J., & d’Haenens, L. (2026). *Hoe digitaal geletterd zijn jongeren? Een analyse van zelfinschattingen en verschillen tussen groepen*. EU Kids Online.

Vissenberg, J., Joris, W., Bauwens, J., & d’Haenens, L. (2026). *De digitale schooldag: Internet, AI en smartphonegebruik van jongeren in en rond de klas*. EU Kids Online.

Vissenberg, J., Joris, W., Bauwens, J., & d’Haenens, L. (2026). *Van regels en filters naar vertrouwen en gesprek: Ouders als gids in de digitale leefwereld van jongeren*. EU Kids Online.

Key findings

The Belgian findings are based on data from 1,070 young people aged 12–17 in Flanders and Brussels, and are presented in four thematic reports. They show that digital media are firmly embedded in young people’s school, family and social lives, with internet use for schoolwork now widespread.

Generative AI is also becoming part of everyday school practice, particularly for writing, summarising and explaining texts. Its use is higher among older pupils and those in more academically oriented education, and lower among younger pupils, those in vocationally oriented education and those from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds.

Young people assess their communication and interaction skills positively. Technical skills are generally strong, while information evaluation and content creation are less consistently developed. Boys report higher technical, information-processing and content production skills, whereas girls report stronger communication skills. The youngest respondents report lower skills in some areas.

Friends are the most frequently consulted source of support after negative online experiences, closely followed by parents or caregivers. One in five young people speak to nobody about things that bother them online. Parental mediation gradually shifts from rules and technical controls towards dialogue, trust and shared responsibility as adolescents grow older.

Cyberbullying affected 22.4% of the young people, and frequently overlapped with offline bullying. Girls and older adolescents reported higher rates of cyberbullying victimisation. Higher digital skills did not necessarily reduce victimisation.

Highlights

Digital participation does not automatically ensure digital competence, inclusion or safety. The findings point to three priorities: strengthening critical information and content creation skills; preventing generative AI from widening existing educational inequalities; and maintaining supportive relationships as adolescents become more autonomous. Parents or caregivers remain important, but open communication must replace excessive control. Schools should address online and offline bullying together, because they are often interconnected. Digital education should therefore combine skills, critical judgement, emotional resilience and accessible support for young people who are least likely to seek help.

Croatia (HR)

EU Kids Online team

Lana Ciboci Perša (PI), Igor Kanižaj and Dunja Potočnik

Contact: Association for Communication and Media Culture (Društvo za komunikacijsku i medijsku kulturu, DKMK), Golikova 28, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia

Email: lciboci@gmail.com

National report

Ciboci Perša, L., Kanižaj, I., & Potočnik, D. (2025). *Digitalno djetinjstvo u Hrvatskoj – Nacionalni rezultati međunarodnog istraživanja EU Kids Online 2025*. Društvo za komunikacijsku i medijsku kulturu. EU Kids Online.

<https://djecamedija.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/EUKO-2025-Hrvatska-izvjesce.pdf>

Key findings

A study conducted on a sample of 1,172 children aged 10–16 confirms that digital space has become an inseparable part of everyday life while also posing complex challenges for children’s wellbeing. As many as 54.9% of children use digital devices daily or almost every night. A particular focus of the study was generative AI, which is widely used by the majority of children, primarily for school essays, task completion and saving time.

Children generally believe they know how to protect their devices, but lack more advanced skills such as private browsing or a critical understanding of algorithms. With 27.1% of children experiencing distressing online content at least once a month, the most vulnerable group is 16-year-olds: as many as 40.6% reported having witnessed online hate speech. Exposure to sexual content is particularly alarming: a quarter of children received sexual messages in the past year, often from unknown individuals. More than half of the children have made unsuccessful attempts to reduce the time they spend online.

As many as 46.1% of parents or caregivers never discuss children’s online mistakes with them. When asked whom they spoke to the last time they experienced something upsetting online, only one in five children spoke with a parent or caregiver or other adult while a similar proportion spoke with a peer. The findings point to an urgent need for systematic public policy measures that strengthen digital literacy, encourage parental mediation and ensure better support for children’s mental health in the digital age.

Highlights

Children generally recognise the main principles of the online environment. Still, findings on algorithms and content dissemination indicate significant gaps and uncertainty, emphasising the need for additional systematic education in digital literacy. Although most children report that it is easy for them to talk to a parent or caregiver about distressing experiences, girls report significantly more often than boys that they find this difficult. More focused support for communication is needed. A large proportion of children report a lack of active mediation: parents often do not discuss online activities and mistakes, do not set rules, do not engage in joint activities and do not systematically teach children how to use the internet. Additionally, most parents or caregivers do not use technical protective measures (e.g., ad blockers and related applications), which, together with the findings on communication and rules, point to the need to strengthen parents’ or caregivers’ digital and media competencies.

Czechia (CZ)

EU Kids Online team

Marie Jaron Bedrosova (PI), Hana Machackova, Ivan Černický, Hong Nhung Nguyenova, Ainize Martínez-Soto and David Smahel

Contact: Masaryk University, Brno, Jostova 10, 60200, Czech Republic

Email: marie.bedrosova@fss.muni.cz

National report

Nguyenova, H. N., Martínez-Soto, A., Jaron Bedrosova, M., & Machackova, H. (2026). *Czech children and adolescents on the internet: Results of the EU Kids Online V survey in the Czech Republic*. Masaryk University. https://irtis.muni.cz/media/4172189/en_euko-v_report_fin_100626.pdf

Key findings

Czech children and adolescents (aged 9–17) primarily access the internet via smartphones. Weekly online activities most commonly include communicating with friends (92.8%), listening to music (92.7%) and watching videos on social media (90.5%); 72.4% also use the internet for schoolwork. Older adolescents (aged 15–17) engage in a wider range of online activities and use digital devices more frequently, including during school hours and after bedtime. In all ages, children and adolescents report relatively high confidence in their technical digital skills and online communication. However, gaps remain in critical digital knowledge: 40% are unsure whether the first search result is the best source of information, while 45.3% are uncertain whether the first social media post reflects their contact's recent activity.

Online risks take several forms for them. In the past year, 21.6% experienced online victimisation, which was less frequent than face-to-face victimisation (30.5%). Girls reported stronger emotional reactions to victimisation than boys. Exposure to potentially harmful content was common, with 77.8% encountering conspiracy theories and 66.6% cyberhate at least once during the past year, mostly unintentionally. Receiving sexual messages was reported by 36.8%, most often from strangers or friends. While only 1.7% met all criteria for excessive internet use, 44% reported at least one warning sign.

Overall, Czech children and adolescents are cautiously optimistic about digital technologies. Six in ten (60.7%) believe new technologies will improve access to knowledge, although privacy remains a major concern for them, with 51.4% worried about their personal data being shared without their consent.

Highlights

Czech children and adolescents experience distinct types of online risks depending on gender and age. Girls were more than three times as likely as boys to encounter content promoting extreme thinness (13.3% vs 3.7% daily) and were more likely to actively seek it out, while boys reported higher daily exposure to pornography (12.2% vs 2.8%) and were more likely to seek it out. Gender differences were also evident in sexual risk experiences over the past year, with girls reporting more requests to share sexual content. However, these differences became negligible among those experiencing such risks more frequently (daily to weekly). Instead, sexual risks increased sharply with age: weekly receipt of sexual messages rose from 3.5% among 9- to 11-year-olds to 14.5% among 15- to 17-year-olds, while weekly requests to share sexual content increased from 0.6% to 4.5%. These findings highlight the need for age- and gender-sensitive digital literacy and online safety approaches.

Estonia (EE)

EU Kids Online team

Veronika Kalmus (PI), Hanna Kerstina Kartau, Kristjan Kikerpill, Katre Lamp, Signe Opermann, Ishita Pandey, Andra Siibak, Kadri Soo and Iiris Tuvi

Contact: Institute of Social Studies, University of Tartu, 51003 Tartu, Estonia

Email: veronika.kalmus@ut.ee

National report

Kalmus, V., Opermann, S., & Kurvits, R. (Eds) (2026). *EU Kids Online'i Eesti 2025. Aasta uuringu esialgsed tulemused* [Preliminary results of the EU Kids Online Estonia 2025 study]. University of Tartu, Institute of Social Studies. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18668024>

Key findings

The 2025 EU Kids Online Estonia study shows that internet use is nearly universal among 9- to 16-year-olds, with 98% going online daily. Compared with 2018, the internet is used more often for schoolwork, while communication and entertainment remain central to use. The children generally assess their digital skills positively, but objective digital knowledge is relatively weak, particularly in information evaluation and understanding how digital and AI systems operate.

Online risks remain widespread, with several increasing since 2018. More than half of the children encountered something upsetting online during the previous year; harmful content, sexually explicit messages and symptoms of excessive internet use have all become more common. Bullying affects a quarter of the children, and 18% tell no one about such disturbing experiences.

Generative AI has been used by about two-thirds of all children and by around four-fifths of 13- to 16-year-olds. It is used mainly for schoolwork, explanations, summaries and recommendations. Young people value its speed and convenience, but recognise hallucinations, unreliable information and privacy risks. Although they feel confident using AI, their understanding of its operation, ownership and ethical implications is limited.

Mental wellbeing is supported by self-efficacy, trusting communication with parents or caregivers and active parental mediation, whereas experiencing bullying and harmful content are associated with poorer wellbeing. Girls and pupils who completed the questionnaire in Russian emerge as comparatively vulnerable groups across several indicators.

Highlights

The report points to a growing mismatch between adolescents' confident adoption of technology and their limited capacity to evaluate its underlying mechanisms, commercial interests and wider social consequences. Digital and AI literacy education should therefore move beyond functional skills towards critical, ethical and data-related understanding.

The findings also favour supportive mediation over control alone. Parents or caregivers and schools can strengthen wellbeing by combining open discussion and practical guidance with age-appropriate autonomy, rather than relying primarily on rules and restrictions.

Targeted support is particularly important for groups facing intersecting disadvantages. Prevention and support measures should be sensitive to gender differences and to the greater online and psychosocial vulnerability found among pupils who completed the questionnaire in Russian.

Finland

EU Kids Online team

Sirkku Kotilainen (PI), Jussi Okkonen, Reijo Kupiainen and Roosa Heikkiniemi

Contact: Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences, 33014 Tampere University, Finland

Email: sirkku.kotilainen@tuni.fi

National report

Heikkiniemi, R., Kotilainen, S., Kupiainen, R., & Okkonen, J. (2026). *Eu Kids Online 2025 Suomi: Tuloksia lasten ja nuorten median käytöstä*. EU Kids Online. www.mediaalantutkimussaatio.fi/wp-content/uploads//EuKidsOnline-infograafi.pdf

Key findings

The survey looked at audiovisual communication for amusement and chatting with friends on a daily basis, mostly via mobile phones. The children follow news and look for support for schoolwork online once a week, but hardly any are active in civic participation online.

Nearly 40% of the young children trust their own digital skills, which is much more than those who are unsure about their digital skills (23%). Based on the analysis, most of the children (77%) are confident of their skills. Still, those aged over 11 in particular are uncertain about their information literacy skills together with critical aspects of social media and algorithms.

Over half of the children and most of those over 13 use AI to save time and to make things happen easy. Even so, attitudes towards future technologies vary greatly, and approximately 44% of the children have no opinion about it at all.

The most experienced digital risks among the children were content related to hate speech, extreme thinness, conspiracy theories and drug use. Additionally, approximately 11% have seen dangerous challenges and tasks online at least monthly. Among the reasons given for having faced bullying online, the children present aspects related to their own body shape or behaviour more than their ethnic background, religion or disability.

Highlights

Girls reported more pessimistic attitudes compared to boys. This may be explained by the fact that girls may face, for example, more gender-specific hate speech than boys.

The finding that older children report more pessimistic attitudes toward digital technologies, despite having higher digital skills, suggests a paradoxical relationship between experience and optimism. One possible interpretation for this is that greater exposure to toxic or problematic online environments leads to increased critical awareness and concerns, which may translate into more pessimistic future expectations.

Youth positive attitudes are seen in the popularising usage of generative AI. In the study 64% of all the children reported that they had used generative AI during the past month, some using it to produce deepfakes. Based on both findings we suggest a need for generative AI-focused literacy with ethical aspects for both young people and teachers.

Ireland (IE)

EU Kids Online team

Brian O'Neill (PI), Aphra Kerr, Tijana Milosevic, Andreas Balaskas, Darragh McCashin, Claudette Pretorius and Marina Everri

Contact: Brian O'Neill (PI), Emeritus Research Fellow, Technological University Dublin, Grangegorman, Dublin 7, D07 H6K8, Ireland

Email: brian.oneill@tudublin.ie

National report

The Ireland EU Kids Online national report will be published later in 2026.

Key findings

Forthcoming.

Highlights

Forthcoming.

Italy (IT)

EU Kids Online team

Giovanna Mascheroni (PI), Piermarco Aroldi, Marco Rosichini and Davide Cino

Contact: OssCom, Centro di ricerca sui media e la comunicazione (Research Centre on Media and Communication), Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Largo Gemelli 1, 20123 Milano, Italy

Email: giovanna.mascheroni@unicatt.it

Thematic report

Mascheroni, G., Rosichini, M., & Cino, D. (2026). *L'IA Generativa fra bambini e adolescenti italiani: Usi e comprensione*. EU Kids Online. <https://researchonline.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/137140>

Key findings

Consistent with other European countries, in Italy the use of screens is most often reported in the afternoon and in the evening after dinner. The proportion of Italian 9- to 16-year-old children who report using screens at times that are considered inappropriate and critical, such as in class or during school breaks, during dinner, after bedtime and during the night, is lower than the European average.

Although the internet is an integral part of everyday life for communication and entertainment, inequalities persist in the children's digital skills and knowledge. With misinformation being one of highest concerns on the public agenda, it is striking that only 17% of Italian children reportedly find it very easy to check if the information they find online is true.

The number of children who have felt bothered (upset, uncomfortable or scared) by something they experienced on the internet has further increased since 2018. In fact, and consistent with the European average, 22% of Italian children reported having felt upset in the past month. Although the most common risk is being exposed to harmful user-generated content (76%) or hate speech (62%), it is also remarkable that 51% of Italian children now report being treated in a hurtful or nasty way either online or face-to-face, with girls more likely to be bullied and exposed to hateful content.

Highlights

Sociodigital inequalities are systematic and persistent, especially when information navigation skills are considered: girls (38%), 11- to 12-year-old children (40%) and lower socioeconomic status (SES) children (34%) are less likely than boys (50%), 15- to 16-year-olds (55%) and higher SES children (46%) to report being able to check if the information they find online is true.

Although most children (58%) know what to do when someone behaves online in ways they do not like, only 19% of Italian 9- to 16-year-old children reportedly feel safe online (vs 48% of the overall European sample). Gender differences are considerable: only 13% of Italian girls feel safe online compared to 24% of Italian boys. Age, gender and socioeconomic differences occur also in exposure to risks.

Intentional exposure to hateful content is higher in Italy than the European average, especially among boys, 15- to 16-year-old children and lower SES children.

Surprisingly, only one in three Italian children talk to their parents or caregivers when they are bothered online; most (48%) seek advice from friends.

Latvia (LV)

EU Kids Online team

Gints Klāsons (PI), Laura Brutāne and Guna Spurava

Contact: Institute of Arts and Cultural Studies, Latvian Academy of Culture, Miera iela 58a, Riga, LV-1013, Latvia

Email: Gints.Klasons@lka.edu.lv

National report

Forthcoming (expected late 2026/early 2027). The Latvian national analysis is currently being prepared within the Latvian Academy of Culture project 'Digital Literacy, Risks, and Well-being of Latvian Children and Youth: National Analysis of "EU Kids Online 2025" Data' (implementation period: 01.06.2026–31.05.2027).

Key findings

Forthcoming (expected late 2026/early 2027).

Highlights

Forthcoming (expected late 2026 early 2027).

Luxembourg (LU)

EU Kids Online team

Claudine Kirsch (PI), Isabelle Albert, Bob Reuter and Philipp Sischka

Contact: University of Luxembourg, Maison des Sciences Humaines, 4366, Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg

Email: claudine.kirsch@uni.lu

National report

Kirsch, C., Albert, I., Reuter, B., & Sischka, P. (2026). *EU Kids Online. Quantitative and qualitative studies in Luxembourg*. University of Luxembourg.

Key findings

Survey findings

- The use of digital tools is widespread.
- Screen use is highest in the afternoon after school and before bedtime.
- Online communication with friends and parents or caregivers is the most common activity.
- The children generally reported low levels of digital knowledge.
- Generative AI tools were most frequently used for educational tasks.
- Over a third of the children reported feeling safe online.
- Exposure to harmful, hateful and pornographic content was reported by a tenth of the children.
- Problematic behaviours and experiences, including publicly sharing personal information or others' content without permission and receiving sexual messages were reported by a minority of the children.
- The children primarily perceived parents or caregivers as setting rules and providing guidance for internet use.

Interview findings with children about their digital lives

- Access to digital devices and apps as well as screentime varied within each family.
- Children's feeling of safety and risks depended on their online experiences, perceived digital competences and conversations about safety with adults.

Interview findings with adolescents about generative AI

- Generative AI tools played a meaningful, mostly school-related role in adolescents' everyday lives.
- The adolescents' awareness of risks was vivid for proximal, personally relevant matters, but largely silent on systemic ones such as environmental cost, disinformation or the manipulation of public discourse.

Highlights

- The EU Kids Online findings regarding the use of digital tools as well as age, gender and socioeconomic status (SES)-related differences are consistent with those reported in the 2026 BEE SECURE Radar and the 2025 Youth Report Luxembourg.
- The EU Kids Online study confirms earlier findings that children and adolescents rate their digital competences as relatively low.
- The online experiences reported in the survey and the interviews appear to be predominantly positive, with only a minority of the children feeling upset by something they had seen.
- The EU Kids Online findings are in line with the 2026 BEE SECURE Radar, and show that parents or caregivers are mainly controllers and rarely take on the role of educators.



Malta (MT)

EU Kids Online team

Mary Anne Lauri (PI), Lorleen Farrugia and Christine Spiteri

Contact: Department of Psychology, Room 230, University of Malta, Msida, MSD 2080, Malta

Email: mary-anne.lauri@um.edu.mt

National report

Not yet published.

Key findings

Malta's findings closely reflect the European picture. Children's online and offline lives are frequently woven into one experience in their communication with family and friends. Few encountered potentially harmful experiences. Communicating with friends is among the most frequent online activity, together with watching videos and listening to music. Some children are constantly online while others use it mostly after school and before bedtime.

This fifth iteration of the survey included questions about the use of generative AI. The results show that around two-thirds of Maltese children aged 9–16 report that they have used generative AI. This places Malta near the European average and highlights how quickly AI has become part of children's everyday digital lives. AI use increases significantly with age, with older teenagers more likely to use these tools regularly than younger children. Education is one of the main reasons for AI use, as students rely on it to complete homework, understand difficult concepts, summarise information and save time on repetitive tasks. Some children admitted copying AI-generated material directly into assignments.

Highlights

One key finding points to the growing knowledge gap between children and adults. Many children learn about AI from friends, siblings, TikTok and YouTube, while parents or caregivers may remain unaware of their usage.

Another key finding is that a smaller number of children use AI chatbots for personal advice about health, relationships and emotional concerns, raising safeguarding issues. This requires further investigation.

Norway (NO)

EU Kids Online team

Elisabeth Staksrud (PI), Niamh Ní Bhroin, Eiri Elvestad, Ida Engan Farstad, Vilde Kalin, Steffen Krüger, Stine Nygård, Ingvill Rasmussen, Kjartan Ólafsson and Gülbin Şengül-İnal

Contact: Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo, PO Boks 1093, Blindern, 0317 Oslo, Norway

Email: elisabeth.staksrud@media.uio.no

National reports

Staksrud, E., Elvestad, E., Farstad, I. E., Ní Bhroin, N., Nygård, S., Rasmussen, I., & Şengül-İnal, G. (2026). <https://hdl.handle.net/11250/5560866> (forthcoming). (Report 3/2026). Centre for Studies of Children, Youth, and Media, University of Oslo.

Generative AI: Staksrud, E., Ní Bhroin, N., Rasmussen, I., Farstad, I. E., Frydenlund, J. H., Kalin, V. S., Nygård, S., & Şengül-İnal, G. (2026). *Norske barns bruk og forståelse av generativ KI: EU Kids Online 2026 [Norwegian children's use and understanding of generative AI: EU Kids Online 2026]*. (Report 1/2026). Centre for Studies of Children, Youth, and Media, University of Oslo. <https://hdl.handle.net/11250/5517852>

Age bans: Staksrud, E., Nygård, S., Farstad, I. E., & Şengül-İnal, G. (2026). *Norske barns bruk av sosiale medier: EU Kids Online 2026 [Norwegian children's use of social media: EU Kids Online 2026]*. (Report 2/2026). Centre for Studies of Children, Youth, and Media, University of Oslo. <https://hdl.handle.net/11250/5516336>

Key findings

Daily screen use is most prevalent among Norwegian children during their free time in the morning (72%) and afternoon (94%). Few children use screens during dinnertime (9%) or at night (10%), while most parents or caregivers report daily screen use during the same times (82% and 72% respectively). The most frequent online activities among children are watching videos on social media, listening to music and watching TV programmes or movies. A total of 59% of 9- to 16-year-olds report using generative AI, most commonly for schoolwork, simplifying tasks and saving time.

A total of 92% of Norwegian children use social media: more than half have a SoMe profile, and about a third have used SoMe without a profile. While most parents or caregivers endorse attitudes in support of a SoMe age ban, 65% consider their child to be old enough to have a SoMe profile before age 16, and 25 % at age 12 or younger.

Norwegian children encounter online risks such as digital bullying (15%), unwanted requests for sexual messages (20%) and potentially harmful content (51%). They also report symptoms of excessive internet use, including being unable to limit their time online (22%). Children turn to parents or caregivers (35%) and peers (38%) when they experience bullying, while most children who receive sexual messages do not talk to anyone (56%).

Across all online activities, experiences and types of digital risk exposures, our analyses show sociodemographic differences in prevalence rates. This highlights the importance of considering the context and characteristics of children when evaluating the risks and opportunities offered by digital media.

Highlights

Overall, the Norwegian findings point less towards one general level of 'digital media use' than towards substantial variation by context, age, activity and, importantly, social circumstances in children's opportunities, skills, risks and wellbeing online. By including data from parents or caregivers, our survey captures additional aspects of children's home environment, which enables us to better contextualise our findings and address blind spots in dominant discourses of the potential harms involved in children's digital media use.

The findings regarding social media use are important for the ongoing debate on regulation, as they show that many children (and in particular, the youngest) use SoMe content and services without a personal profile. Moreover, the risks associated with social media use appear to increase with age, thus suggesting greater vulnerability among older children regardless of activities on SoMe platforms. This suggests that an age ban will have limited effect when it comes to regulating use.

Poland (PL)

EU Kids Online team

Jacek Pyżalski (PI), Piotr Plichta and Łukasz Tomczyk

Contact: Faculty of Educational Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University, ul. Wieniawskiego 1, Poznań, Poland

Email: pyzalski@amu.edu.pl

National report

Pyżalski, J., Plichta, P., & Tomczyk, Ł. (2026). *Polskie badanie EU Kids Online 2026: W stronę nowych wyzwań. Reprezentatywne badanie polskich uczniów i uczennic w wieku 10–16 lat*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM. <https://doi.org/10.14746/amup.9788323245308>

Key findings

The Polish EU Kids Online 2026 study was conducted in 80 randomly selected schools with a representative sample of 1,502 students aged 10–16. Internet access was nearly universal but strongly smartphone-centred: 95% used a smartphone to connect daily or several times a day compared with slightly more than a third using a desktop or laptop, with many rarely using large-screen devices.

Almost eight in ten of the children had used generative AI in the preceding month. However, most used it for only one purpose, suggesting surface use rather than advanced AI literacy. A similar tension emerged between self-assessed skills and actual knowledge. Although 57% declared that they were fully capable of securing their device, 62.9% obtained only 0–2 points on a 6-point digital knowledge test.

Exposure to harmful content was substantial. During the previous year, 40.5% had encountered content concerning self-harm, more than 30% saw suicide-related content, and 62.4% encountered online hate speech. Among those aged 12–16, 26.1% had received a sexual message.

Young people with special educational needs were more active in several online practices and more frequently perceived the internet as a space of safety, strength and self-expression. This should not be interpreted exclusively through the lens of vulnerability, although greater involvement may also increase exposure to risks.

Overall, the findings reveal important tensions: widespread access but smartphone dependence, extensive generative AI use but limited diversity of application, and relatively high confidence accompanied by low digital knowledge. Educational responses should therefore move beyond access and basic safety towards critical understanding, digital wellbeing and differentiated support.

Highlights

- Internet use extended into private and family time: 49.9% used devices frequently after going to bed, 25.1% during the night and 19.9% during family meals.
- Online activity was dominated by communication and entertainment, and only 12.5% created or edited digital content daily.
- Although 77.8% used generative AI, 42.1% reported only one type of use and just 10.9% used it for four or more purposes.
- Girls used generative AI for discussing concerns or seeking advice more often than boys (19.5% vs 12.1%).
- Sixty-five per cent were uncertain how generative AI would affect their lives.
- Conspiracy content reached 52.1% of the children, including 28.2% at least monthly.
- Following a troubling online experience, 38.5% sought peer support, 30.9% approached parents or caregivers, 18.2% told no one, and only 3.3% spoke to a teacher.

Portugal (PT)

EU Kids Online team

Susana Batista (PI), Cristina Ponte, José Alberto Simões, Eduarda Ferreira, Daniel Cardoso and Estrella Luna

Contact: School of Social Sciences and Humanities (NOVA FCSH), Av. de Berna, 26 C, 1069-061 Lisboa, Portugal

Email: susanabatista@fcsb.unl.pt

National report

Batista, S., Ponte, C., Ferreira, E., Cardoso, D., Simões, J. A., & Luna, E. (2026). *Novos usos, novos riscos? Direitos digitais de crianças e jovens*. Relatório EU Kids Online.

Key findings

The EU Kids Online 2025 survey polled 2,111 children and young people (aged 9–17) in the national sample, balanced in terms of gender, with about half aged 12–14 and more than 60% reporting a high socioeconomic status (SES). Smartphones dominate internet access, with daily use reaching 71% among 9- to 11 year-olds and 9 in 10 from age 12 onwards. Social network profile ownership rises sharply with age, from 38% (aged 9–11) to 91% (aged 15–17), and boys are now more present on social media than in previous studies; the most frequent online activities remain communication and entertainment content. Generative AI has become mainstream, used by 85% of the children mainly for schoolwork, although this drops to 34% among those from low SES. Despite confident self-assessment of digital skills, a significant lack of knowledge persists regarding how algorithms work and social media business models. Awareness of digital rights is higher among younger children and girls, and lower in the low SES group, with the right to communicate freely being the most widely recognised. Only 47% feel safe online, and 38% report having had at least one troubling online experience. Half have already encountered hate speech, growing sharply from 25% among 9- to 11-year-olds to 72% among 15- to 17-year-olds, alongside other negative content such as conspiracy theories (37%). Family mediation relies mainly on dialogue (four in five), while technological monitoring (geolocation, parental controls) continues to grow. Three in four disagree with current school phone regulations, although this opposition is less pronounced among the younger children.

Highlights

EU Kids Online 2025 shows children and young people in Portugal navigating both the stability of an online culture of communication and leisure and the emergence of new challenges: generative AI is now part of daily school life, ‘conspiracy theories’ have become a notable informational risk, and non-intentional exposure to negative content remains widespread. Confident in their digital skills, young people nonetheless show gaps in understanding algorithms and platform business models. SES stands out as a central factor of digital inequality. Family and school remain key pillars of mediation, but technological surveillance is growing, raising new challenges for children’s rights to privacy and autonomy.

Romania (RO)

EU Kids Online team

Anca Velicu (PI), Bianca Balea, Gyongyver Tokes and Monica Barbovschi

Contact: Institute of Sociology, Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania

Email: anca.velicu@gmail.com

National report

Velicu, A., Balea, B., Tokes, G. & Barbovschi, M (forthcoming). *Copiii din România pe internet în era inteligenței artificiale generative. Acces, utilizări, riscuri și oportunități (Romanian Kids Online in the Gen AI era. Access, practices, risks and opportunities)*. EU Kids Online.

Key findings

- The phone is quasi-universal (93% daily use), but its ubiquity has come at the expense of other devices rather than alongside them.
- A quarter of the children rarely use a computer (a third in rural areas), with gaps by gender, age and residence – signaling unequal digital benefits from device use.
- Phone use at school rises with age, but not gradually: it ‘jumps’ at high school, from 16% (ages 13–14) to 51% (ages 15–16) during class, and to 85% during breaks.
- Learning and information activities remain a minority practice: 38% learn something new daily, 32% do homework and 25% follow the news.
- Eighty-two per cent have used generative AI at least once in the past month, mostly for school (45% essays/homework, 36% summaries); fewer use it for personal interests (22%), health advice (23%) or mental health advice (10%).
- Children in the Hungarian-language subsample use generative AI significantly less (65% vs 84%).
- Online civic participation remains marginal and unchanged since 2018: 93% have never joined an online petition or campaign and 85% have never taken part in a public discussion.
- Romanian children tend to overestimate their digital competencies: self-assessment scores are substantially higher than scores on the factual knowledge test.
- Cyberbullying experience has stabilised (24%) after rising steadily across earlier waves (13% in 2011, 19% in 2014 and 23% in 2018).
- Aggressors mostly come from children’s close circle: friends (43%) and classmates (42%), versus total strangers (23%) and people known only online (15%).
- Boys stay significantly more silent after an upsetting experience: 22% tell no one compared with 11% of girls.

Highlights

- The daily rhythm of screen use is more intense among children in Romania, especially in the evening or at night (with the potential to affect their sleep).
- Adoption of generative AI is higher in Romania than the European average.
- Children in Romania feel considerably less safe online (36%) than the European average.
- Children in Romania report more intense worries than the European average across almost all categories. However, the most intense worries are not digital but classic worries (e.g., illness in the family at 68.8% and war at 48.6%).
- Regarding the digital world, image-related fears (a nude photo published without consent, a fake image) reach nearly four in ten children and are stronger among younger children than teenagers.
- Children in Romania seem to perceive lower costs from a potential ban on social media under age 16 compared to the average of the other countries that measured this behaviour.

Serbia (RS)

EU Kids Online team

Dobrinka Kuzmanović (Co PI), Tijana Milošević (Co PI), Oliver Tošković and Dragan Popadić

Contact: Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, Studentski trg 3, Belgrade 11000, Serbia

Email: dobrinka.kuzmanovic@fil.bg.ac.rs; tijana.milosevic@fil.bg.ac.rs

National report

Kuzmanović, D., Tošković, O., Popadić, D., & Milošević, T. (forthcoming). *Internet, digital technology and artificial intelligence use among children and young people in Serbia: Results of the 2026 National EU Kids Online Survey*. EU Kids Online.

Key findings

Forthcoming.

Highlights

According to the EU Kids Online international comparative report on AI almost a quarter of surveyed children from Serbia (23%) used AI chatbots to talk about their worries or get advice, surpassed only by Italy (24%) among the surveyed countries.

Slovakia (SK)

EU Kids Online team

Pavel Izrael (PI), Juraj Holdoš, Angela Almašiová, Katarína Kohútová, Norbert Vrabec and Katarína Hollá

Contact: Catholic University in Ružomberok, Hrabovská cesta 1A, 034 01, Ružomberok, Slovak Republic

Email: pavel.izrael@ku.sk

National report

<https://euko.ku.sk/index.php/publikacie-a-vystupy>

Key findings

Slovak children aged 10–17 most frequently access the internet via their mobile phones, with 90% doing so on a daily basis. Daily usage increases with age, and no significant differences were observed between boys and girls. After school (in the afternoon) and before bedtime are the times when children use screen-based media most frequently. In these instances, as well as before school and during school breaks, girls and older children do so more frequently on a daily basis. The most common activities are watching videos on social media, listening to music and playing online games, the latter being more common among boys.

As for generative AI, almost half of the children use it to write school essays and to summarise or explain longer texts. Around one in five use AI to talk about what is troubling them and also to seek advice on physical health. Boys are more active in creating content using AI, while girls are more active in seeking product recommendations for purchases. Overall, the use of AI increases with age.

Although more older children state that they possess media literacy skills, 20% of 14- to 15-year-olds have difficulty verifying information. Across the entire group, 45% have no restrictions from their parents on internet use, but among 10- to 11-year-olds, this figure is only a quarter.

The data shows that half of the children are not allowed to bring their mobile phones to school, with more children agreeing with this rule than disagreeing with it. Just under two-thirds of the children disagree with information about their online behaviour being collected for the purpose of targeted advertising.

Highlights

Around one in ten children aged 10–11 use a screen-based device at night, while in the 14–15 age group, this figure was almost one in three. Although there are age restrictions on the use of social media, around 50% of 10- to 11-year-olds and as many as 70% of 12- to 13-year-olds watch videos on social media. Even the youngest children in the sample (aged 10–11) reported that they consult AI when something is troubling them (14%). Almost a third of parents or caregivers do not talk to their children about what they do online.

Spain (ES)

EU Kids Online team

Maialen Garmendia (PI), Miguel Angel Casado, Estefania Jiménez, Nekane Larrañaga, Gemma Martinez, Rubén Oliveira and Itziar Castro

Contact: HEFA II, Plaza de Oñati 3, 20018, San Sebastián, Spain

Email: maialen.garmendia@ehu.eus

National report

Garmendia, M., Martínez, G., Larrañaga, N., Casado, M. Á., Jiménez, E., Oliveira, R., & Castro, I. (2026). *EU KIDS ONLINE V: Experiencias digitales de la infancia y la adolescencia en España. Resultados de la encuesta EU Kids Online V a menores de 10 a 16 años en España (2026)*. EU Kids Online. www.ehu.eus/documents/d/eukidsonline/informe-eu_kids_spain_2026-pdf

Key findings

Spanish children's engagement with online entertainment activities has slightly increased since 2018. Their preference for leisure activities – such as listening to music (75%), watching video clips (59%) and streaming movies (54%) – on a daily basis stands out, while communication activities either with friends (61%) and family (58%) is not as frequent as it used to be. Most of the children (51%) use digital devices for schoolwork, while the use of generative AI tools is less widespread among them. Nevertheless, the most common activities with AI are connected to school tasks such as writing essays or summarising longer texts. The use of these tools increases strongly with age.

While engaging in their everyday online activities, 19% of the children and adolescents were bothered or upset at least once a month. Even though victimisation – both online and offline – has decreased overall, the evidence shows that face-to-face victimisation (27%) is far more frequent than online (10%). Among teenagers, girls' victimisation is much higher than boys' victimisation. The findings show that bullies are mostly friends and schoolmates. The most common motives for these violent episodes are related to physical appearance and behaviour (14%), but others point out that they are do with their opinions or beliefs (11%).

A large majority – almost six out of ten – of the children and adolescents are confident that technology will facilitate their access to knowledge. However, they view their rights to non-discrimination and privacy as at risk.

Highlights

Even though some families have been asking for bans – both for mobile devices at school and social media for under-16s – in the last two years, active mediation patterns have not improved while technical monitoring has increased steeply, showing families' confidence about technology for supervising their children's online activities. Moreover, as the evidence shows that families tend to focus their attention on adolescents' online behaviour rather than on pre-adolescents' behaviour, their mediation pattern seems to be more reactive than preventive. In general, more attention is also paid to the online activity of girls than to that of boys.

Switzerland (CH)

EU Kids Online team

Martin Hermida (PI) and Marco Hartmann

Contact: Pädagogische Hochschule Schwyz? (Schwyz University of Teacher Education), Zaystrasse 42, CH-6410 Goldau, Switzerland

Email: martin.hermida@phsz.ch

National report

Hermida, M., & Hartmann, M. (2025). *EU Kids Online Schweiz. Chancen und Risiken für Kinder und Jugendliche im Internet*. Pädagogische Hochschule Schwyz. <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.17654070>

Key findings

Swiss children aged 9–16 access the internet mostly via smartphones – 41% several times a day. The most common activities are listening to music (80% do this at least once a week), watching videos on social media (73%) and streaming services (63%). The largest differences between boys and girls are in online gaming (boys: 73%, girls: 43%) and in searching for news or information on current events (boys: 40%, girls: 31%).

Hate speech (31%), problematic user-generated content (31%) and sexual images (24%) are the most common risks encountered, but there are significant differences between age groups. For example, while only 2% of 9- to 10-year-olds report seeing hate speech, 61% of 15- to 16-year-olds report seeing such content. Only 52% report knowing what to do if something online bothers them. Even among 15- to 16-year-olds, the figure is only 65%. Almost a quarter (23%) of 15- to 16-year-olds report having tried unsuccessfully to spend less time online.

More than a quarter (28%) of children report that their parents or caregivers never talk to them about what they do online, and a further 18% report that their parents or caregivers almost never do this. Most respondents aged 11–16 want support and suggestions on how to distinguish fake news from real news, how to protect their data and how to help others who are being bullied.

Highlights

Peers remain the most important source of support when children and young people have unpleasant experiences online. Children should be encouraged to also seek advice from adults when their friends are facing serious problems. There are still children who do not confide in anyone when they have unpleasant experiences. They, too, should be encouraged to turn to someone they trust. Excessive internet use is a concern for children, parents or caregivers and teachers. This issue should receive greater attention at all levels, including in the regulation of platforms, particularly because children themselves express a desire for guidance on this topic (28% of 11- to 16-year-olds).