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# Net Children Go Mobile

Final Report

Giovanna Mascheroni & Andrea Cuman



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November 2014



Net Children  
Go Mobile



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Giovanna Mascheroni & Andrea Cuman

### PLEASE CITE AS:

Mascheroni, G. & Cuman, A. (2014). Net Children Go Mobile: Final report. Deliverables D6.4 & D5.2. Milano: Educatt.

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The Belgian data collection is supported by the Flemish Government.

The study in Germany is funded by the Federal Ministry of Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in context of the project “Youth Protection and Media Education in digital Environments”.

The Irish data collection is made possible by the Department of Education and Skills (Central Policy Unit), Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, and the Dublin Institute of Technology.

The Portuguese survey is made possible thanks to the financial support of the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT).

Net Children Go Mobile Spain is supported by the department of Education, Language Policy and Culture of the Basque Government.

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# 1. The Project

The Net Children Go Mobile project is co-funded by the EC's **Safer Internet Programme (now Better Internet for Kids)** to investigate through quantitative and qualitative methods how the changing conditions of internet access and use – namely, mobile internet and mobile-convergent media – bring greater, fewer or newer risks to children's online safety.

**Participating countries** include **Denmark, Italy, Romania, and the UK**, who have been directly funded by the EC's Safer Internet Programme; and **Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain**, who joined the project on a self-funded basis.

## Methods

Drawing on the experience of network members within the EU Kids Online network, the conceptual framework is operationalised in a *child-centred, critical, contextual and comparative approach* (Livingstone & Haddon 2009; Livingstone et al., 2011), which understands children's online experiences as contextualised and shaped by three intersecting circles: 1) childhood, family life and peer cultures; 2) media systems and technological development; and 3) the European social and policy context. Accordingly, the project assumes that **the voice and viewpoint of children** is crucial to understanding online opportunities, risks and any harmful consequences of mobile media use. To reach this goal a mix-method research design was developed. Parental mediation is typically developed in five main forms (Livingstone et al., 2011):

- The **survey** was conducted **in seven European countries** from May to November 2013 (UK, Denmark, Italy, Romania, Ireland) and February to March 2014 (Portugal and Belgium) (Mascheroni & Ólafsson, 2014) and involved a random stratified sample of around 500 children aged 9-16, who are internet users, per country.



**3500**



Face to face in home questionnaires, self-completed for sensitive issues.

**9-16**

Age of children (internet users) interviewed



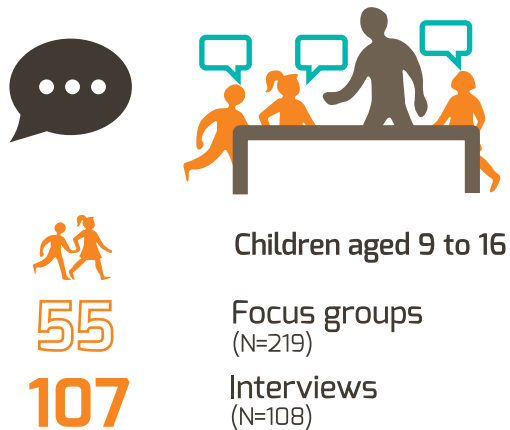
Random walk sampling method

In order to maximise the quality of children's answers and to ensure their privacy, the survey was conducted face-to-face in the home, but sensitive questions were self-completed by the child. The wording of the questionnaire was refined on the basis of cognitive testing with children of different age groups (9-10, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16) and gender in each country, in order to ensure children's comprehension and to avoid adults' terminology (such as "sexting"). Furthermore, particularly emotive terms, such as "stranger" or "bullying", were also avoided.

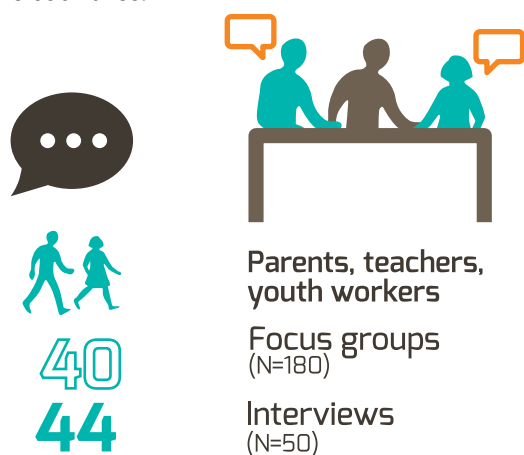
- The **qualitative research** was carried out from January to September 2014 **in nine European countries** (the seven involved in the survey plus Germany and Spain).

**Children** were recruited in schools, where the focus groups and interviews also took place. The average number of focus groups was six in each country, three with girls and three with boys, with age distributions of 9-10, 11-13, and 14-16 (two focus groups each). Four or five children were included in each focus group. Children who were interviewed individually were different from the children included in the focus groups. The average number of interviews was 12 in each country, six for each gender, with the same age distribution as for the focus groups. Young people were selected from at least three different schools and/or youth centres, chosen to ensure a balanced composition of the sample

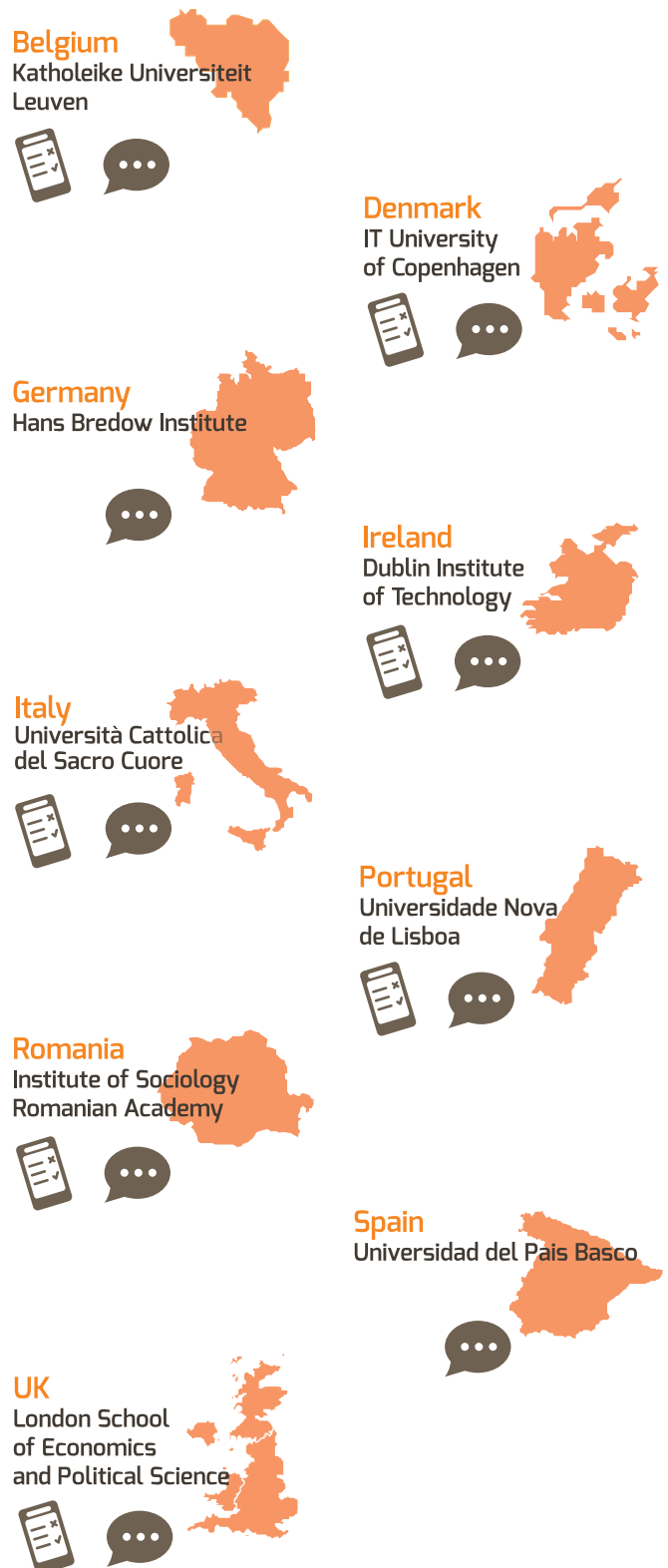
in terms of type of school, area and socio-economic background of the families (public x private, city x sub-urban x rural). There were **55 focus groups** (N = 219) and **107 interviews** (N = 108) conducted across the nine countries..



**Parents** were recruited through schools, parents' associations, after school programmes and researchers' contacts. The average number of focus groups with parents was six, two for each children's age group (9–10, 11–13, and 14–16). Where the recruitment of parents and the organisation of focus groups was particularly challenging, focus groups were replaced by individual interviews. A similar procedure was followed with **teachers** and **youth workers**, who were also recruited through schools, teachers' associations, youth centres or after school programmes and researchers' personal contacts. In some countries focus groups were replaced with individual interviews. The average number of focus groups was two with teachers (one group for primary school and one for high school teachers) and one with youth workers. Overall, there were 40 focus groups (N = 180) and 44 interviews (N = 50) with adults across the nine countries.



## Countries & Universities involved



# 2. Adoption and use of smartphones and tablets

## 2.1 Use and ownership

Ways of going online are changing with the diffusion of mobile media: both **locations and devices of internet access have diversified**, with children using more devices overall and using the internet in more places. In terms of locations, while **the home remains the main context of use**, internet access from the child's own bedroom and when out and about has increased substantially. Greater **autonomy of use** is experienced by British, Danish, and Italian children, who are more likely than average to access the internet both in the privacy of their bedroom and on the move. Figure 1 and 2 show how access to the internet from a private bedroom and on the move varies by age, gender, socioeconomic status and across countries.

Figure 1: Daily internet use in own bedroom and when out and about, by gender, age, and SES

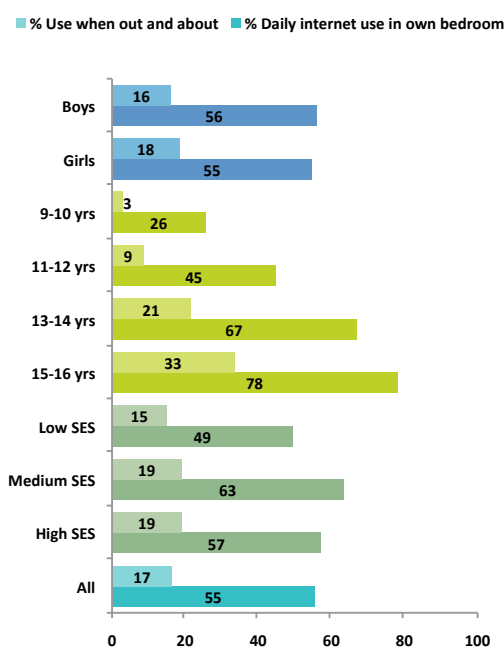
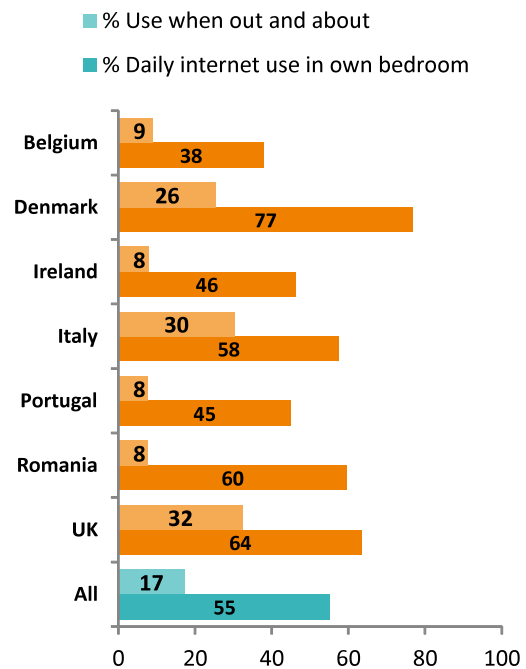


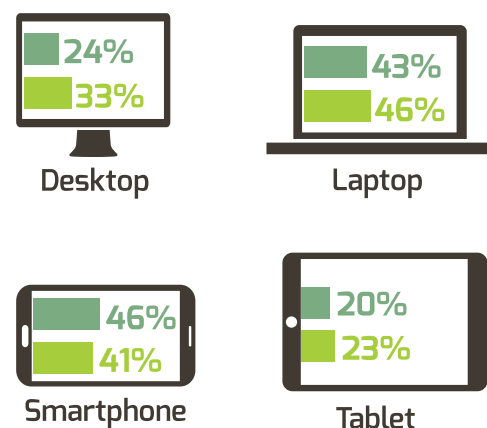
Fig. 2: Daily internet use at different places per age, gender and country



Base: All children 9-16 years old who use the internet

The second major change relates to **the ecology of devices** that children inhabit, which includes more and more **personal and portable** devices (as in Figure 3). The two factors combined - increasing unsupervised access from private (often mobile) spaces and access by means of mobile devices - concur to **a greater privatisation of internet access and use**.

Figure 3: Daily internet use and ownership of different devices



% of children who own the device  
 % of children who use the device daily

Base: All children 9-16 years old who use the internet

Indeed, **despite being the devices most likely to be used on the move**, however, **smartphones are mainly used at home, more often in the privacy of the child's own bedroom.**

In-depth interviews and focus groups with children also suggest that they **value privacy and convenience more than mobility**: smartphones especially are often at hand. Younger children are particularly excited by having a personal device that they do not need to share with siblings or family members. Moreover, even within the home, young people will often speak of pulling them out of their pocket to check something, rather than going to a PC and waiting for it to boot up:

*I was happy because I have something that is mine and nobody could use it without my permission. Because before my dad had a tablet, so I had to use it with my sister. Therefore if I wanted some games and she didn't, we had to negotiate. Instead I can now download all that I want.*

Girl, 10, Italy



*The smartphone is mine and the tablet is not and so I can do more with my smartphone, I can do what I want.*

Girl, 9, Germany



*It's smaller so you have it always with you. So you can always use it. (...) if the possibility is there, you'll just use it more.*

Boy, 15-16, Belgium



The use and ownership of a device do not necessarily coincide, with **children having access to a wider range of devices than those they actually own or have for private use. However, ownership and private use** shape the quality of online experiences, with children owning a certain device being more likely to use it intensively throughout the day. **Smartphones are the devices that children are more likely to own or have for private use.** By contrast, tablets are in some households never personally owned, as they are bought for the whole family or for the children to share.



### Policy recommendation Industry

Even though mobile devices are designed to be used individually and privately (providing a unique user profile), research shows that at least tablets are often shared by all family members. Industry should consider this usage pattern and **design devices that host multiple accounts**, each with customisable safety settings.

While personal ownership is an important condition for autonomy of use, economic or technical constraints (such as the cost of mobile internet plans and the availability of public networks), and parental and teachers' rules may actually limit where and how often a device is used to go online. Overall, children are **slightly more likely to use laptops than smartphones or tablets to go online at least daily.**



Fig. 4: Daily use of smartphones, tablets and laptops by gender, age and SES

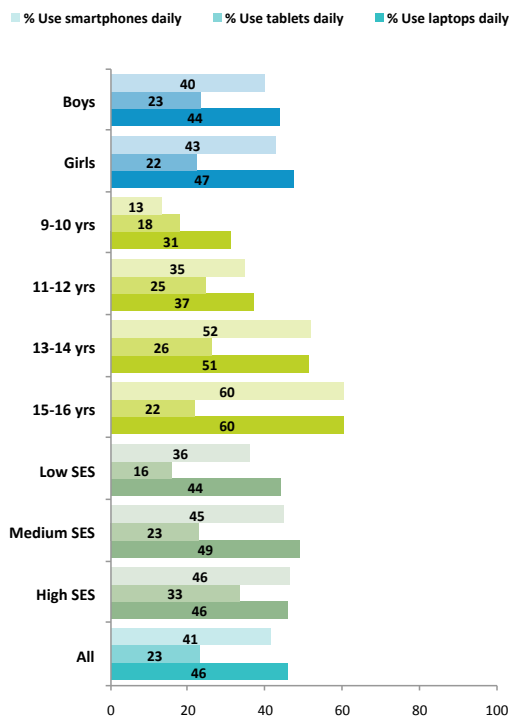
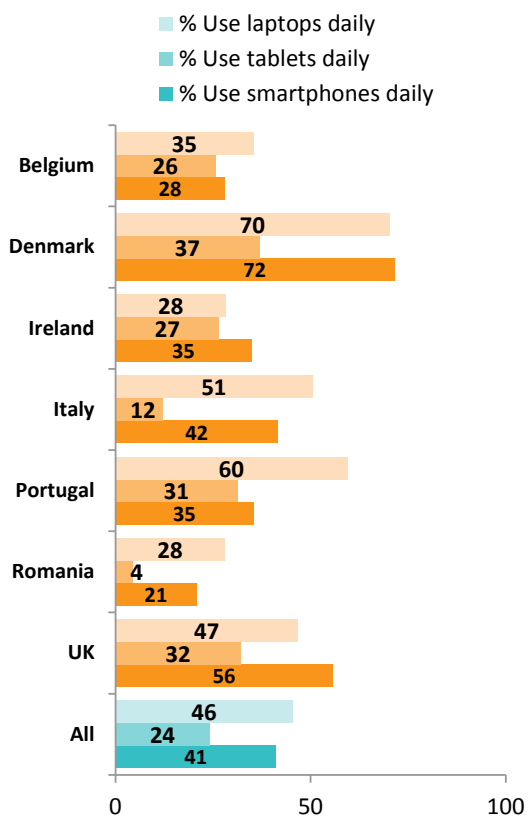


Figure 5: Daily use of smartphones, tablets and laptops by country



Base: All children 9-16 years old who use the internet

As shown in Figure 4 and 5, daily access to the internet by means of smartphones, tablets and laptops varies across countries and is also differentiated by age: while younger children are much more likely to use a laptop every day, **teenagers use smartphones as much as laptops**. The differences in daily use of smartphones by socioeconomic status (SES) are also notable: only 36% of children from lower SES homes go online from a smartphone every day, compared to 46% of higher SES families. As anticipated, this is also due to potential constraints on time and space of use, by which younger children, children from lower SES families and children in certain countries are more affected.

## 2.2 Constraints on use

Despite mobile-convergent media providing in principle “anywhere, anytime” connectivity, **mobile internet use** may actually be **limited by economic and technical constraints**, as much as **by social rules**. Among financial constraints, the **cost of the device** is taken into account by parents among the pros and cons leading to the initial acquisition of devices. Interviews and focus groups with both parents and children indicate that the cost of smartphones influences not only whether but also at what stage children might be allowed to have these devices, and which model they might get.

*We went to the shopping mall and there were two phones that I liked most, so we checked the plan first, and then we chose the most convenient, since my mother says it doesn't have to be beautiful for me to show off, it has to be useful.*



Boy, 10, Italy

Use of smartphones is also influenced by other financial - the cost of ISP plans - and technical constraints - the availability of WiFi networks: both constraints are differentiated by age and socioeconomic status. Children aged 9-14 are more likely to go online from smartphones only through WiFi networks, while teenagers aged 15-16 use both internet plans and WiFi networks;

use of 3Gs connections only is more common among lower SES children, while their peers from higher SES homes are more likely to go online via both WiFi networks and mobile internet plans. **Ways of going online from smartphones also vary across countries**, as shown in Table 1.

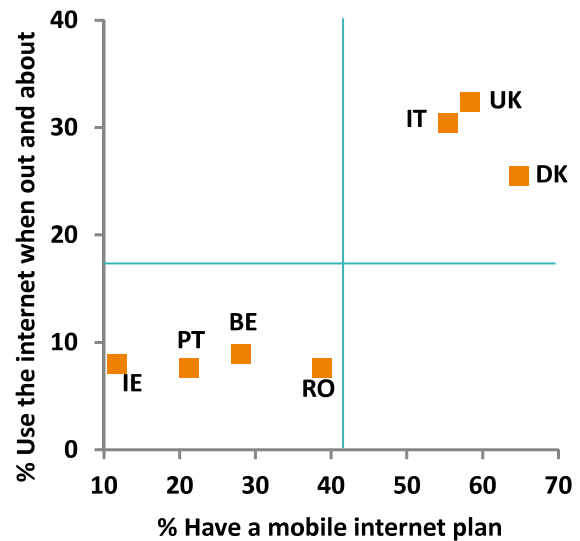
**Table 1: Ways of connecting to the internet from mobile phone/smartphone by country**

	% mobile internet plan and free WiFi	% mobile internet plan only	% free WiFi only	% phone does not connect to the internet
Belgium	20	8	50	22
Denmark	51	14	28	7
Ireland	5	7	74	14
Italy	32	24	18	26
Portugal	10	11	47	32
Romania	15	24	20	41
UK	41	17	18	24
All	27	15	35	23

Base: All children who own or have for private use a mobile phone or a smartphone

As expected, the **availability of internet plans is associated with the use of the internet on the move**, as shown in Figure 6, and **with specific usage patterns**: those who can rely both on mobile internet plans and WiFi networks to go online from their smartphones, can actually benefit from **more autonomy of use**, while those accessing the internet either through free WiFi networks only or through internet plans only are likely to experience more constraints when using mobile devices to go online.

**Figure 6: Daily use of the internet when out and about and availability of internet plans**



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📶
🔋

### Policy recommendation

#### School

The adoption and use of mobile devices is still unequal, characterised by both access divides (with more affluent children enjoying wider access through both monthly internet plans and WiFi, and more private access through personal devices) and usage divides (that is inequalities in the activities undertaken and opportunities they have access to, e.g. paid content). Schools and teachers should engage in **mitigating existing divisions by offering equal opportunities to children and fostering inclusive uses of mobile technologies during class activities.**

### Policy recommendation Government

It may not sound appropriate to recommend to commercial institutions that they should supply free WiFi access. However, the financial constraints on the increasing number of children with smartphones and tablets means that this audience would particularly appreciate the existing of such free WiFi spaces. Especially in countries where the commercial centre supplies few such spaces, government and other civic bodies should be encouraged to compensate by **enabling such free internet access**.

Indeed, **children ration their own use due to cost considerations**: even children who are provided with mobile internet plans seek WiFi in public places or try to use 3G as little as possible, and to limit their time online if WiFi is not available:

*I try to turn it off (3G) most of the time, otherwise it would cost a lot of money. If I want to go on Facebook or Snapchat, I turn it on. But immediately afterwards, I turn it off again.*



Girl, 12-13, Belgium

In the most extreme cases,<sup>1</sup> children had smartphones but simply did not use the smartphone for accessing the internet. For example, Marco, a 15 year old boy from Portugal, had recently deactivated his 3G access, because his internet tariff became too expensive for accessing the internet “wherever he wants”.

### Policy recommendation Industry

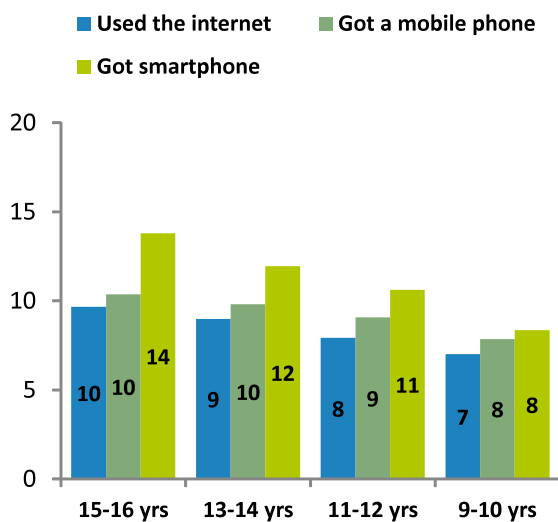
Young people often reported unexpected costs incurred by them unknowingly installing paid apps or using certain services (e.g. roaming). This can be particularly distressing for children (who have acted in good faith) not just because of the money involved but because it can lead to stressful interactions within the family. Digital literacy around the use of mobile devices and apps should be a priority, with industry taking a lead role in ensuring clear specifications of costs of applications and services and providing **transparent tools to help control the costs of internet use (especially of roaming and in-app purchases)**.

<sup>1</sup> Many of the more dramatic examples of not using the smartphone for mobile access came from Portugal and Romania, which may in part reflect the difficult economic situation in these countries at the time of the research.

## 2.3 Age of first use

Children are using the internet and getting a mobile phone or a smartphone at ever younger ages. As shown in Figure 7, **children start using the internet before they are given a mobile phone.** The average age at which **children receive a smartphone** is older, **at twelve** years old; however, **younger children are more likely to be given a smartphone when they are only eight.** By contrast, older teenagers were fourteen on average when they got their first smartphone:

Figure 7: Age of first internet use, first mobile phone and first smartphone, by age



Base: All children 9-16 years old who use the internet

After 2011 children of all age groups are more likely to be given a smartphone than an ordinary mobile phone. Indeed, 15% of our interviewees had never owned a mobile phone that was not a smartphone.

Country variations are considerable: the average age when children started using the internet is lowest in Denmark and highest in Italy. Danish children were also younger when they were given their first mobile phone or smartphone. In contrast, children in Belgium tend to receive either a mobile phone or a smartphone considerably later than their peers in the other six countries surveyed.

As the qualitative data reveal, however, such statistics hide some more complex processes, whereby **far more children gained access to and experience of smartphones before actually owning one**, at an earlier age. Some children in effect serve apprenticeships, using or trying out other family members' devices be-

fore they had their own. This can start at an early age, as when John (boy, 9-10, UK) reported how his 6 year old sister regularly played with their mother's broken Blackberry: *"She just wants to pretend she's all girly, like. Blah, blah, blah. Always on the phone, texting!"* Often devices were first borrowed by young children specifically to play games, as when Francesco, a 10 year old Italian boy, still borrows his mother's smartphone for that purpose.

The **"appropriate age"** for owning a smartphone is a matter of debate among both parents and children, with children having to "prove" they are mature and responsible enough to look after a mobile phone before parents would buy them a smartphone, as Joost (boy, 12-13, Belgium) explains. Sometimes the decision about being responsible is flexible, depending upon the child, **but a number of children refer to getting the smartphone at certain life stages, almost as a rite of passage** - e.g. when they changed school to a more senior school; on occasions of the first Holy Communion or as a Confirmation gift in the Catholic countries; as gift for birthdays or as a remuneration for success in school.

The demand for smartphones and tablets does not always come from children. At times, mobile devices are an **unrequested and unexpected gift** from parents and grandparents, as Gaia commented about acquiring her iPhone:

*I am always concerned I might lose it, or it could be stolen. Because I didn't really ask to have an iPhone. My grandparents gave it to me (...) But I could have a cheaper phone, less expensive, less important, because it makes me anxious, as much as wearing an expensive watch.*

Girl, 14-16, Italy



Even when the acquisition is driven by children themselves, part of that demand is not specific to technologies: rather, it is about wanting things that are **fashionable and socially legitimated**. Indeed, there were cases of actual peer pressure as when Lilya and Anna (girls, 11-13, Romania) told how their classmates used to laugh at them because of their old mobile phones

until they acquired smartphones.<sup>2</sup> Parents can also be fashion conscious about what their children have relative to their peers:

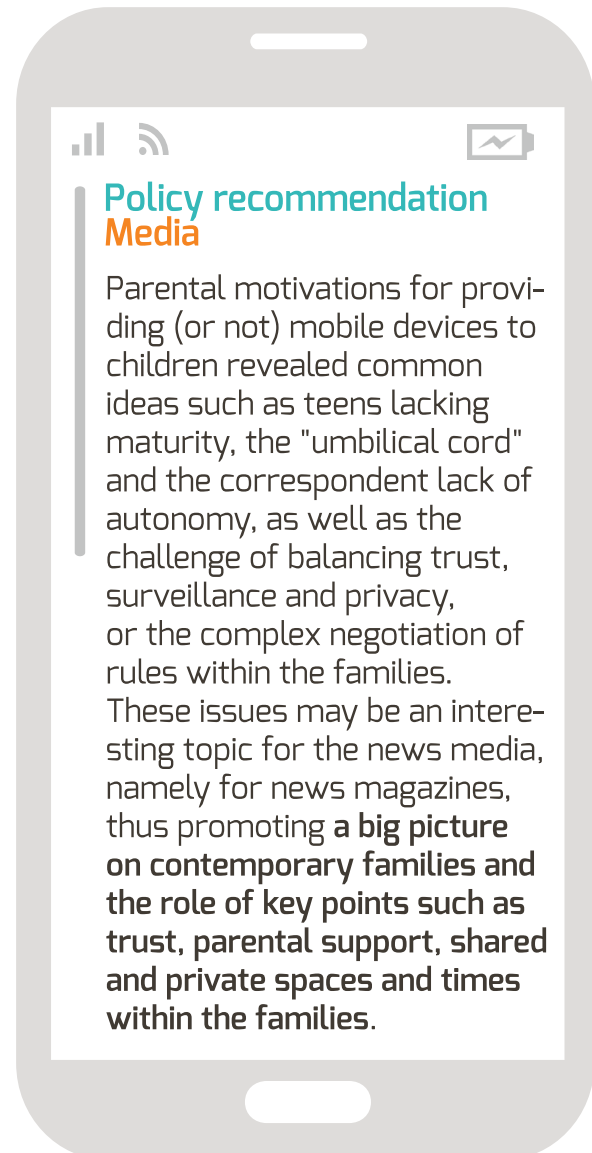
*At first I didn't even want one! I got it for Christmas, and then my parents said: 'Now you need a new phone, because everyone else has a touch phone'. At first I thought: 'what should I use that for, I have my Nokia phone? But then I became fond of it.*

**Girl, 11-13, Denmark**



Beyond providing children with the latest fashionable gadget, in order to prevent any form of exclusion from peers, the idea of a “**digital leash**” or “**umbilical cord**” also emerged as an important motivation for parents: both fathers and mothers seem to feel a similar anxiety and a need for the child to become “always reachable”, “always close to them”. In Belgium, Portugal or Italy, teachers and youth workers share stories of parents calling their children during class or outdoors activities, even though parents are aware of rules.

However, the meaning of the smartphone in the parent-child relationship is ambiguous. Often, in focus groups, parents expressed their “good parenting”, differentiating themselves from other parents who use technology to compensate their lack of time to support children. Lorenzo, an Italian father, says that “*parents not enough involved in the education of their children usually see digital devices as baby sitters, something used to make their children quiet*”. A Portuguese father, Abel, says “*smartphones are given to children as toys because parents don't spend enough time with them... a smartphone makes the child quiet, focused on it...*”



<sup>2</sup> Although the references to peer pressure are cross-cultural, they emerged as the dominant motivation expressed by Romanian parents and teachers, as if they were embedded in the public discourse on children and new media.

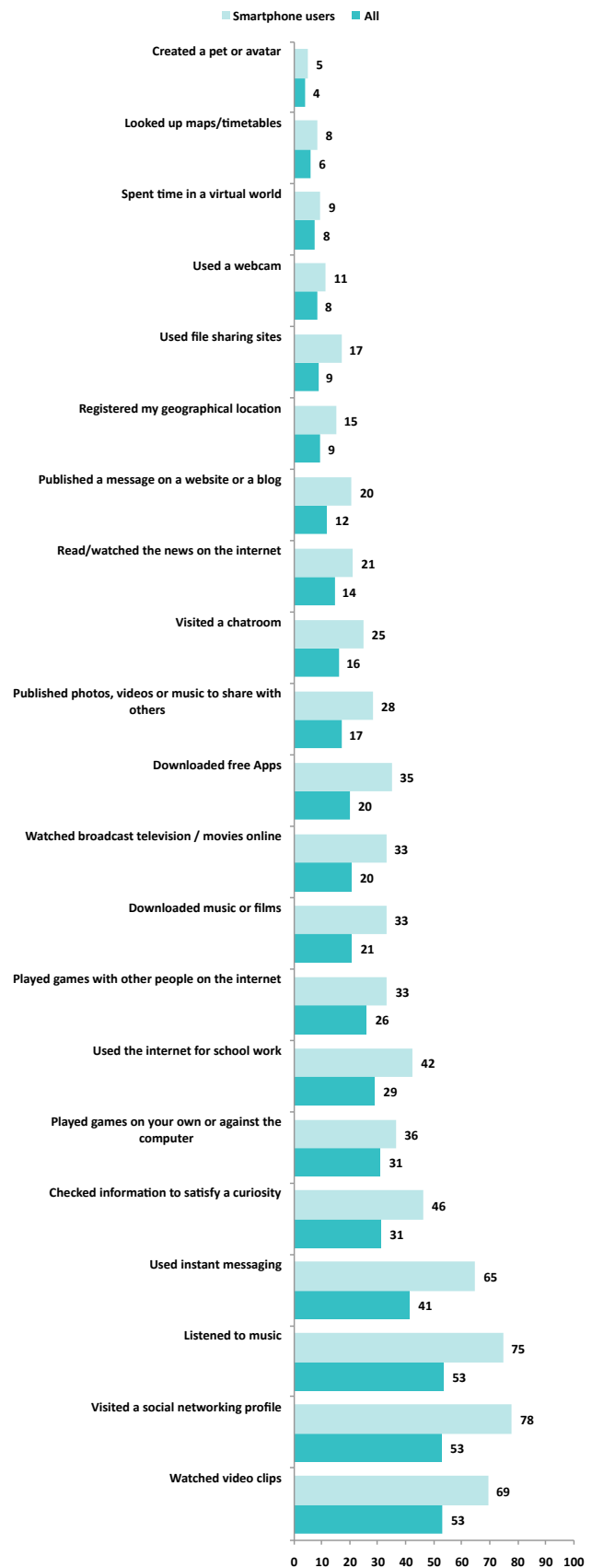
# 3. Changes and consequences

## 3.1 Online activities: old or new practices?

The Net Children Go Mobile data show that communicative practices (social networking and instant messaging), entertainment activities (listening to music and watching video clips), and use of the internet for school-work top the lists of activities done on a daily basis. Compared with the EU Kids Online data (Livingstone et al., 2011), it also shows that **social networking, sharing and entertainment activities have increased** substantially from 2010 to 2013-2014.

When we look at **communicative abilities**, however, we find support for the hypothesis that **creative and interactive uses of the internet are still at the top of the “ladder of opportunities”**: just 31% of children (and 40% of smartphone users) know how to create a blog. By contrast, 56% (69% of smartphone users) claim they know how to post a comment online and 63% (86% of smartphone users) how to upload and share content on social media.

Despite children are engaging with more and more online activities, they do not take advantage of the same online opportunities across all age groups and countries, also due to different levels of familiarity with the English language in each country, and **unequal provision of positive content for children in national languages**.



Base: All children 9-16 years old who use the internet.

Figure 8: daily online activities



### Policy recommendation Industry

With communication, sharing and entertainment activities at the top of the preferences for online activities of children, industry (content providers, mobile telecom operators, software developers etc.) need to ensure that **age-appropriate positive content is available**.

**More positive content in national languages** is also needed. Whereas children in Ireland and UK are unsurprisingly satisfied with the provision of content in their language, in other European countries children's satisfaction is lower (lowest in Belgium and Italy), thus increasing the gap between children who can access a wider variety of content produced both locally and globally, and those who are more reliant on locally produced content.

**Smartphone users engage more** in each of the online activities measured, the greatest differences being found **in communication and entertainment practices** (see Figure 8). This does not imply a linear causation: children who engage in more online activities may actually have more motivations to use a smartphone, thus being early adopters. Tablet users also tend to engage more in each online activity measured, but the difference between users and non-users is lower than the gap between users and non-users of smartphones. This is due to the main advantage of smartphones compared to any other device: their **convenience** - being small, portable and always "at hand" - and **privacy** - being private devices.

The usability and ease of smartphones encourages **creativity** and sharing, turning both **the sharing of photos with larger audiences and the editing of pictures into a mainstream practice**: as Beryl a British mother, explains, her son "*Alistair uses his small device for photos. He'd take photos, edit photos, and clips of video.*" Indeed, 28% of smartphone users report uploading pictures of videos to share with others every day, against 10% of non-users. Pictures are modified by means of photo-editing apps and shared on Facebook,

Instagram, or WhatsApp.

However, for some purposes newer portable devices do not displace the older ICTs. **Many children speak of preferring to do their school homework on the PC (rather than the smartphone or tablet), because of its screen size and keyboard:**

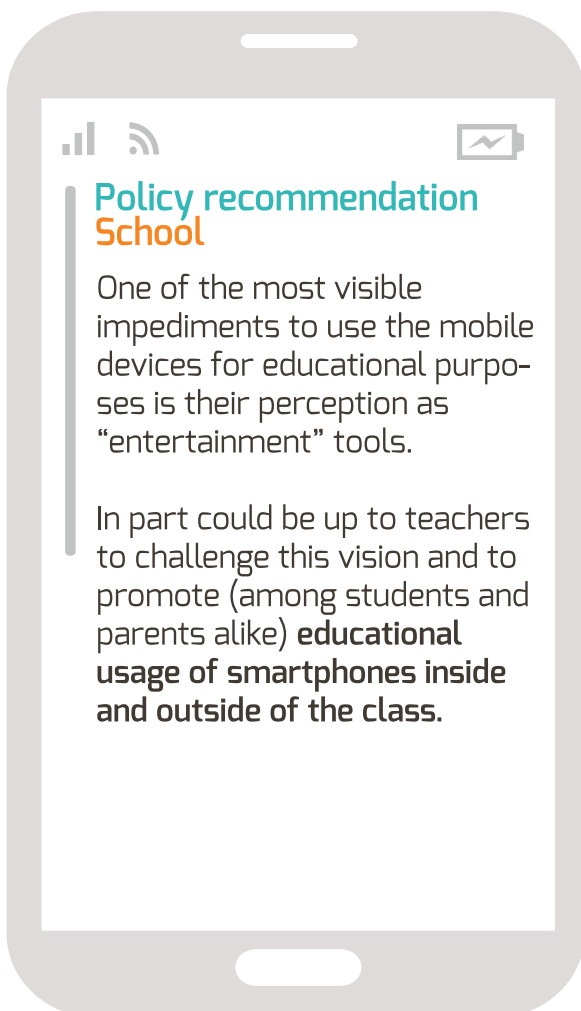
*It is just that, on a computer the screen is bigger, and then you have to scroll up and down that much, so you just have it so you easily can see it.*



Boy, 14-15, Denmark

Some download material onto a PC (or tablet) because it is quicker than doing it onto their smartphone, or else watch YouTube on a PC, once again because of the larger image. A similar preference for the old, well-proven technologies emerges also in relation to games and gaming: many children preferred to play games on

a PC or games consoles because of their faster processing power and higher resolution graphics. A 10 year old British boy, Fletcher, says that he prefers one platform over another for usability reasons. He used to use the games console a lot but, then, he got a tablet. He tried that out but he still prefers the games console because he found out that: “It’s much easier on the console.” Or Frederica (girl, 9-10, Italy) has a particular taste for detective games, available for the PC but not the smartphone, although Răzvan (boy, 11-13, Romania) notes that while more games on the tablet are accessible, those on the PC are more advanced. For whatever reason, it was clear how **older devices have certain features, certain affordances, that continue to make them attractive** for certain purposes.



## 3.2 Communication

Staying in touch with friends via social network sites (SNS) or instant messaging services is on the rise and represents a great part of youth’s online daily activities.

**Smartphones** not only **change where and for how long children can keep in touch with their circles of friends**; they also **expand the range of mobile communicative practices and the type of audiences children are now able to engage with.**

Children associate new mobile devices with a rise in the volume of peer communication. Many interviewees believe they are **more “sociable” since they had a smartphone**: for example, Alan, a teenage boy from UK, explains that: “*I talk more and I talk to a lot more people in general because the ability is there in my hands.*”

Smartphones and, to a minor extent, tablets have widened children’s communication repertoires by extending the opportunities to access already popular social media tools such as Facebook, while supporting new apps such as WhatsApp, Instagram and Snapchat. The changing communicative practices are enabled by particular **affordances** of smartphones and new messaging services that children remark upon in their discourses: first, smartphones are portable devices, meaning that communication facilities are perceived as **always “at hand”**; second, contrary to SMS, communication through social media apps and instant messaging apps is **free** of charge, thus encouraging a continuous, intermittent flow of communication; third, these apps enable **group communication**, thus supporting the practice of “**broadcasting**”.

*Well, how much do I use it? I use it... basically I always have the smartphone in my hand.*

Girl, 15, Italy



*Instead of using SMS, Snapchat is for free, here you can just take a picture, write a textbite and send it.*

Girl, 11-13, Denmark





*It's free. (...) if you had normal text people only message you if they need to message you. And you can't really create groups on text message so I think that's why you might message more. So if you want to tell, let's just say, about your birthday party, or something, you could instead of sending it individually, and paying a lot on the text message, on the group you could send it one time for free and everyone would know about it on the group.*

Boy, 11-13, UK



Overall, 68% of children have at least one profile on a SNS, but the use of SNS varies consistently by age and across countries. Figure 9 and 10 show the number of children with at least one account on a SNS and of those indicating Facebook as their main SNS by age, gender and country.

Figure 9: Children with a profile on SNS by age and gender

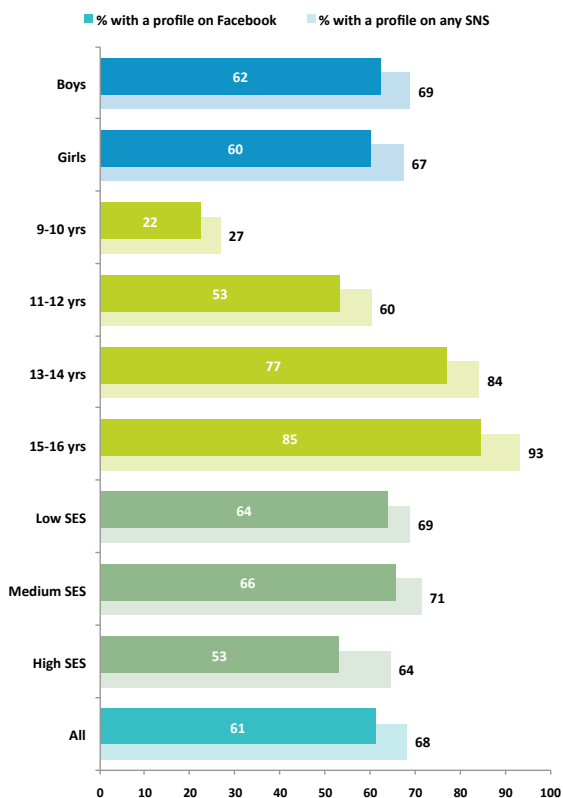
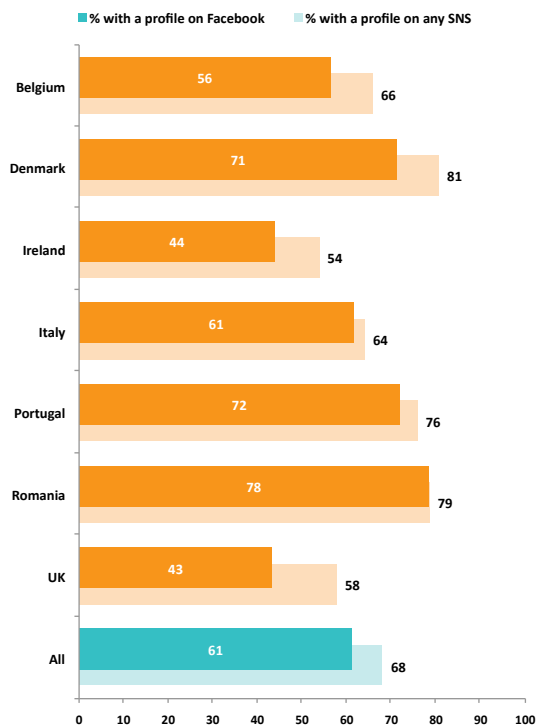


Figure 10: Children with a profile on SNS by country



Base: All children 9-16 years old who use the internet

The use of SNS has increased in most countries - substantially in Romania, Portugal and Denmark, while less in Belgium and Italy - Ireland and the UK excluded. Indeed, the lower diffusion of social networking in **Belgium, Ireland, Italy and the UK** is due to **lower rates of under-age use** in these countries.

Almost all respondents indicated Facebook as the SNS they use most - the rise being particularly notable in Portugal and Romania. By contrast in the UK just three out of four children who use SNS still favoured Facebook, while one in four children said the profile they used the most was on Twitter.

While **Facebook is still** being reported by the majority of respondents as **the most used SNS, the use of social media is diversifying** – children simultaneously use various services, each enabling specific practices and targeted at a specific audience.

One reason for using Facebook less can be found in its popularity among parents. The adoption of Facebook by adults has had an impact for children in some countries who rarely use Facebook for talking to each other but merely to keep in touch generally with those who don't have the other SNS they use, knowing also they can be "seen" by parents: one UK father, Kelvin, who took an interest in his son's Facebook while he learned how to use it himself, was quickly unfriended.

*He [son] cancelled the whole thing. He unfriended me and he cancelled the whole thing and went on Instagram. They're that sensitive about you looking at it and teasing them or anything like that.*

**Father, (14-16), UK**



However, rather than replacing one SNS with another, children combine and integrate them with other communicative practices. Just like adults, children develop **sophisticated repertoires of practices, devices and services** from which they choose what best suits the particular communicative situation and relationship.

Two out of three children report keeping in touch with their friends several times a day by means of SNS or messaging apps. Indeed, **full-time access to friends** is praised as one of the major opportunities of smartphones. By extending their face-to-face interaction in a sort of 24/7 communicative bubble, children reinforce their friendship ties.

Children use SNS and messaging apps also to make new friends. While the practice of meeting people on the internet is sporadic, children tend to **expand their social networks by activating latent ties**, such as “friends of friends”. Indeed, only 9% of the respondents say they accept any request of friendship on SNS. By contrast, one in four children add people with whom they share offline friends, as shown in Figure 11 and 12. This practice is particularly legitimised among teenagers, children from medium SES and Italian children.

*It has changed a lot because before we didn't keep in touch once back home. When we didn't have a smartphone. (...) And it is much better now because it strengthens relationships. I used to feel lonely before, because everyone else had a smartphone and they kept in touch, they had Facebook and I didn't.*

**Girl, 16, Italy**



### Policy recommendation Parents

Parents need to be made more aware of the potential risks of underage social networking. Awareness campaigns against under-age use of SNS have been more effective in Belgium, Ireland, Italy and the UK. By contrast, in other countries the number of children under 13 who are using SNS is still high. Parents have to take up **an active role in ensuring that their children are using the services in a safe and responsible manner**. They should also be encouraged to act accordingly with child's age and to adapt their mediation, combining supervising younger children's use of SNS with a partnership approach for older children.

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## Policy recommendation Industry

Children express the need for safe, private spaces and services - for example when they praise Snapchat because of the freedom from the social pressure of always having to produce good-looking pictures. Service providers should consider how they might empower children by providing safe and private spaces and/or tools for customising apps and platforms.

As the social networking platform most popular among European children, **Facebook should continue its active role** in promoting the safe use of their service (including age-sensitive privacy settings, ease of use of report mechanism). One should note the recent change in 'private by default' for 13-17 year olds as opposed to 'friends of friends', but introducing options of public viewing from others, meaning anyone can view what teenagers post, if they so choose. Unfortunately, this does not work if a child registers as being over 18. However, as other SNS become popular (e.g. Snapchat, Ask.fm), also these other providers/services should take up responsibility for ensuring safe use of their platforms.

Figure 11: Children's responses to friends' requests on SNS, by gender, age and SES

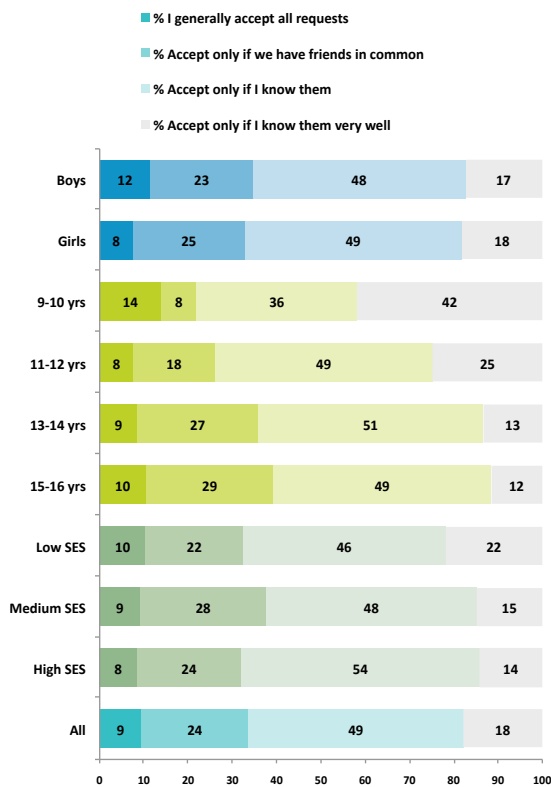
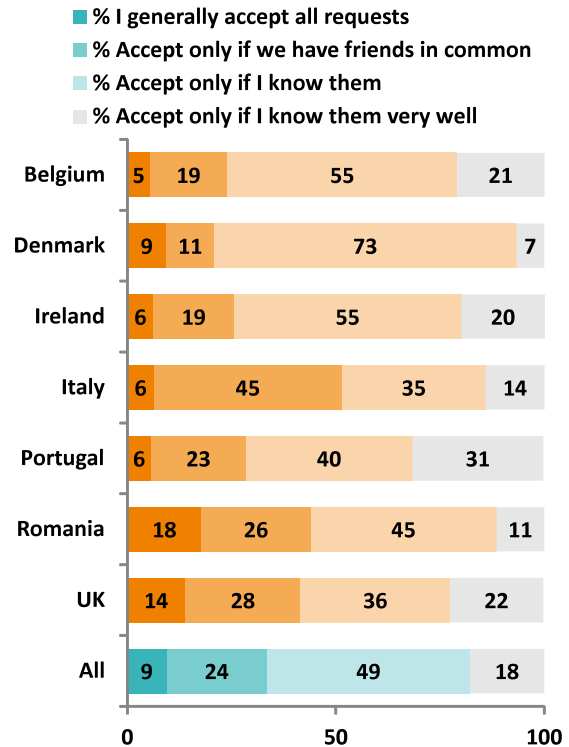


Figure 12: Children's responses to friends' requests on SNS, by country



Base: All children 9-16 years old who use SNS.

As children become more social media-savvy, they have become particularly sensitive to the kind of personal information they display, as Imogen, a teenager from UK explains:

*So my Facebook has my birthday but I don't have where I go to school, where I live, my phone number or anything like that on there, and I don't have any of that stuff on Instagram or Twitter either, so I... the thing... some of the things that I do are public but none of my personal details are.*



Girl, 14-16, UK

Children's narratives about personal data and privacy concerns are consistent with survey data, confirming that children across all age groups do not disclose the most sensitive information such as their home address or phone number (as shown in Table 2):

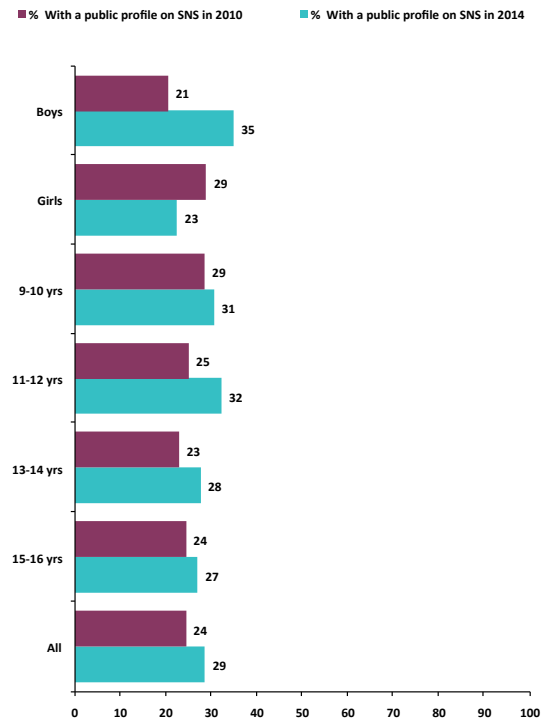
**Table 2: What information children show on their social networking profile, by age and gender**

% who say that their SNS profile shows...	9-12 years		13-16 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
A photo that clearly shows their face	71	73	79	88	80
Their last name	81	80	85	82	82
Their home address	12	12	11	13	12
Their phone number	10	11	14	10	12
Their school	44	52	69	70	63
An age that is not their correct age	62	65	29	28	39

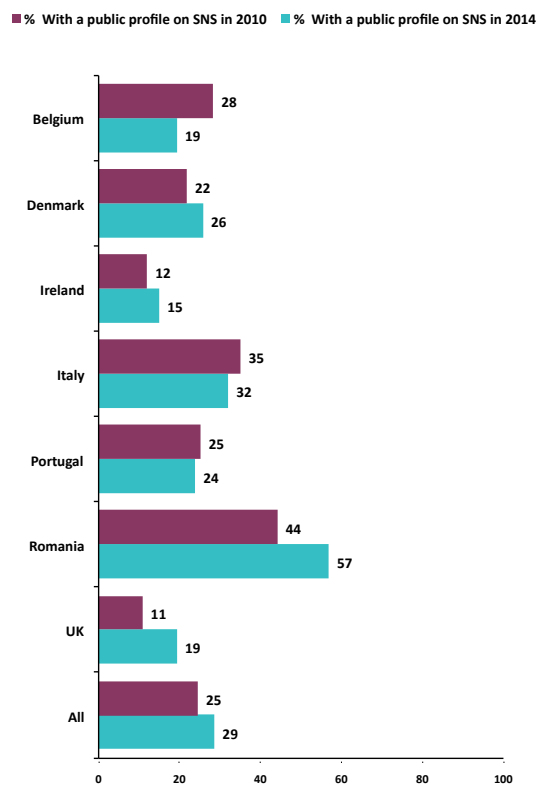
Base: All children who use SNS.

The practicalities of managing, for example, a private Twitter account combined with the use of SNS to make new friends mean that **some children are more likely to moderate their personal data rather than deal with the inconvenience of staying private.** Figure 13 and 14 show how the number of children keeping a public profile varies by age, gender and country, comparing 2010 and 2013-14 data:

**Figure 13: Children with a public profile, by age and gender, comparing 2010 and 2013-14**



**Figure 14: Children with a public profile by country, comparing 2010 and 2013-14**



Base: All children who use SNS.

The number of children who have a public profile on SNS has increased among boys, pre-adolescents, and children living in Romania or the UK. Different privacy settings may not necessarily be an indicator of risky behaviour, and also have to be contextualised within “friending” practices - with pre-teens more likely to use SNS as a way to make new friends and with Romanian children more open to accept all requests of friendship - and different platforms - with Twitter profiles being usually public, and with children in the UK who are more likely than average to indicate Twitter as the profile they use most. Indeed, different SNS may imply **different notions of “friendship” and different regimes of privacy and disclosure**. However, these findings also signal that, while many children are social media-savvy, others still lack basic safety skills.

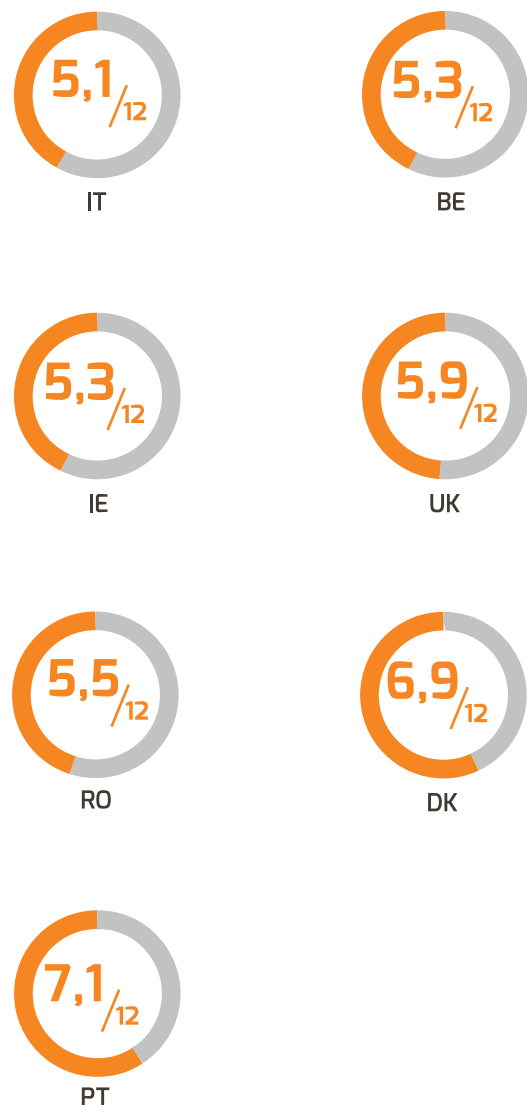
### 3.3 Skills

Overall children claim half of the twelve internet skills measured - including instrumental skills, safety skills, critical skills and communicative abilities - as shown in Figure 15:

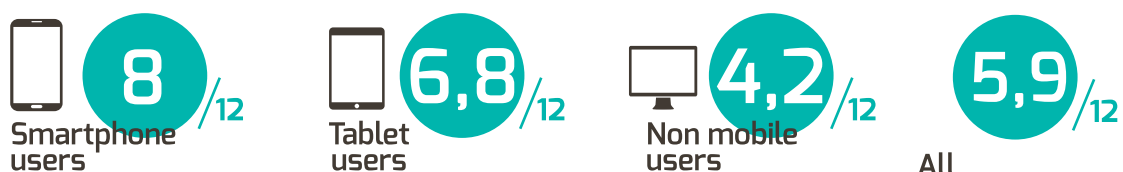
Comparing these findings with the EU Kids Online data collected in 2010 (Livingstone et al., 2010), we can observe how over the past four years children have developed greater social media skills that help them be safe on SNS. Critical skills such as comparing different websites to assess the reliability of information have also increased. By contrast, other competences measured in both surveys show a little increase.

As Figure 15 shows smartphone and tablet users claim nearly twice as many skills as children who don't use mobile devices to go online. Therefore, these **findings are supportive of the “usage hypothesis”: the more children use the internet, the more opportunities they take up and the more skills they develop**.

Figure 15: Average number of internet skills, by country, comparing mobile internet users with non-mobile users

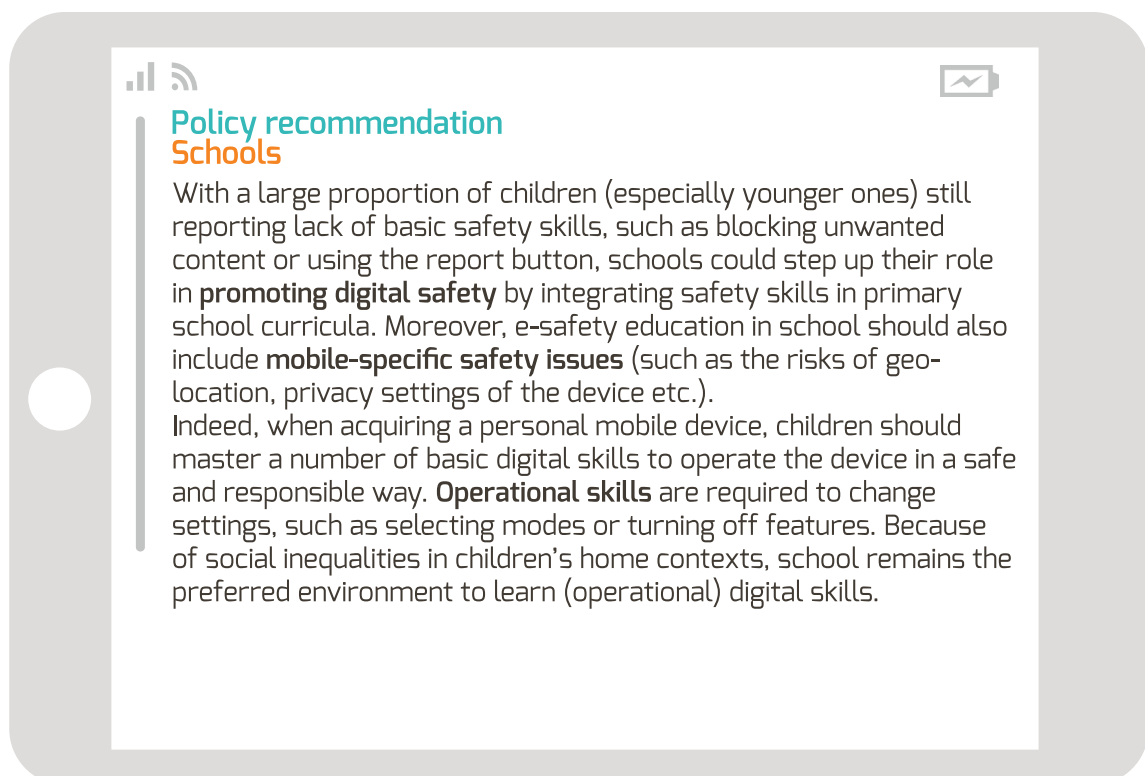
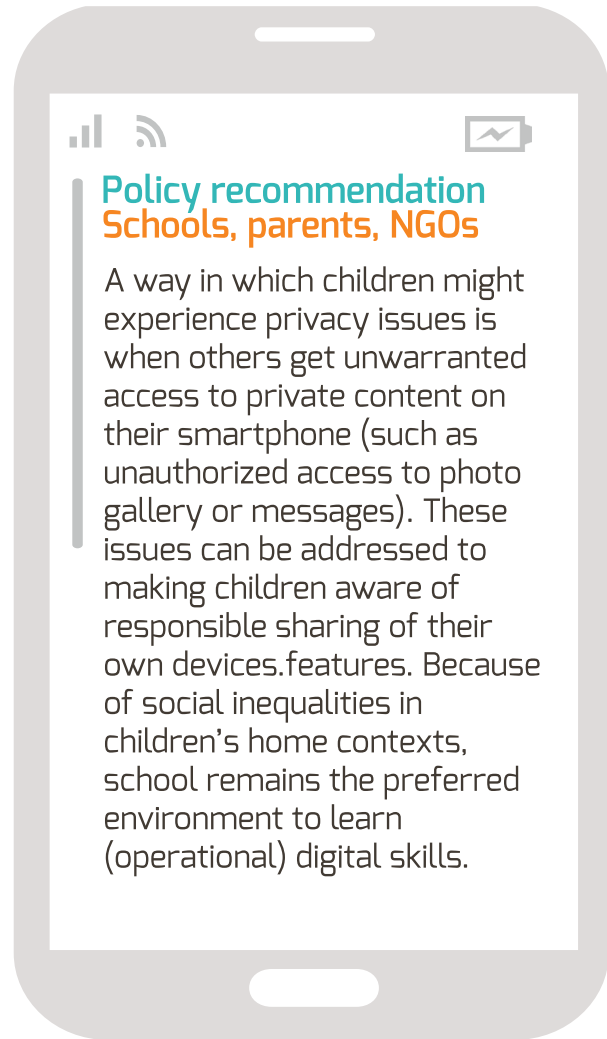


Base: All children 9-16 years old who use the internet.



On average, children claim more smartphone and tablet specific skills - 7.5 out of 11 measured. **Protecting a mobile device with a passcode, finding information on how to use the smartphone/tablet safely, and deactivating location-tracking functions** top the list of the competences children possess.

Children are also more self-confident regarding their smartphone-specific skills: while **38% of children believe the statement “I know more about the internet than my parents” is very true of them, 58% say it is “very true” of them that they know more than their parents about using smartphones.**



### 3.4 Over-dependence

Mobile communication has become a taken for granted condition of our sociability and our everyday lives, bringing about notable benefits – for example, always being in contact with family and friends, easier management of everyday life activities and mobility, better employment of otherwise “dead” time, etc. – as well as some negative consequences – more stress, and the pressure to be “always on”. In general, the new practices that emerge from the availability of internet connectivity on the move (whether through WiFi networks or internet plans) is enriching the lives of many respondents. They like to feel always connected with their friends and to be able to instantly manage situations by searching the web, asking friends and family for advice and generally using the internet in a proactive way. However, this might be leading to an **overdependence** for some, who find solutions to problems from an external source rather than developing personal resilience and know-how for managing tricky situations.

**Feeling less bored** is identified among the most notable consequence of smartphones: the majority of children agree “a bit” (43%) or “a lot” (41%) with the statement “thanks to my smartphone I feel less bored.” On the other side, however, the smartphone can be the tool for **perpetuating apathy**: for some children, the “always on” availability of 24x7 information feeds becomes a perpetual circle of tedious non-activity, as they scroll through SNS finding nothing for them or nothing new, but looking again and again just in case they have missed something.

*I get to the point where I'm kind of like, I get so bored, sometimes I just pick it [smartphone] up and look at it and I have nothing. Or I'll go onto Instagram, come out of it, go on Twitter, come out of it, go on Snapchat and come out of it, and just keep going in the circuit and I'll not realise I'm doing it, because I've got nothing to do. So now I actually downloaded a game again the other day, so I've just been playing that recently.*

Girl, 14-16, UK



Offering multiple opportunities for filling in awkward, uncomfortable moments experienced by children, the smartphone can lead to laziness as admitted by the same teenagers:

*Teema: We'll be in separate rooms and we'll tweet each other.*

*Isleen: Or call each other because you can't be bothered to get up.*

*(...)*

*Teema: That's really bad.*

*Isleen: And then I call, I just call them to find out if they're there; I can't be bothered to get up and see*

*Teema: That's lazy.*

*Isleen: I know.*



Girls, 14-16, UK



#### Policy recommendation Schools

As school is the place where children spend most of their day together, teachers are in a privileged position to promote the **responsible use of mobile communication**. Encouraging face-to-face interactions among children by means of engagement in shared offline activities without minimising the relevance of mobile communication for children is also recommended. Children need to realise that they can still manage face-to-face interactions and that mobile, online communication can be as problematic as co-present interaction.

A further consequence of smartphones, according to children, is feeling **more connected to their friends**: most children think it is “a bit” (39%) or “very” (42%) true of them. However, constant **accessibility to one another** by means of mobile communication has become **normative**: three out of four children (72%) also agree that they **feel they have to be always available to family and friends**.

While children feel perpetual social access to peers annoying, they usually conform to the social pressure to be “always on”:

*When we were younger, and we had those old phones it was like, you could easily forget it at home, but now, where you can use the social media, now it's really important!*

Girl, 11-13, Denmark



*What bothers me is that you're always busy, and that you have no rest*

Boy, 15, Belgium



Temporary or permanent disconnection is negatively sanctioned and troublesome, leading to the feeling of **exclusion** from the peer group:

*Because all the others have a smartphone, I think that I'm more unavailable now because nobody calls on the home phone but everybody is writing WhatsApp messages.*

Boy, 13-14, Germany



*and when you go on WhatsApp you find a lot of messages, they might be interesting but you don't bother to read them all and then the next day in class they talk and you don't know what they are talking about*

Girl, 11-13, Italy



The feeling of **entrapment** generated by this normative mobile etiquette - whereby one should be always accessible and reply in real time - appears to be radicalised by new features of instant messaging apps and SNS alike. Knowing that the sender is notified when the message has been received and read causes **anxiety** as well as **misunderstandings** in relationships with friends:

*So it's not nice no to answer?*

*Andrea: Yes, in my opinion, well if you really have problems or if you're away and cannot talk, yes, nobody says anything. But when you get messages and you see and you're not in the mood to talk... (...) so, it's a very stupid idea that they write and can see that I saw the message and this is the most annoying: to write someone and to get "seen at..."*

Girl, 15, Romania







## Policy recommendation

### Parents

Children sometimes share parental concerns about the potential negative consequences of always being socially accessible to peers. Parents can help to **empower children by educating them to more responsible uses of these devices, helping them to understand that mediated communication does not need to be in real time, that written words are less ephemeral than spoken words and that text can reach a wider audience than children had expected.** **Setting rules** is also an effective measure, without downplaying the rules children set themselves when under no parental pressure - e.g. not using the smartphone until they have done with homework. Parents should also recognise - as they sometimes do - that they are also victims of the communicative bubble when they want their own children to be always available to them.

### Industry

Children express concerns about the new technological affordances of messaging apps and social media, reporting that they feel socially obliged to reply in real time but how fast (sometime ill-thought out) replies can lead to conflicts or misunderstandings with peers. **Notifications should be disabled by default for younger children or made optional** for them to use. they are also victims of the communicative bubble when they want their own children to be always available to them.

### Peers

Mobile (online) communication has the potential to exacerbate issues and problematic aspects of peer communication: issues of belonging, trust and respect are all at play. **Children need to be themselves responsible for the safety of their (online) communication environment.** Those children who are more aware of these issues should be encouraged to promote better mobile and online communication amongst their peers.

## 4. Risks

One major acquisition of research on online risks and safety in comparative perspective - and notably of the EU Kids Online project - is that online risky experiences do not necessarily result in harm, as reported by children (Livingstone et al., 2011). While internet activities are not beneficial nor negative per se, some online experiences are more likely to result in problematic experiences for children, namely, in harm. Harm is, therefore, considered as the distinct - subjective or objective - outcome of exposure to online risks.

Before asking children about specific risky experiences, we asked them a closed and an open-ended question, asking them to provide their overall view on negative online experiences. Children were asked, “In the past 12 months, have you seen or experienced something on the internet that has bothered you in some way? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn’t have seen it?” and “If you have seen or experienced something on the internet in the past 12 months that has bothered you in some way, can you write down what happened or what it was that bothered you or made you upset?”

Figure 16 and 17 show children’s experiences of problematic events, by age, gender, SES and country.

**Overall 17% of children said they had seen or experienced something on the internet that had bothered them.**

Figure 16: Online experiences that have bothered children (%), by gender, age and SES

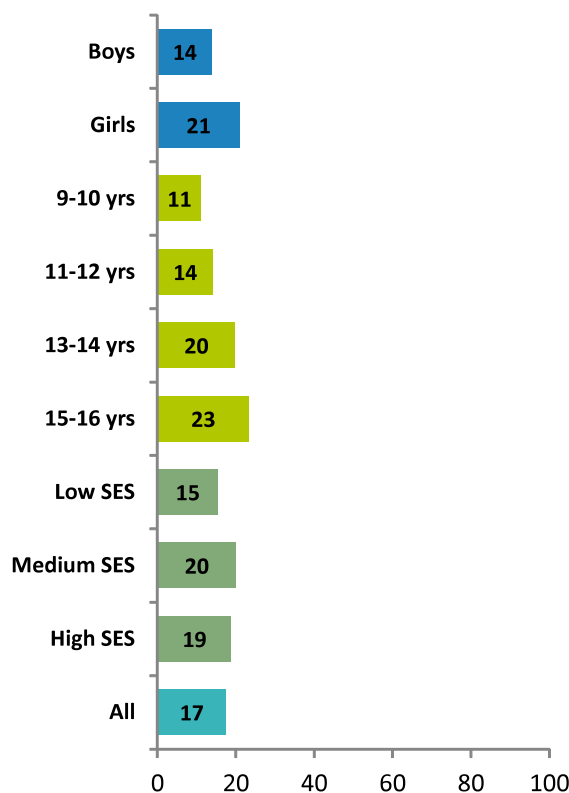
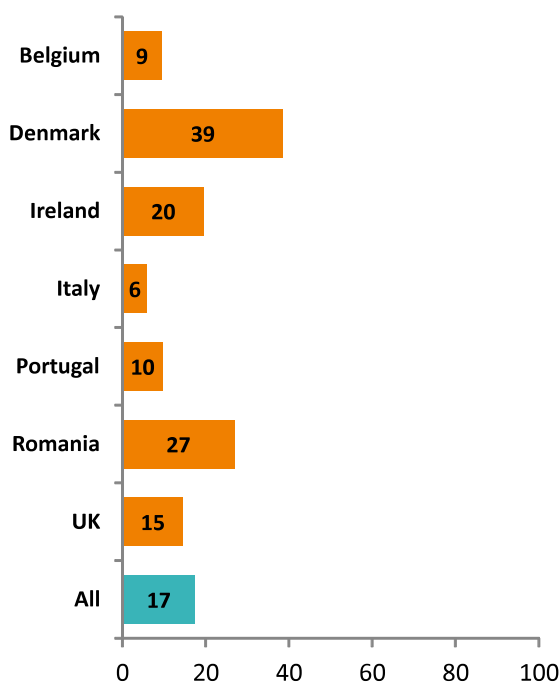


Figure 17: Online experiences that have bothered children (%), by country



Base: All children 9-16 years old who use the internet.

Gender and age differences are considerable: **girls (21%) and older teenagers (23%)** are more likely to report being bothered by something on the internet. Perceptions and experience of problematic events on the internet is also variable across countries: **Danish children (39%) are more likely to report being bothered** by something on the internet, while **Italian children (6%) are the least likely** to do so.

Figure 18 and 19 show how the number of children who have experienced at least one of the seven risks asked about - namely, being bullied (online or offline); receiving sexual messages; seeing sexual images; meeting online contacts offline; seeing negative user generated content (concerned with hate, pro-anorexia, self-harm, drug taking or suicide); experiencing other risks such as privacy risks; and reporting excessive internet use - varies by gender, age, SES and country.

Figure 18: Child has experienced at least one of the seven risks (%), by gender, age and SES

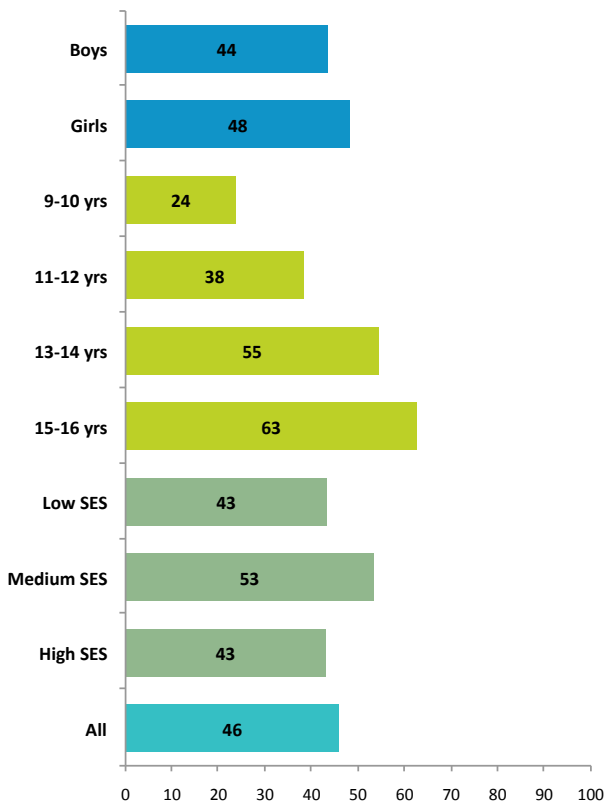
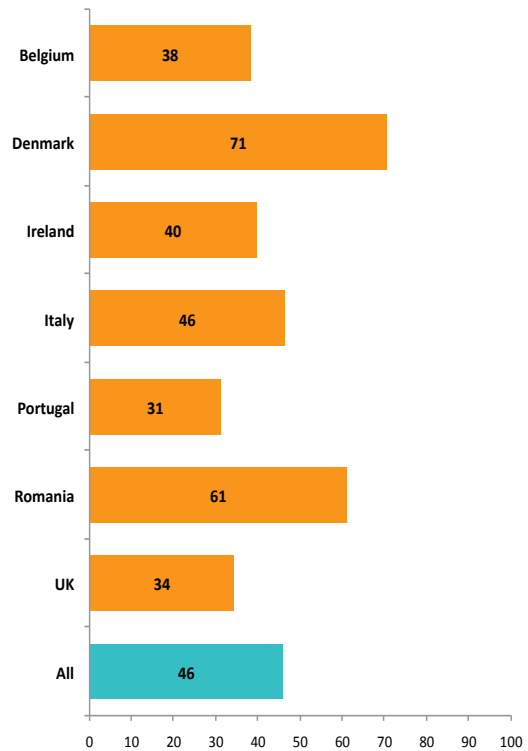


Figure 19: Child has experienced at least one of the seven risks (%), by country



Base: All children 9-16 years old who use the internet.

Exposure to risks increases with age, and among smartphone and tablet users. This supports the so-called “more opportunities, more risks” hypothesis: older users and mobile internet users benefit from more online opportunities, but are also exposed to more risks. Moreover, country differences show that online risks do not necessarily have harmful consequences, as the case of Italy - where risk exposure is on average but the number of children bothered on the internet is the lowest - exemplifies this.

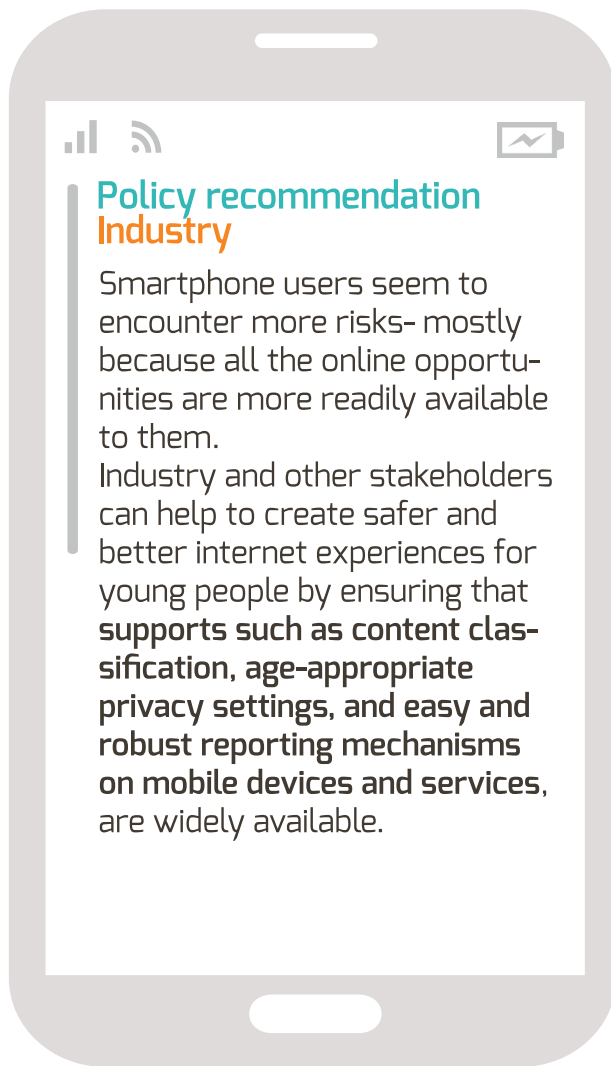
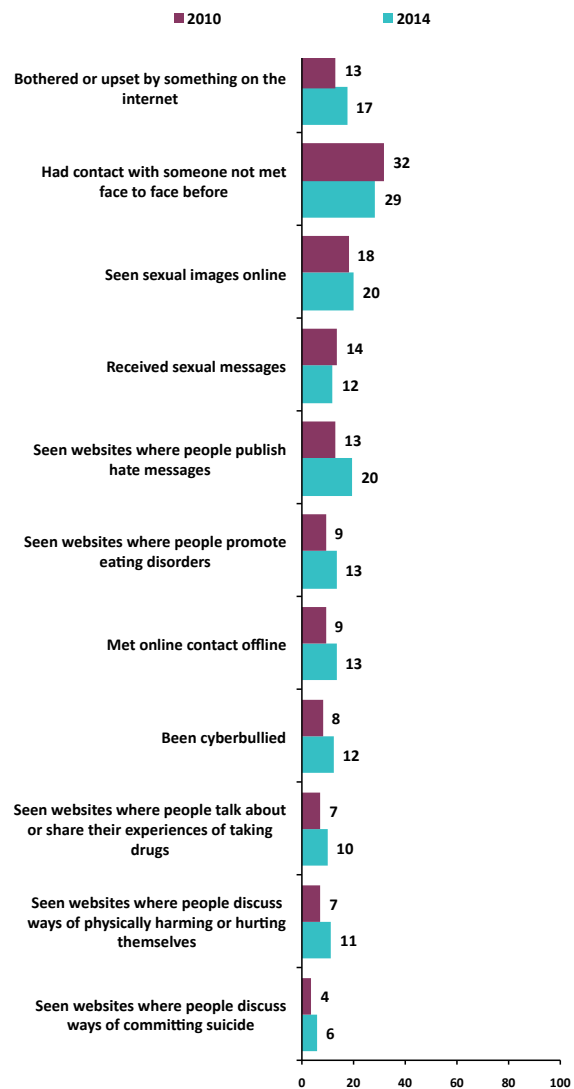


Figure 20 shows how the overall level of harm and exposure to specific risks has changed from 2010 and 2014:

Figure 20: online risks and harm, comparing 2010 and 2013-14, for children 11 + <sup>3</sup>

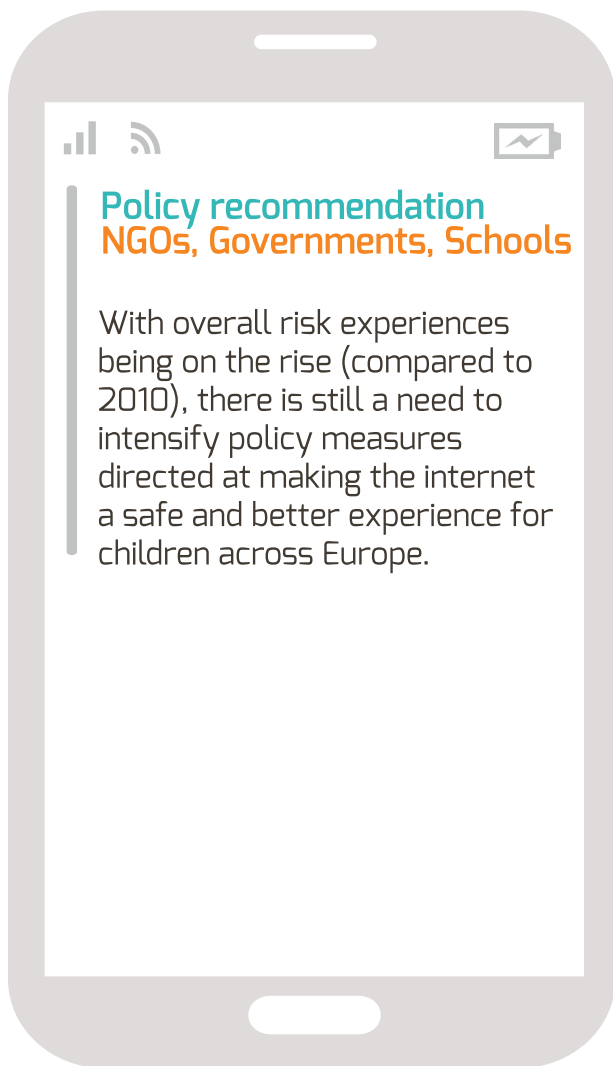


Base: All children 11-16 years old who use the internet.

Comparison with the EU Kids Online data shows that since 2010 exposure to negative user generated content - especially hate messages and pro-ana or pro-mia content - cyberbullying and face-to-face meetings with online contacts have increased substantially. By contrast, meeting new people on the internet has slightly decreased.

<sup>3</sup> We focus here only on children aged 11 years old and above because in both surveys questions on receiving sexual images and/or on negative user generated content were not asked to children aged 9-10.

If we look at country differences, the number of children reporting an online experience that bothered them has increased in the past 4 years in Denmark (from 28% to 39%), Ireland (from 11% to 20%) and Romania (from 21% to 27%). It has been more or less stable in the UK (from 13% to 15%), Portugal (from 7% to 10%), Belgium (from 10% to 9%) and Italy (also 6% in 2010).



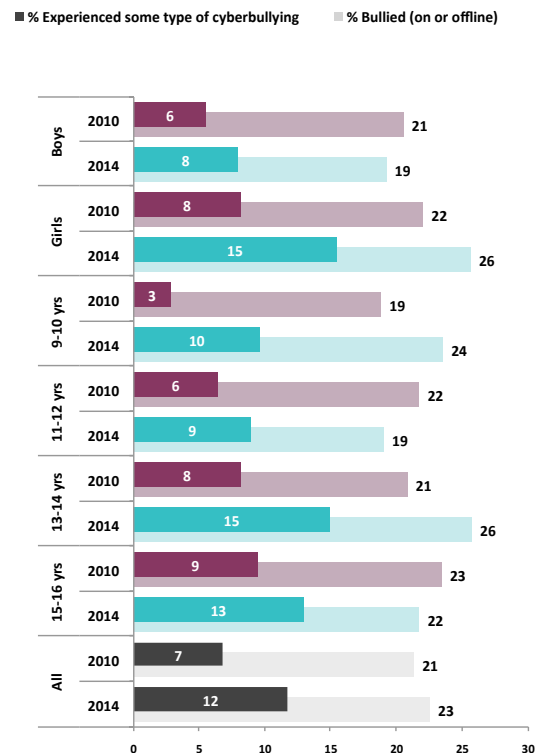
## 4.1 Bullying on- and offline

As anticipated, different risks are not perceived as equally problematic: some are more dangerous and harmful than others. Bullying is still the most harmful risky experience: two out of three children who have been bullied on- or offline claim they have been “very” or “a bit” upset.

The experience of bullying is gendered, with girls being more likely to be bullied (26%) and to be upset (20%) than boys. Age variations are also notable, and confirm that the transition from pre-adolescence to adolescence marks a time of increased bullying: 13- to 14-year-olds (26%) are more likely to be bullied. It is, however, the youngest children, aged 9-10, who report higher rates of harm (21%).

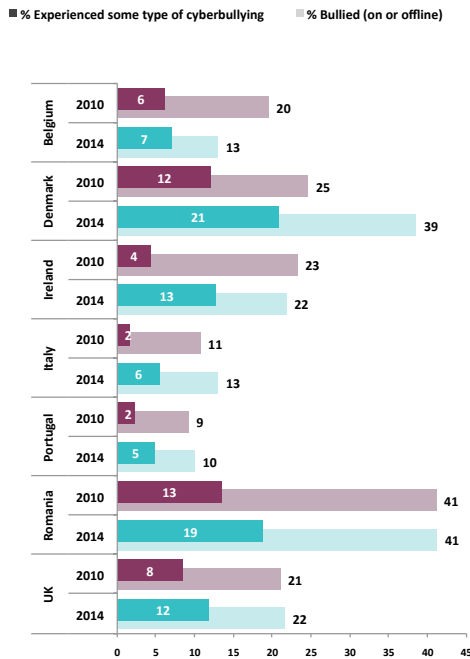
While 10% of children have been bullied face-to-face, offline bullying is no longer the dominant mode of mean and offensive conduct; indeed, if we sum all the forms of cyberbullying, 12% report being bullied online or through mobile communication. The rise in cyberbullying emerges clearly also from the comparison between 2010 and 2013-14 data, as shown in Figures 21 and 22:

Figure 21: Being bullied off- and online by gender and age, comparing 2010 and 2013-14



Base: All children 9-16 years old who use the internet.

Figure 22: Being bullied off- and online by country, comparing 2010 and 2013-14



Base: All children 9-16 years old who use the internet.

According to children, the rise in cyberbullying is associated with new communicative practices and opportunities. **Some children believe mobile devices facilitate online bullying, because these devices allow them to be constantly online and available.** According to children, increased communication opportunities and the possibility to send free messages have led to impulsive, even aggressive communication:

*Yes, I think smartphones have made it possible for people to be mean more, because if you were paying for text you'd probably think more, saying, I'm going to be paying for this text, or my parents will be paying for this text. Is it really worth sending it? Whereas now on WhatsApp or Facebook you can quickly message and send it for free. So I think that's kind of opened it up to be like cyberbullying more, or sending silly messages...*

Boy, 11-13, UK



*My daughter passed the limit on WhatsApp, so she lost, she had a conflict with her friends, for bullshit, and if she had talked face to face rather than texting she would have probably solved the issue before having a fight and losing their friendship...*

Father, (9-10), Italy



More often, children describe unpleasant episodes on messaging apps or SNS as instances of “**social drama**” and aggressive communication, which extends to the use of mobile devices and new social apps, reported especially in Italy, Romania and Spain. By contrast, bullying is non-reciprocal, involving intentional, repetitive aggression and a power imbalance between the bullied and the bully.

### Policy recommendation Schools

Schools should play a more active role in **preventing social media-based bullying, since most communication on SNS and messaging apps occur between schoolmates.**

Moreover, given that bullying is age-specific, with younger children reporting more face to face bullying and bullying through gaming websites, while adolescents report more bullying through SNS and phone calls, specific messages should be designed for different age groups.

Children reported being harassed through calls and messages on the smartphones, usually anonymously; most likely, these were pranks played by peers, but in most cases they could not identify the bullies. **Peers sharing phone numbers of others without permission** can lead to children being anonymously harassed through their smartphones.

New messaging services, such as WhatsApp, offer new modes of peer interaction, as well as new modes of inclusion and **exclusion**: one Italian girl reports missing out on WhatsApp group conversation due to technical problems with her mobile, only to return to find a lot of negative messages posted by another peer during her absence (Italy, girls, 12-13).

*I used to have a friend who was really a good friend of mine, but, for while I couldn't use WhatsApp because she kept on dis-installing it, and I told her because we used to tell each other anything, and on this group she started speaking ill on me, so when I managed to access WhatsApp again I didn't tell her, to make her a surprise, and I read all those messages*

Girl, 12-13, Italy



Another way of talking unkindly about peers on WhatsApp is creating “groups within groups” where children can badmouth excluded peers (boys, 14-16, Spain).

**The portability of the new devices makes it easier for young people to take each other's phones and send rude messages** directly from the accounts of the owner or to answer messages on behalf of the owner, as reported by Italian 9-10 and 12-13 year old girls and Romanian 14-16 year old boys. Another issue that came up in several interviews was children having their phone number shared by peers without their permission and receiving annoying messages and calls as a consequence. This practice is connected with forms of sexual harassment, some girls reporting having unknown people calling them with sexual propositions (Italy, 12-13 girls)

**New platforms being embraced by young people can facilitate new modes of misconduct.** For example, one Italian girl (12) reported having her picture taken from Facebook and shared on WhatsApp with an entire group and being mocked for posing as “sexy”. Another girl reports on the new practice of boys secretly taking pictures of their peers on toilets and posting them on WhatsApp groups.



### Policy recommendation NGOs

The new forms of sociality enabled by mobile devices (e.g. WhatsApp) and their catering to the needs of group communication can further foster patterns of aggressive communication and peer victimization (such as excluding some from WhatsApp groups-within-groups).

The ease of snapping compromising pictures of peers and posting them on SNS is another way in which mobile devices can foster cyber-aggression and victimization. **Cyber-bullying prevention campaigns should include also the need for responsible use of mobile devices and the most recent and popular mobile apps.**

## 4.2 Privacy issues and personal data misuse

The number of children who reported privacy-related risks on their smartphones (e.g. people accessing their personal information or pretending to be them) is low, 5% overall. However, this rises to 9% of teenagers aged 15-16. Similarly, just a minority of children (4%) experienced personal data misuse, that is having someone using their information in a way they did not like. However, privacy issues are at the core of other problematic experiences, such as anonymous bullying via phone calls or messages, or sexual solicitation on messaging apps following inappropriate sharing of their phone numbers. **Aggression, sexual communication, privacy issues and personal data misuse are interconnected**, with privacy-breaching aggressive acts such as “fraping” or “revenge sexting” being among the most salient examples.

Moreover, mobile devices are often regarded as **facilitating exposure to privacy-related risks, because of mobile-specific functions**. For example, the new platforms catering for groups of users can also facilitate **the dissemination of screenshots of private chats into group chat windows** (boy, 14, Italy).

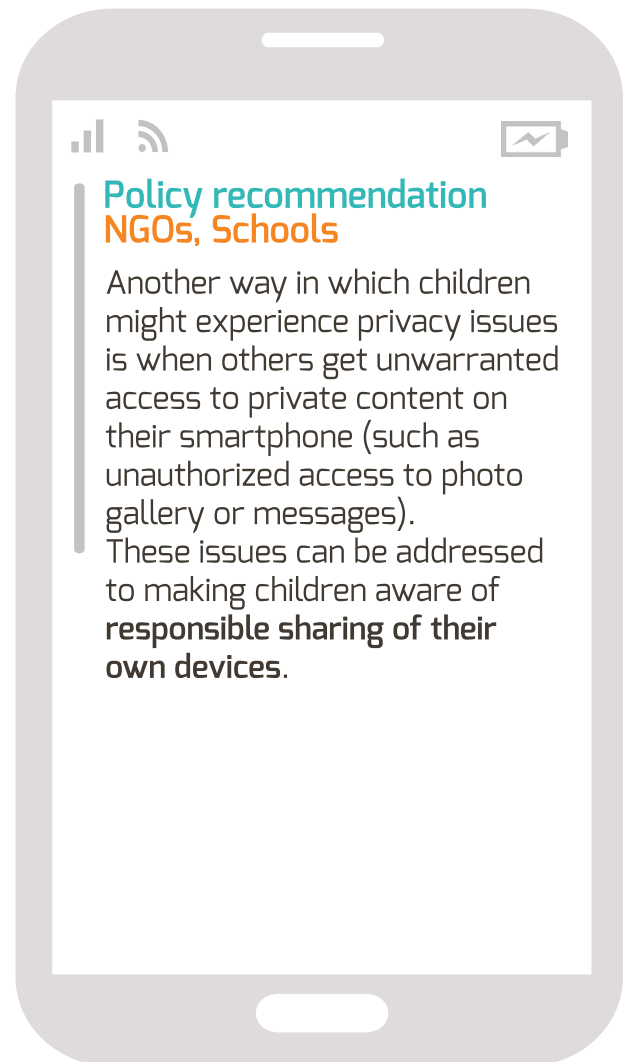
**A new way in which children experience privacy issues is from peers standing nearby and seeing their private messages or photos on their smartphone or tablet screens**. Sometimes sharing devices with peers (such as for playing a game or checking Facebook) might lead to peers accessing the owner’s photo gallery or personal messages (as reported by 9-10 year old girls in Romania). Another Romanian girl (15) reported leaving her phone at home while on a trip and having her sister and father check her personal messages while she was away. Another girl recalls her experience:

*I had my iPod with me on the train and they took it away from me anyhow. I had put it in my backpack and didn't noticed that they took the iPod away and had a look at all my vacation photos.[...] Where I lay on the beach in a bikini and then they made a photo of it with their phones and said: this is really nice.*

**Girl, 13-14, Germany**



An Irish boy (14-16) talked about losing his phone in the taxi and being worried that the photos of him and his family at the beach might be misused.



The rise in personal data misuse associated with mobile media and services is also an indication that **the literacy necessary for the safe use of is in still in need of development**, thus causing unpleasant situation to occur. As a consequence of their lack of skills, many children end up sharing personal details with unwanted people. For example, some children reported on things “getting messed up” when they merged Facebook or regular phone numbers and WhatsApp contacts:



*I downloaded an app that looked like WhatsApp because the icon was very similar, but, instead, it was an app that you insert your telephone number and many people see it. So, they found my number on that app and wrote me on WhatsApp and... but they were grown-ups (adults)! And I did not know how to end this ...Then, luckily, I changed my telephone number and smartphone.*

**Girl, 15, Italy**



One 10 year old Italian girl reported some unknown people being able to add her on WhatsApp and sending her pornographic pictures, and not being able to figure out where they got her number. One Spanish girl mentioned finding an app which was supposed to give her access to other people's chats, but instead the app was giving nearby phones the possibility of seeing her own chats (girl, 10, Spain).



### Policy recommendation NGOs, Schools

Children talked about receiving unpleasant phone calls and texts from "strangers" (most likely friends of friends) without having given out their phone number. Phone numbers sharing without permission is a reported way in which young girls experience unsolicited sexual communication.

As mobile devices have become more at the centre of children's sociability increased attention should be given to **being careful about who has one's phone number and the potential consequences of distributing the phone numbers of peers should be emphasised in safety curricula and campaigns.**

## 4.3 Sexual content and communication

Many children (28%) have come across sexual content in the past 12 months, whether online or offline, while 17% have seen sexual images on the internet. This experience is less bothering than bullying, with around half of the children who report being harmed by what they have seen.

Although some children believe that new devices are not necessarily linked to increased access to unwanted sexual content, others think that **the new devices and platforms offer new options for young people to access and share sexual content**. For example, a girl mentioned having a cousin using her mobile phone to access pornographic material, because his own phone was being monitored by his parents (girls, 12-13, Italy). Other girls from Romania and Spain complained about boys bringing and sharing sexual material at school (video clips watched on mobile devices during breaks or even during classes). A mother and youth worker from Italy also tells about a group of children watching a pornographic video on a child's smartphone during a bus trip:

*Suddenly we saw a crowd of children at the end of the bus and they were all watching a video on a child's phone.*

*The kid accessed this video and showed it to the group. It was really a pornographic movie.*



Youth worker, Italy

**Even though encountering sexual content can be upsetting, children are much more concerned about the risks of sexting.** As shown in Figure 20, sexting has decreased from 2010: overall 11% of respondents have received sexual messages. Exchanging sexual messages and content, and sometimes showing these on smartphones, can occur as part of sexual experimenting and/or joking between peers, especially among boys. Gender and age differences matter, with teenagers being more likely to experience sexual solicitation, and girls being more likely to be harmed by what they have received.

Similar to online bullying, **children have the impression that mobile devices facilitate taking and sharing pictures**, also sexy pictures that may be misused. Girls talked about the practice of boys sending girls requests for naked pictures of themselves.



### Policy recommendation Governments, NGOs, Schools, Parents

'Revenge sexting' (usually boys disseminating sexual photos of their ex-girlfriends to a larger group of peers, coupled with victim blaming - marked by "she shouldn't have sent those pictures"-type attitudes) was one of the practices reported as being the most harmful.

While mobile devices are usually the common dissemination tools (i.e. photos taken and sent from mobile to mobile in first instance, and further shown or disseminated to larger peer audience), this type of victimization is something to be addressed by **both digital rights (e.g. the right to personal image) and anti-gender discrimination and anti-sexism campaigns** (e.g. it is not only the girls' responsibility to ensure her personal image is not ruined online, but also the responsibility of young boys to treat them with respect).

*We also had that, one boy said: Yes, I will send you a friend-request and then you just send me many photos of you and then she send him many pictures of her and then he – But she intentionally said: but don't show them to anybody. And then the boys always show, and most of the time the boys are the ones who, - actually always the bad ones, who pass on for example secrets or you show – or they show pictures around of somebody, who didn't agree to it.*

**Girl, 11, Germany**



The practice of (girls) sharing sexy pictures is generally disapproved of, and seen as asking for trouble, whether the pictures are posted on social media or exchanged in private messages:

*But imagine. I am in a relationship with a girl and we decide, hypothetically, to send pictures to each other, we send them “like that” and we trust each other. So imagine the case that you split up with that person badly or there has been some serious problem and they have split up. Then you might be angry and you have the mobile in your hands, to get revenge you might use the photo and send it to other people. To use it like a weapon...*

**Boy, 13-14, Germany**



The phone numbers shared without the young people's consent is another way through which young people experience unwanted sexual communication (e.g. phone calls with requests of sex).

*Rui: Because a mobile phone now ends up being a [photo and filming] camera.*

*Artur: It existed before, but there were not many and you had to take the picture, then transfer it to a computer etc, but...*

*Hugo: Now a girl can go to the bathroom, take a picture and send it... Now people are a bit scared to do this, even people in a stable relationship, because you never know what happens afterwards... if it will appear on Facebook. I think even married people... shouldn't be doing this... afterwards they split up and sometimes men are a bit...*

*Mateo: But imagine. I am in a relationship with a girl and we decide, hypothetically, to send pictures to each other, we send them “like that” and we trust each other. So imagine the case that you split up with that person badly or there has been some serious problem and they have split up. Then you might be angry and you have the mobile in your hands, to get revenge you might use the photo and send it to other people. To use it like a weapon...*

**Boys, 14-16, Spain**



## 4.4 Excessive use

Many more children now spontaneously mention addiction or overuse, and **many agree that they spend too much time online and/or on their smartphones.**

The survey findings are consistent with interviews and focus groups with children and adults alike, in showing that children are more likely to develop an overdependent attitude towards their smartphones because of its features: first, like mobile phones before them, smartphones are perceived among children and adolescents as extensions of their body, that can be easily stored in a pocket and carried around all the day long; and second, as anticipated, they provide full time access to peers and family. For these reasons, the **smartphone** has become **so fully integrated into the social wellbeing of the user that it is almost a part of who they are.** Many children grasp their phone in their hand, they take it to bed, they use it in places such as in school where is it against the rules to use it, and they flout their parents guidance and mediation regarding its use in their bedrooms, at night and in places where it is not appropriate such as during meals or on a night out with the family.

*I think our generation has just grown up to have a phone in their hand'*

Girl, 14-15, UK



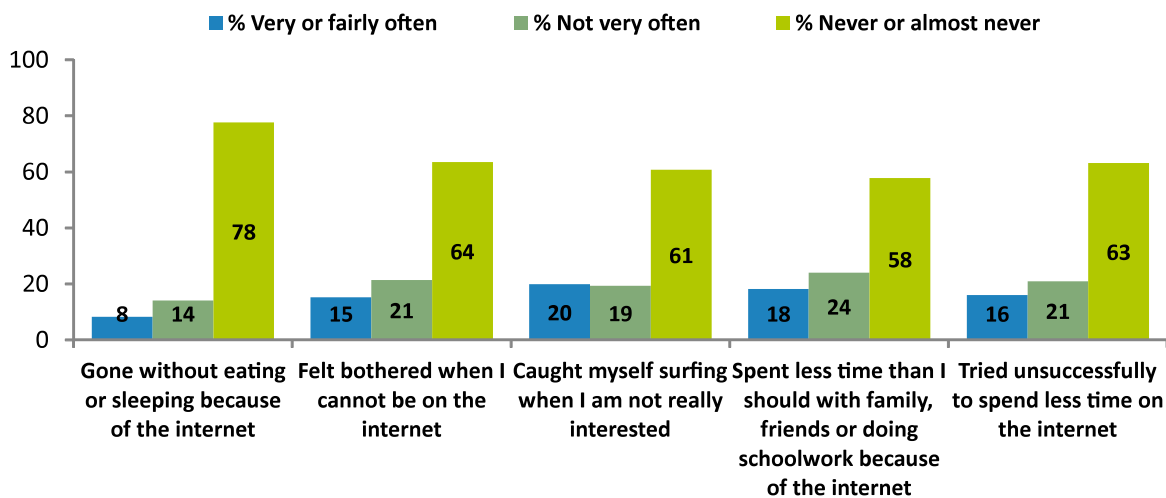
*my daughter had a birthday party at home, they were 29 (...) the picture was the following: boys were dancing – it was kids aged 12-17 – the girls instead were with their phones in their hand, they danced with their phone in their hands, they didn't leave the phone for a second, I guess they also brought it to the bathroom!*

Father, (14-16), Italy



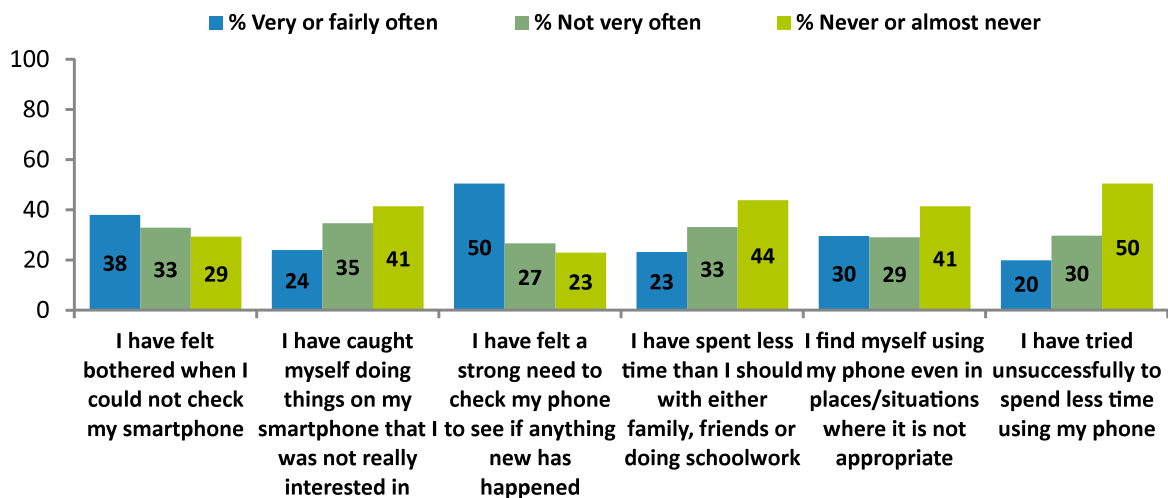
As a consequence, it is understandable that children feel uncomfortable when they cannot check their phones, or tend to check them every once in a while when they can do so. Figure 23 and 24 compare excessive use of the internet and of smartphones:

Figure 23: Excessive use of the internet among children



Base: All children who use the internet.

Figure 24: Excessive use of smartphones among children



Base: All children who use the internet.

At the same time overuse by other people is considered stupid and even irritating, especially when it gets in the way of (offline) social interactions. Children in all countries lament being bothered by peers who spend their face-to-face time texting with distant others because “for doing that you could have stayed at home!” (as a Spanish boy comments).

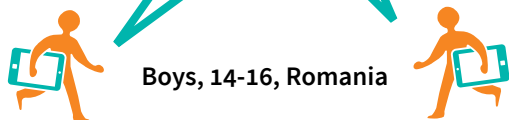
What seems to be the (genuine) underlying concern behind fear of addiction, are online activities getting in the way of school and homework, with bad grades as a possible result. Across countries, social networking and messaging notifications on mobile devices are often mentioned as distractions from focusing on homework. Therefore, even without parental pressure, some children prefer to do their homework first before using their smartphones – even turning these devices off so that they cannot be disturbed by incoming messages.

Victor: ‘There is some addiction.’

Vlad: Because I tried to see it in some people, who even when they are on the street, they start typing. I think it’s pretty weird to talk to someone and they are staring at a screen.

Interviewer: when you talk about addiction, what do you mean?

Vlad: First, when they spend a lot of time, causes problems, and at school during classes or when I see them walking on the street and talking a lot, but a lot on the phone.’



Boys, 14-16, Romania

I check my smartphone after lunch and then I go to do my homework, I leave it there, in the dining room, so that I get not distracted by it, indeed I started using this strategy because when I received messages I had the instinct to immediately go to see them, while if I leave it in the dining room maybe I do not even listen the sound of incoming messages and I keep studying.’



Girl, 13, Italy



### Policy recommendation NGOs, Schools, Parents

**Teach children how to deal with social pressure and overdependence.** Children should know it is perfectly fine to be 'offline' sometimes and accept it is OK not to reply immediately to every message or notification. Self-monitoring techniques can be very helpful, but some children have difficulties in managing their own online and mobile activities. Tips and tricks for self-management and how to support each other in these practices would be valuable.

## 4.5 Other risks

**Commercials, spam and pop-ups** are found annoying, and many children say they avoid clicking on them. However, the new mobile devices **require a specific set of skills**, which children, especially younger kids, still need to fully acquire, particularly with regard to the commercial content they deliver. They talked about advertisements promoting other games on gaming apps, being redirected to the app store while in the middle of a game. Children also talked about having to deal with **hidden costs of apps**, such as discovering a lot of apps which they do not remember downloading and not knowing if they were charged money for those (Italy, boys, 12-13), downloading a games app which charges every SMS they send with 2 euros, being cheated by

the "you've won an iPod" advertisement. More children mentioned they discovered they were charged money after they entered their phone numbers to claim the so-called prizes. Another mobile-specific risk one child mentioned was being charged a great amount of money for playing online games on the phone while on roaming (UK, boys, 11-13).

A further mobile-specific concern shared by many children across countries is about **theft of or damage to the smartphone**, which keeps many from taking their smartphones to school and other places (e.g. sports clubs), and from lending them to others. The actual experience of this is uneven across countries: in some instances children mention having their **smartphones stolen** (Italy, boys, 12-13, UK, boys 9-10), on others it is their **tablet** (Romania, boy, 10).

The reaction that children have to unexpectedly losing their smartphones (or tablets) is an emotional shock, a problem because of the value of the device, but in terms of losing communication and contact:

*Isleen: 'And I lost mine today actually.  
Interviewer: So you haven't got your phone at all?  
Isleen: Well, I dropped it [by the house] next door. And I thought I'd left it on the bus so my Dad blocked my phone, but an old lady picked it up and I went and picked it up from her house. Interviewer: That was nice of her.  
Teema: yeah. Interviewer: So let me just ask you about that, so when you realised you'd lost it what happened? Isleen: I got really scared, I went oh no, I've lost everything because I can't back it up. And then we went on the computer and then we were about to fill in the form.*

**Girl, 13-14, Germany**



Several children believe that the location-tracking features of mobile devices are risky because strangers would use these apps to find children. Many children mistrust geolocation in SNS, and claim not to feel comfortable about using geolocation apps or functions, and they avoid using it or only use it in very specific circumstances. The most common motive is fear about dodgy

people tracking or following them, or burglars robbing their house while away. Indeed, only 9% of children - but 15% of smartphone users - say they are used to register their location in status updates and posts. By contrast, most smartphone users (63%) claim they know how to deactivate location-tracking functions.

## 4.6 Responding to risks

**Coping behaviour and preventive measures are strongly interconnected**, as children's coping strategies often aim at avoiding re-occurrence or further escalation of the unpleasant situation. In some situations children prefer to deal with the problems themselves, while in other situations they decide to seek support within their own social network (parents, peers, siblings, etc.) or institutional support (schools, online helplines, counsellors, etc.). Five main ways of dealing with online risks, smartphone-specific risks included - can be identified. Usually, in coping with problematic experiences, **children combine more than one strategy:**

- **Self-reliant strategies**, such as tactics of avoidance and self-monitoring, are employed in the prevention of risks associated with **location-tracking** functions, as well as in the management of **privacy** issues and **excessive use**.
- **Other-reliant strategies** are preferred when dealing with contact risks, as when children receive **nasty or sexual messages**.
- **Technical measures** involve active intervention or "interaction" with the device or service, with the aim to solve the problem or avoid (re)-occurrence of the unpleasant situation. It generally requires some level of digital skills to operate the device or service.
- **Confrontation** refers to personal confrontations or discussions, face-to-face or online. Non-violent confrontations are mainly aimed at clarifying misunderstandings and avoiding escalation. Violent encounters are often the results of taking revenge and getting back at the perpetrator. In the context of posting or sharing 'unwelcome' messages or pictures among peers (friends, classmates), face-to-face confrontation is a recurring strategy, mentioned across all age groups. Ea (girl, 11-13, Denmark) says that her mom encourages her to talk and stand face-to-face with the person who is angry with her, instead of trying to solve it through text messages.
- **Collective approaches**. Children acknowledge that social support in dealing with unpleasant situations online can be very helpful, both in terms of emotional support, as well as practical or technical assistance.<sup>4</sup> Among all age groups, children talk about the benefits of collective coping. When confronted with **online bullying**, support from bystanders is perceived as helpful and important for emotional well-being.
- **Disengagement**: in some situations, young people decide not to engage in any preventive or reactive measures, because they perceive either technical or other-reliant strategies as ineffective.<sup>5</sup> **Young people's motivation for not engaging in communicative coping is mainly the belief that adults will not be interested, do not take it seriously, would be angry or even reprimand or punish the child.**

Therefore, communicative responses are a common way for children to deal with online problematic experiences, though **one in three children say they are not likely to talk with anyone about what bothers them on the internet**, as shown in Figure 25.

The people children are more likely to turn to in order to share their negative online experiences and seek support are mothers (71%), friends (57%) and fathers (54%):

*Yes, because you can block that, and in the street it is difficult to 'block' a person. With WhatsApp it is easy. You just go to Settings and Block, and that's that. So, that about cyberbullying on WhatsApp can be avoided.*

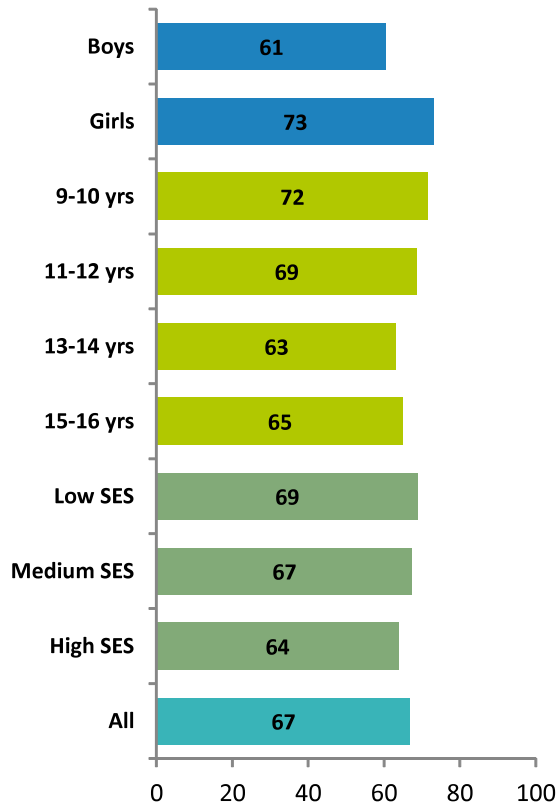
Boy, 14-16, Spain



<sup>4</sup> Italian and Romanian seem to talk more about 'collective' coping among peers in situations of bullying and social drama. Peer support plays an important role, and children try to get support from bystanders when a situation is about escalating into drama.

<sup>5</sup> Romanian children seem to report more often an attitude of 'disengagement'; not (pro)actively dealing with (potential) risks because they believe it is unavoidable.

Figure 25: Children (%) who are very likely to talk to at least one person about things that might bother them on the internet, by gender, age and SES



Base: All children who use the internet.

## 5. Parental Mediation

The family sphere is an influential social space that shapes children's online experiences: strategies adopted by parents in order to regulate their children's internet use may result in different contexts of internet access - e.g. inhibiting or favouring private access and use - as well as mould the way children cope with online risks. Parents try to deal with the complexity of a convergent and mobile media environment, which apparently is no longer "under control", by adopting multiple strategies of mediation, including:

- 1) Active mediation of internet use, where parents engage in activities such as talking about internet content while the child is engaging with it, and sharing the online experience of the child by remaining nearby.
- 2) Active mediation of internet safety, where the parent promotes safer and responsible uses of the internet.
- 3) Restrictive mediation, which involves setting rules that limit and regulate time spent online, location of use and online activities.



### Policy recommendation Parents, Schools, Peers

#### Encourage collective and collaborative coping strategies.

Support and assistance from parents, teachers, family members and peers can be very helpful. Online resilience is fostered in a supportive social environment where children learn step by step how to deal with risks on mobile and non-mobile devices.

Parents and other caretakers should find a good balance between active mediation, monitoring online activities and imposing restrictions, depending on the child's age and personality characteristics.



4) Technical restrictions, that is, the use of software and technical tools to filter, restrict and monitor children’s online activities.

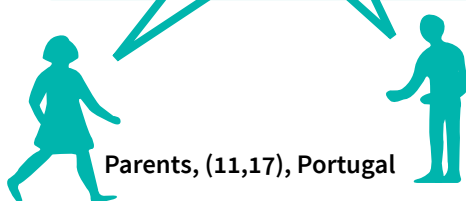
5) Monitoring or checking the record of online activities.

Some parents admit that their lack of digital literacy and skills constitutes a major challenge, as it prevents them from helping their children in an effective way. This problem is intensified by mobile devices, which are considered more complicated and harder to handle by parents. Smartphones and tablets also allow for a more individualised use in different circumstances, creating a “privatised sphere” even within the home making it harder for parents to control what their child is doing.

*Irene: Yes, it is more difficult to control something that they have on their pockets, we have to ask ‘hand me your mobile phone so that I can know what you were doing’. It is a breach of...*

*Cesar: ...privacy?*

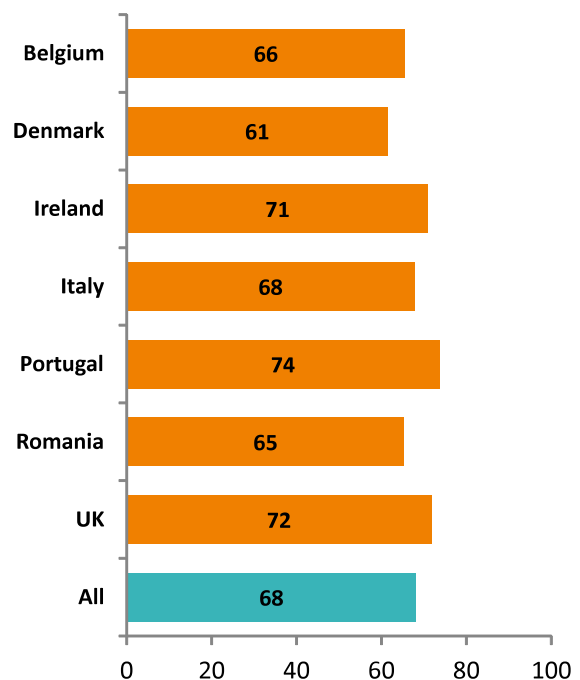
*Irene: ...Privacy of the kids. When they are in front of the computer it is easier to take a look and to see what they were doing by searching the browser history records, but as the devices get smaller it is more difficult to know what they are doing.*



## 5.1 Active mediation of internet use and internet safety

The majority of parents (**68%**) engage in **at least two forms of active mediation of internet use**, according to their children, as shown in Figure 26 - with little variation by country. The most common of these strategies is talking to children about what they do on the internet (66%) and stay nearby when their child is online (58%).

Figure 26: Parent’s active mediation (%)\* of the child’s internet use, by country

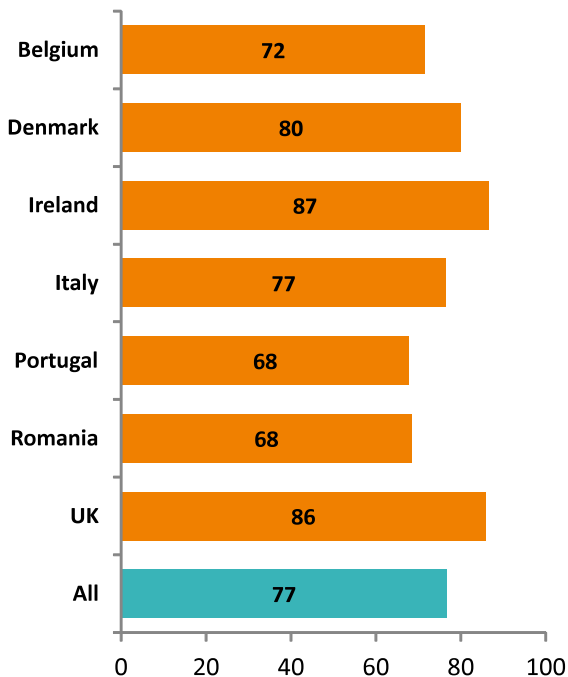


\* % of those who answered ‘yes’ to at least two items of active mediation of internet safety.

Base: All children who use the internet

**Active mediation of children’s internet safety** is even more popular, with **77% of parents** that engage in at least two measures aimed at promoting their online safety, according to children. More specifically, 68% of parents helped their children when something was difficult to do or find on the internet, and suggested how to behave with others online. Equally popular are two other strategies: according to children, 66% of parents explained why some websites were good or bad, or suggested safer internet uses. Country variations in active mediation of internet safety, are, however, more pronounced, as shown in Figure 27.

Figure 27: Parent's active mediation (%)\* of the child's internet safety, by country



\* % of those who answered 'yes' to at least two items of active mediation of internet use.  
 Base: All children who use the internet

In the case of children, asking for help about the use of particular devices or apps is one of the most common ways the exchange takes place. This happens with children of different ages, but particularly with younger ones, who are less experienced and lack more digital skills. Parents also suggest ways to behave online and to protect one's reputation, especially in order to mediate teenage girls' online self-presentation:

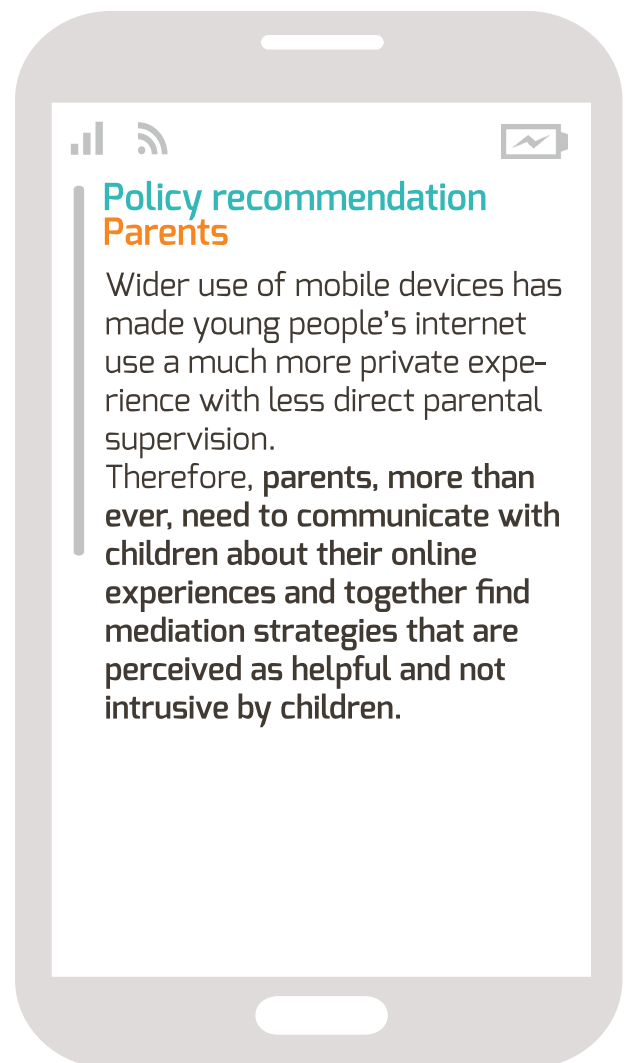
*My mom shows me exactly where I have to type and then she says... Because when you click then you see several things that you can click and give you different things, (so) she tells me the right one and I have to click it.*

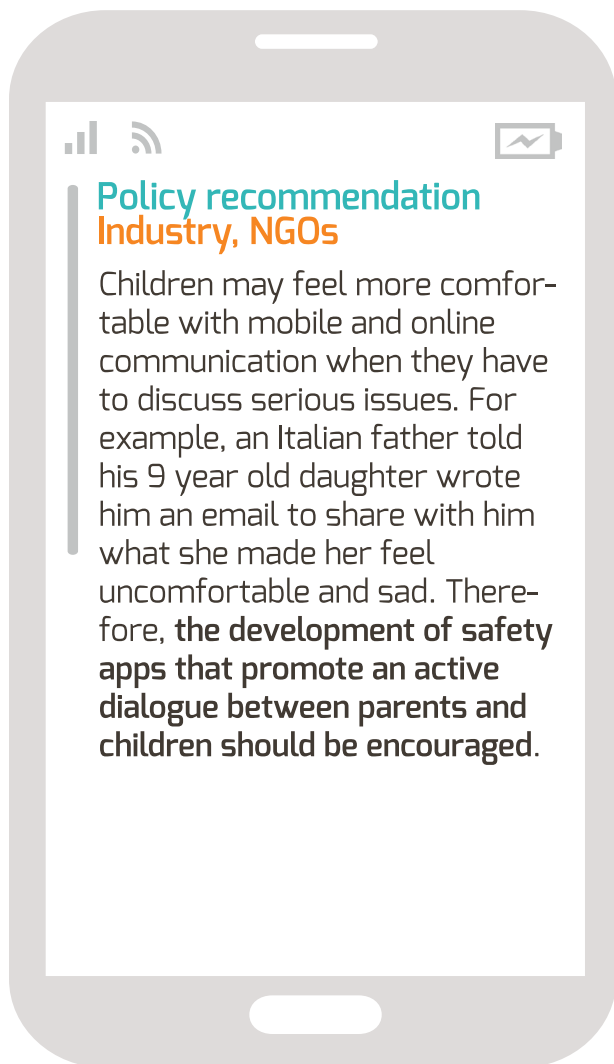
Girl, 9, Italy



*I must say that my daughter has been instructed not to publish certain images, that if she wants to share selfies the camera has to be far enough, she has to be appropriately dressed, I explained her all these things.*

Mother, (14), Italy





## 5.2 Rules

### Setting rules is less common than active mediation of children's internet use or online safety.

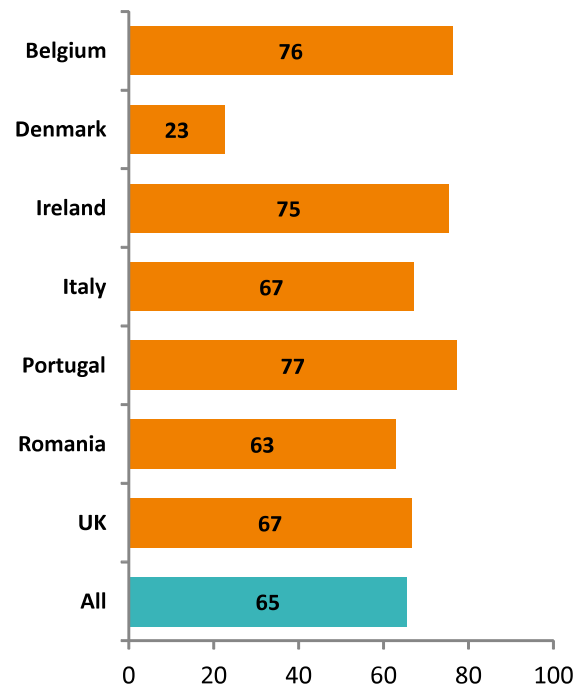
Some parents do not want to set up strict rules or do not see them as necessary, because the media use of the child has never caused problems; other parents are not confident in setting up rules, because they are not familiar with the technologies – or in words of a Danish girl they “*are really bad at smartphones*” – and do not have clear knowledge of risks, setting options etc. By contrast, many also emphasise the need for parents to regulate the internet use.

Younger children receive more mediation in general and more restrictive mediation in particular: most parents seem to agree that **the older the children become, the less they are able to regulate the media**

**use and the more trust they need to have in their children.** As an Italian mother said: “*There are rules and as parents we have to make children obey these rules- until a certain age.*”

According to children, 65% of parents adopt two or more forms of restrictive mediation, with great variations across countries, as shown in Figure 28:

**Figure 28: Parent's restrictive mediation (%)\* of the child's internet use, by country**

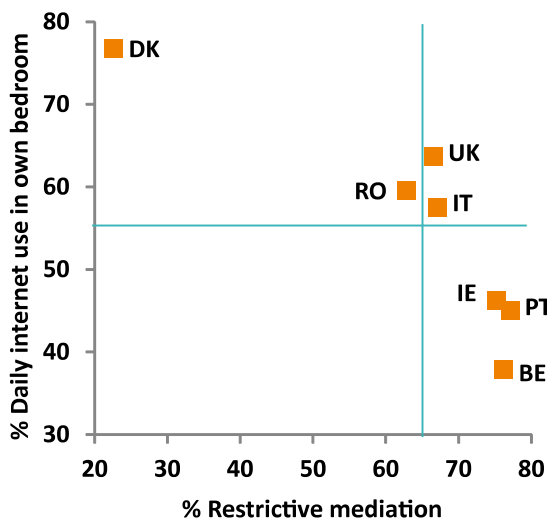


\* % of those who answered 'yes' to at least two items of restrictive mediation.

Base: All children who use the internet.

Indeed, if we look at country variations in both parental restrictions and privatisation of internet use in the domestic context, as shown in Figure 29, we can observe three main patterns of restrictive mediation at play, that shape different context of internet use. In **Belgium, Ireland and Portugal** a pattern of **high restriction and low privatisation of internet use** can be observed. At the opposite is the pattern of **low regulation and high internet use in child's own bedroom**, as observed in **Denmark and Romania**, which, however, are different under many respects. Third, in **Italy** and **the UK** children are slightly more restricted than the average but still **use the internet in their own bedrooms more**. Children in these countries are more regulated in their time online and/or in specific online activities than in autonomy of use.

Figure 29: Restrictive mediation and child's internet use in own bedroom



Base: All children who use the internet.

Rules can be differentiated regarding different aspects (apps or services, time, location and situation) and regarding the level of differentiation (e.g. internet in general, different apps or services like SNS, or different activities like posting pictures).

**Rules regarding content** were mentioned quite rarely and mostly in relation to violent videogames or “inappropriate content”, which encompasses sexual content, violence, bad language etc. This rule includes both download and upload of inappropriate content like intimate, permissive pictures.

*My parents were angry because I posted photos and (also) they do not want me to write bad words and maybe I did write them, and also I had a photo in which I did the middle finger and they got mad and they made me delete Facebook.*

Girl, 14-16, Italy



**Rules regarding time** are seen as an important tool to regulate the media consumption, but due to the diversification of devices and programmes and with regard to different age groups it is quite complicated for parents to find the right level. Some parents set a general limit for all screen media, while others try to limit the time for each single device. The limit seems to be

set rather intuitively and individually without considering the characteristics and affordances of the particular media.

*I play, like... sometimes... three quarters of an hour and my mom wants that I play half an hour, like half an hour a day and I play more so she says ‘You pass the limit that I set’ and so she put me in punishment and the following day I cannot play. The extra time I spent online, she takes me that away for the following day.*

Girl, 10, Italy



Apart the time limit, parents mention that **children have to switch off the smartphone and tablets** at 8 or 9 pm and/or **during the night**. Irish children mention that their parents switch off the router during the night and parents from Belgium and Romania mentioned that their children are not allowed to take the mobile or smartphone into their bedrooms.

*They are not allowed to take up their mobiles to their bedrooms at night. They don't agree, and they say we overreact, but they try to adapt to the rule. They believe we are too strict, because many of their friends are allowed to do so. But we don't have real fights over this. They know it's the rule. And if they break the rule and I notice it, their mobile is confiscated for a day.*

Mother, (16f), Belgium



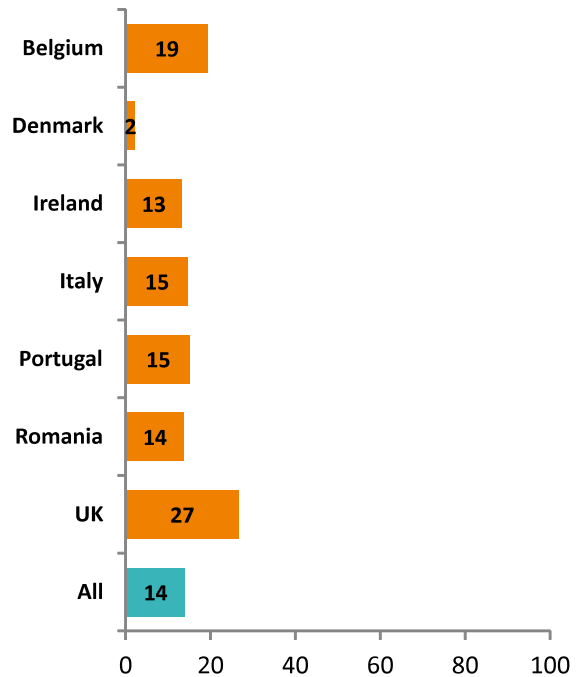
Typically children are **not allowed to use their smartphones at dinner**. Children also allude to homework and good weather as typical situation in which they are not allowed to use the media as they like. Still, **consistency of rules** within families and between friends, peer groups and siblings is a challenge for parents. Ellen from Belgium points to the different rules she encounters:

*Actually I don't use the computer a lot, I do everything on my mobile phone. At my mom's I'm not allowed to use it at the dinner table. At my dad's it's sometimes allowed, because he does this himself sometimes. When my homework is done, I can go online as long as I want.*

Girl, 12-13, Belgium



Figure 31: Parent's technical mediation (%)\* of the child's smartphone use, by country

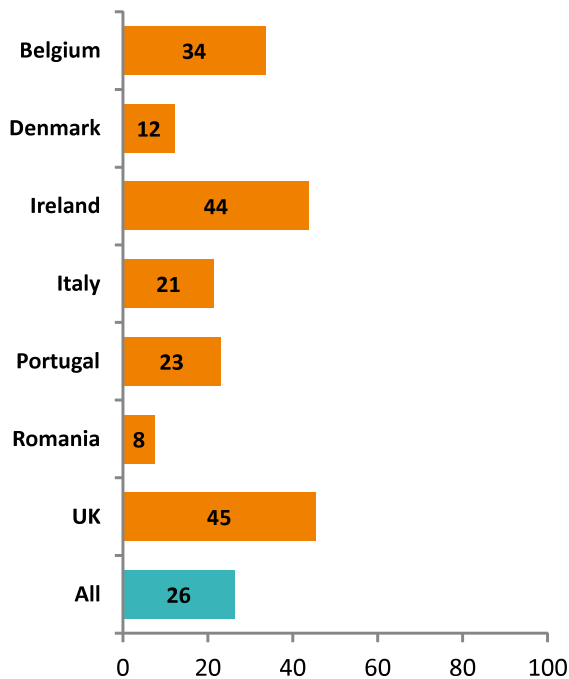


\* % of those who answered 'yes' to at least two items of technical restriction.  
Base: All children who own or have for their own use a smartphone.

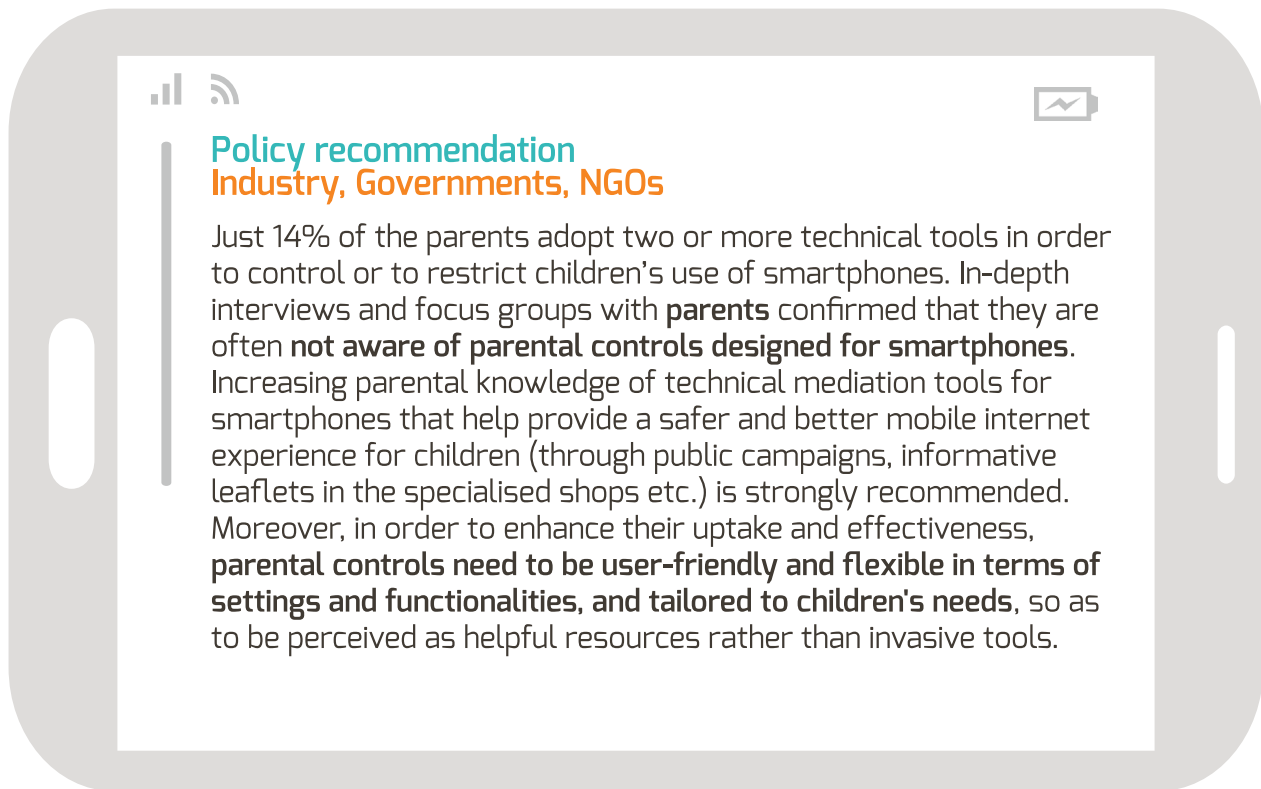
### 5.3 Technical restrictions

Technical mediation - that is the use of software and technical tools to filter, restrict and monitor children's online activities on computers, tablets or smartphones - is the least favoured mediation strategy by parents, as shown in Figures 30 and 31:

Figure 30: Parent's technical mediation (%)\* of the child's internet use, by country



\* % of those who answered 'yes' to at least two items of technical restriction.  
Base: All children who use the internet.



## 5.4 Children's responses to parental mediation

Different monitoring strategies adopted by parents (from installing particular software to checking children online activity) are not only a form of surveillance and control but also a way of limiting children's privacy. From the point of view of children, different types of justifications are presented:

- **acceptance** – children accept parental surveillance, whether because they think (or agree) they need it, or just because they don't have an alternative, since it's their parents' prerogative.

*My parents check my messages, on Facetime. Every month. Actually I don't mind, because I used to send nasty messages to my cousin Louise. It was more like a joke...*

**Boy, 11-13, Spain**



- **Non acceptance** – children feel bothered by parents' surveillance, especially if it's done furtively.

*I don't like it when my mom sees these things [Facebook comment]. I don't do bad things, but I don't want them to know everything about me. When they pass by and they always ask 'who is this,' then I'm thinking 'go away!'. Some things are private.*

**Girl, 13, Belgium**



- Strategies of **concealment** – children try to avoid parental surveillance, by adopting several tactics to evade parents control (from going online without parents knowing to protection of mobile device with password). These tactics might also include using the internet without parents’ knowledge:

*Actually... parents are very stupid. Because I know my neighbour's WiFi password. My parents always tell they will turn off the WiFi. But... I know my parent's password... so I can go online anyway. Because, my bedroom is next to their house, my room is right next to their office!*

Boy, 13, Belgium



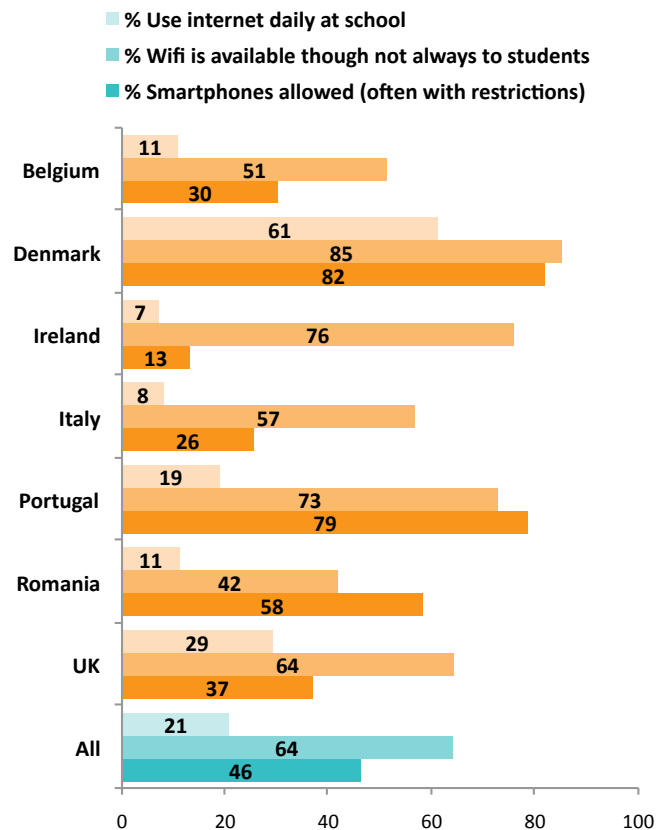
The key challenge for parental mediation is trying to balance intended protection (from problematic situations) with children’s freedom to experiment (maximizing opportunities), avoiding the risk of overprotecting children or betraying their trust.

## 6. Schools

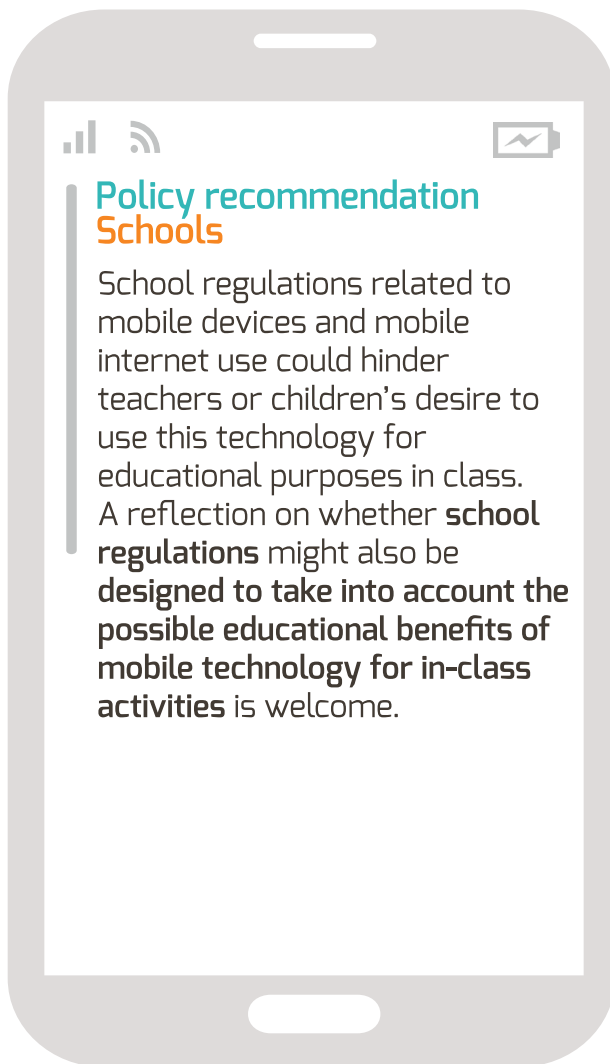
### 6.1 Rules

**Huge variations across countries persist regarding internet use in schools, school provision of WiFi networks, and regulation of smartphones’ use** in schools, as shown in Figure 32. These inequalities are the outcome of different stages of the digitisation of schools and learning processes, as well as of cross-cultural differences in the education system.

Figure 32: Daily internet use in school, availability of WiFi networks in schools and use of smartphones with no or some rules, by country



Beyond country differences, **the digital infrastructure of schools and the availability of internet access by means of shared or personal devices is also strongly structured by age and socio-economic status**: younger children and lower SES children are considerably less likely to use the internet daily at school and to be provided with WiFi networks in school. These two categories of children are also least likely to be allowed to use their smartphones in school.



Notwithstanding WiFi provision and rules regarding smartphones, the portability of smartphones and children's strong attachment to their devices are rapidly changing the "climate" of European classrooms and schools. Indeed, even in schools where it is available, access to WiFi by students is usually restricted: the number of children accessing the school's WiFi with no restrictions varies from 1% in Ireland and the UK to 56% in Denmark. Hence, students' personal devices represent a quick and fast solution to access the internet bypass-

ing the schools' infrastructure, limitations and rules. Moreover, while 54% of children claimed that they are not allowed to use their smartphones at school and a further 31% said they were allowed with some restrictions, teachers tend to be flexible and make concessions, especially when secondary school children are concerned.

As a consequence, students and teachers report an increasing amount of interruptions that sometimes make it difficult to follow the lesson. Interruptions include phone calls by parents in the middle of the lesson; students also complain about classmates watching video clips next to them or admit feeling the need to check their phones once in a while.

*A lot of students check Facebook, watch videos etc., in class so it has become the biggest problem.*



**Boy, 14, Denmark**

*At school? I use it anyway. I have been caught using my phone and it has been confiscated, but [laughing] it is stronger than me I can't help replying to messages.*



**Girl, 15, Italy**

Most often, students break the rules because they forget to turn off their ringtones, they send texts, check SNS or play video games. Occasionally they also accomplish something more advanced: for example in Romania and Germany some interviewees report having used their own personal devices to create an open WiFi hotspot for all their classmates. The practice of hacking the school's WiFi network is more common in Italy, Portugal and Romania (where 12-13% of children say they had done so).

It is also worth noting that in many countries, some students seem to violate rules not because they really want to use their devices, but only because they want to defy teachers.



The majority of children, though, agree that rules are needed to regulate their use of smartphones in class. Teachers' reactions to students' infractions are very diverse, as it is for rules. A punitive approach prevails in which **teachers confiscate students' smartphones**, the length of the punishment varying from a few hours - more common - up to one month, as reported by a Belgian child.

*There are people who don't switch off their smartphones in class (...). Sometimes some people take their phones out when the teacher goes out, and you say: what are you doing? And they say "nothing, I'm bored". They think they are important because they do that.*

Boy, 11-13, Spain



## 6.2 Opportunities

Confiscating a smartphone or forbidding its use are part of a wider variety of mediation strategies teachers engage in – namely, **active mediation of internet safety, restrictions on internet and smartphone use, and promotion of positive, school-related uses of the internet and smartphones.**

Regarding active mediation of internet use and safety, one in two teachers assist students in doing or finding things on the internet (54%), or explain why some websites are good or bad (56%), suggest ways to use the internet safely (56%) or how to behave with others on the internet (51%). According to children, teachers are also likely to talk to them about their online activities (49%), or about what they should do after a negative online experience (40%); they are least likely to help children cope with a bothering experience (23%), but we must not forget that children themselves are not likely to talk to teachers when they have such experiences.

Most of the problematic situations teachers have to cope with deal with privacy risks or the production and exchange of negative user generated content. Whilst posing new challenges for teachers, smartphones also provide them with more opportunities to engage in safety education: for example, the circulation of negative generated content is dealt with **a safety or preventive talk by the teachers**

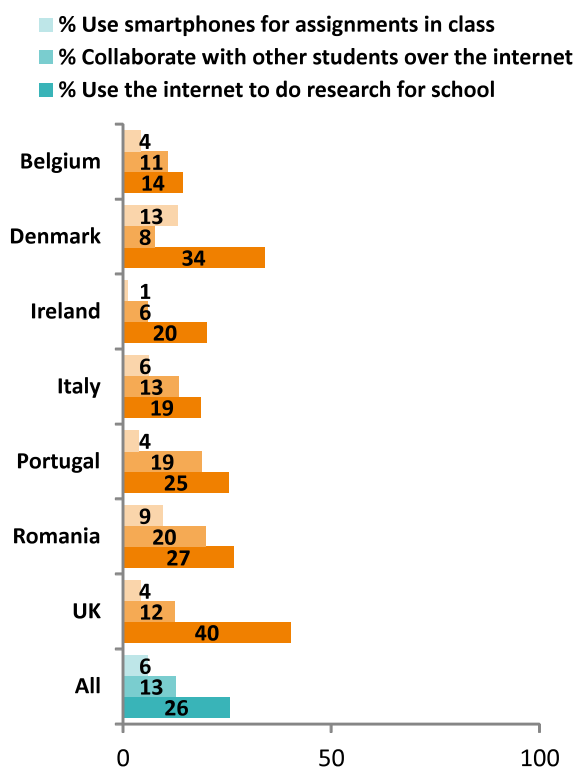
*In a way, it's good because you've got the evidence, whether it's Facebook or Snapchat or whatever, but on the other hand, they don't realise, the kids who send these messages don't realise how A, permanent and B, how many people can see them. I know when they had the assembly about social networking a couple of weeks ago, the year tens were all in a bit of a state that lunchtime, because of photos and stuff they knew they had on their personal accounts, and A, I said to them, you shouldn't have that sort of stuff on your account, but B, good you're scared because now you won't, maybe - but they will you know.*

Teacher, Secondary Schol, UK



Teachers may also encourage positive uses of the internet by promoting use of the internet and smartphones in school-related activities. Two out of three children report being encouraged by their teachers to use the internet to do research for school assignments at least every week. Far less common is the use of smartphones for assignments in class. The **integration of new technologies in learning activities** increases with ages, but is still uneven across countries, being particularly poor in Belgium, Ireland and Italy, as shown in Figure 33:

**Figure 33: Students who use the internet or smartphones daily at school, by country**



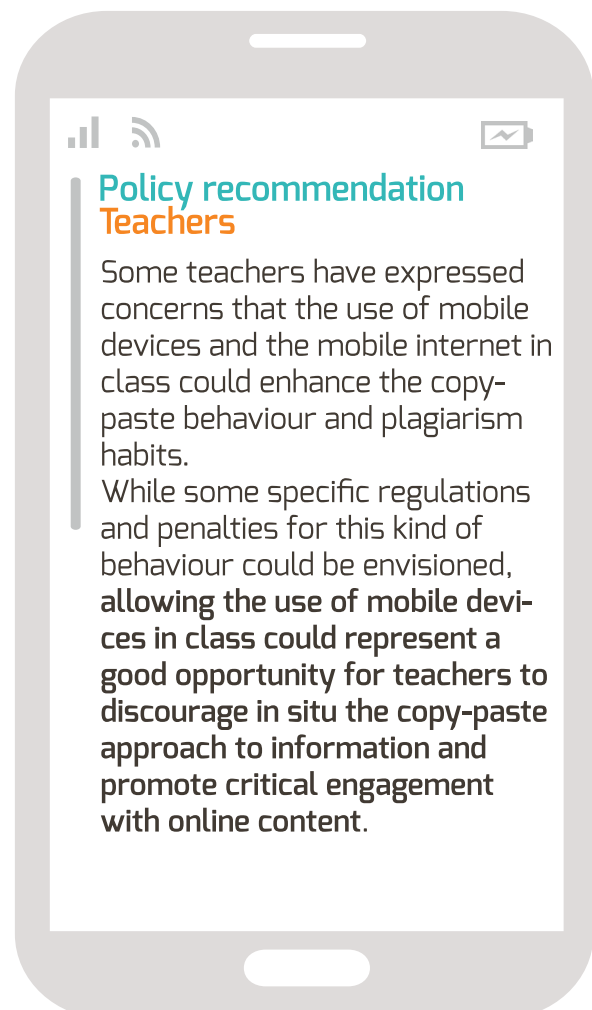
Base: All children who use the internet.

Children’s, teachers’ and parents’ comments seem to offer more reasons for using the mobile technology in school than to avoid it. Arguments in favour of the use of new devices in class are diverse, varying from health or ecological issues - the opportunity to replace heavy books and dictionaries - to psychological reasons - smartphones and tablets are more engaging for children. From the viewpoint of parents, replacing heavy dictionaries and books with digital books stored on a tablet is good for children’s health: *“in this way children don’t have to carry 5 kilos of books daily”* (Romanian mother).

Having digital and interactive educational supports, may be also very useful for children with cognitive disabilities: for example, Mario, an Italian 9 year old boy with a cognitive disability, already uses his tablet at school on a daily base for taking notes.

The adoption of tablets and other digital equipment in school can also promote more engaging teaching and learning methods, according to both students and teachers. Fabio, a 16 year old boy from Italy, says he felt more interested in class since the school provided students with an iPad. Some Romanian teachers agree, pointing that obtaining information very quickly by means of a tablet would increase children’s satisfaction and self-esteem, thus helping them delve deeper into academic subjects.

The challenges faced by **teachers** in managing and mediating their students use of digital devices are threefold: their own **poor digital skills**; the problem of **plagiarism** and the “copy-paste” practice - discussed especially by Italian and Romanian teachers and parents; and the need to allow for **equality of access** for their students.





## Policy recommendation Governments

European and national programmes to help teachers manage digital technologies for school related activities have had some results. Those designing **teachers' training programmes** need to consider the capabilities of new technologies and applications even though some of them do not look, at first glance, appear to be designed for educational purposes.

This is to say that, alongside the traditional and legitimate educational platforms, teachers also have to be trained about the potential of social media capabilities for education and how various apps might not only allow students to consult online information but also to create online content.

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**Final Report (Deliverables D6.4 & D5.2), November 2014  
Net Children Go Mobile Project**

CO-FUNDED BY:



Safer Internet Programme  
European Commission  
(SI-2012-KEP-411201)



**Net Children  
Go Mobile**

ISBN 978-88-6780-641-6



9 788867 806416

PRINTED ON NOVEMBER 2014

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