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Disadvantaged children and online risk

Report

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Summary

Educational/economic disadvantage

27% of children have parents with lower secondary education or less. These children report fewer online risks than average, but are more upset by risk, less skilled and less helped by parents to cope with risk.

25% of children have parents who do not use the internet. They report fewer online risks but more upset and have few skills to cope. Their parents lack confidence, lack support from friends and family, and wish the school would guide them.

7% of children use the internet less than once per week. Again reporting fewer risks but more harm than the average, these children's digital skills are lowest of all, and though their parents do not think their children well prepared to cope with the internet, they do not plan to do more than others.

Psychological disadvantage

41% of children have parents who say they are very worried about their safety online. These children have not encountered or been upset by more risks than average. Their parents lack confidence, think they should do more, and they both have and want more safety information.

34% of children reported more psychological difficulties than most. These children report more online risks and more harm. Their parents lack confidence but are likely to have adjusted their approach after something upset their child online.

12% of children have experienced something upsetting on the internet. These children report many more risk and harm experiences. Their skills are above average, suggesting a readiness to learn. Their parents too have changed their approach after an upsetting experience, and wish for more safety information from all sources.

Social disadvantage

6% of children have a mental, physical or other disability. These children report raised risk levels, and find meeting new online contacts offline more upsetting than average. Their parents are less confident that their child can cope, and they wish to receive more from ISPs and websites.

4% of children belong to a discriminated-against group. These children report more online risk. Their parents lack confidence in themselves and their children in terms of coping, receive less support from friends and family, and wish for safety information from the government.

4% of children speak a minority language at home. These children are more upset by bullying and 'sexting'. Their parents lack confidence in their and their child's ability to cope, they think they should do more to support their child online, and they receive less safety information from all sources than average – they prefer to get this from the child's school, from TV or friends and family.

Towards a safer internet for children

A multi-stakeholder context for safety. Since children are often in the vanguard of fast-paced technological changes, it is vital that the population is resourced to deal with associated safety issues. At international, European and national levels, government, industry and third sector organisations are working to make the internet safer for children. The intent is to maximise the benefits of internet use while minimising any harms to children, using a mix of legislation, co- and self-regulation, and technical/ informational support for families.

Providing resources for families. A major policy plank is the provision of resources directly to families – parents and children. This includes information (on safety, privacy, etc), social support (guidance and advice, for general use and in specific cases of difficulty), and technical tools (filtering and safety software on end-user devices or at the level of the service provider).

Inequalities in risk and safety. One problem often faced in public policy is that those most in need can be 'hard to reach'. A first step is to identify who they are, in relation to the specific challenges of online risks to children. A second problem is "the knowledge gap," namely that the more information and guidance is available, the more it is generally taken up by the information-rich rather than the information-poor. Just making resources available may even increase inequalities. Given inequalities in both risk and safety, it is vital to target resources for those who most need them.

This report

A focus on disadvantage. In this report we compare the risks, and the resources available, to children from specific disadvantaged groups. The analysis draws on the EU Kids Online survey of 25,142 children aged 9-16 who used the internet across 25 countries. The present intent is to guide the better targeting of safety resources in the future. Thus we reveal, first, inequalities in risk and, second, inequalities in safety, as these affect children across Europe.

Varieties of disadvantage. Families differ in many ways, and in approaching the analysis, we did not know in advance which kinds of difference would result in disadvantage or inequality. The findings show where knowledge gaps occur, and where they might have been expected but did not occur.

EU Kids Online

Indicators of disadvantage

Some forms of disadvantage are more common than others. Some indicators identify a small minority within the overall population. It was not presumed that any of the variables examined are inevitable sources of inequality or disadvantage, but all seemed worthy of exploration. Indeed, we were not sure which would be noteworthy, so we explored a range of factors from age (are young children more at risk, or are their parents less informed, for instance) to disability to low parental education, and so forth (Table 1).

While some are commonly recognised sources of disadvantage (e.g. disability), some might be disadvantages in this particular domain – for example, younger children are shown by our research to be using the internet more and more but policy resources are typically focused on teenagers; or, while parents who worry about their children are not necessarily disadvantaged, it would be a concern if these parents were receiving fewer (rather than more) safety resources. Gender was added because our research so far has shown that girls and boys engage and cope with what they encounter online slightly differently.

A strength of the EU Kids Online survey is that with an initial sample of over 25,000, we can pinpoint sources of disadvantage that are easily lost in smaller or national studies. Some subgroups are too small to break down findings by country in this report. But, since the overall sample is large, small percentage differences are statistically significant (shown in **bold**).

In what follows, we first examine potential inequalities in the experience of online risks, as defined and operationalised by the network.[1] Then we examine the sources of information and support available to and desired by parents and children, again categorised according to potential inequalities.

Note that each variable is treated independently of the others, to create a straightforward report of findings for each category of disadvantage. It should be borne in mind that underlying interrelations among the variables (e.g. that discriminated against groups are also lower in education) are not considered here

The possible sources of disadvantage examined in this short report can be classified in several ways.

- As indicators relating to the child or the parent/household (Table 1). This is a heuristic not absolute classification (for example, a child from a discriminated-against group) is likely to come from a similar household.

- As indicators relating to economic or educational resources (or lack of), or as indicators of psychological or social disadvantage or vulnerability. We use this classification to organise our conclusions.

Table 1: Indicators of potential disadvantage

Child indicators	% of all children
Gender:	
Girls	*50%*
Age:	
9-10 years	*23%*
11-12 years	*24%*
13-14 years	*27%*
15-16 years	*26%*
Child's internet use: How often do you use the internet?	
Use the internet less than weekly	*7%*
Child disadvantage:	
Belongs to a discriminated-against group[2]	*4%*
Has a mental/physical/other disability[3]	*6%*
In top third for self-reported psychological difficulties[4]	*34%*
Language used at home is minority language[5]	*4%*
Online harm: In the past 12 months, have you seen or experienced something on the internet that has bothered you in some way?	
Child says yes	12%
Parent indicators	
Parental education: Highest level of education completed by the head of household	
Lower secondary education or less	*27%*
Parental internet use: How often do you use the internet?	
Do not use the internet	*25%*
Parental confidence in using the internet: How confident are you in using the internet?	
Not very/at all confident user	*22%*
Parental view of the internet: Thinking about your child, which of these things, if any, do you worry about a lot?: Seeing inappropriate material on the internet; Being contacted by strangers on the internet	
Worried that child might be contacted by a stranger or see inappropriate material	*41%*
Online harm: As far as you are aware, in the past year, has your child seen or experienced something on the internet that has bothered them in some way?	
Parent says yes	*8%*

Scoping the nature of online risks

Table 2 summarises the EU Kids Online survey findings for online risk in terms of the above indicators of potential disadvantage.

- Across all children, 41% reported encountering one or more of the seven risks we asked about in the survey. This percentage is strongly related to age, for only 14% of 9-10 year olds, rising to 63% of 15-16 year olds, reported one or more risks. **Thus teenagers are more at risk than younger children.**

- Since teenagers also have more resilience to cope, this increased risk need not result in more harm. But, while their lack of technical, critical and social skills may pose risks for younger children, teenagers' orientation to online communication may pose risks as much as they open up opportunities: as they grow older, children are more likely to see the internet as a means to 'being oneself' or talking about private or intimate matters.[6]

- **The incidence of risk is raised by some 15% among children who belong to a discriminated-against group (47%), are in some way disabled (48%) or have more psychological difficulties (46%).** There is no effect for those who speak a minority language at home.

- For example, 10% of children who belong to a discriminated-against group or have some psychological difficulties report being bullied online, by comparison with 6% of all children. **Generally, a moderate increase in risk for disadvantaged children is evident across all measures of risk, including in the incidence of children who perpetrate risks.**

- Children and parents who report that the child has experienced something upsetting online are also, unsurprisingly, more likely to report risk encounters. Low internet users encounter fewer risks overall, for as *EU Kids Online* reports make clear, more use results in more risk (and more online opportunities).

- The incidence of risk by gender shows no clear pattern of differences and those differences that are significant do not exceed a range of 1% to 2%. Hence, we conclude that **gender differences in the experience of risks are not very noteworthy**.

Table 2: Online risk factors, by indicators of potential disadvantage

	Child as victim								Child as actor		
Child indicators	Seen sexual I images online	Been bullied online	Seen or received sexual messages	Contact with new people online	Meeting new online contacts offline	Negative user generated content	Misuse of personal data	One or more of these risks	Bullied others online	Sent sexual messages	Either of these
Girls	**12**	**7**	**13**	29	8	**23**	10	40	3	**2**	4
9-10 years	**5**	**3**		**13**	**2**			**14**	**1**		**1**
11-12 years	**8**	5	**7**	**20**	**4**	**12**	**7**	33	**2**	**2**	**3**
13-14 years	**16**	6	**13**	**32**	9	**22**	**10**	49	3	**2**	4
15-16 years	**25**	8	**22**	**46**	**36**	**29**	**11**	63	**5**	**5**	**8**
Use the internet less than weekly	**5**	**2**	**11**	**11**	**16**	**11**	**6**	**16**	**0**	3	**1**
Belongs to a discriminated-against group	17	**10**	**19**	**34**	**2**	25	**12**	**47**	4	2	5
Has a mental/physical/other disability	14	**8**	**18**	**35**	11	**27**	**15**	**48**	4	**5**	**6**
More psychological difficulties	**18**	**10**	**19**	**32**	11	**29**	**15**	**46**	**5**	4	**6**
Language used at home is minority language	12	**8**	14	31	11	**16**	9	39	**1**	4	3
Child says s/he experienced something upsetting online	**43**	**27**	**36**	**48**	**18**	**55**	**22**	**77**	**9**	**8**	**13**
Parent indicators											
Parent education is lower secondary or less	**12**	5	**13**	**25**	8	21	10	**38**	2	3	4
Do not use the internet	**11**	**4**	**12**	**22**	**6**	22	**8**	**35**	**2**	3	**3**
Not very/at all confident user	15	6	**16**	30	9	22	**11**	**42**	**4**	3	**5**
Worried that child might be contacted by a stranger or see inappropriate material	14	**7**	14	30	8	22	10	42	3	3	4
Parent says child experienced something upsetting online	**31**	**23**	**28**	**41**	**14**	**36**	**18**	**67**	**8**	**4**	**9**
All children	**14**	**6**	**15**	**30**	**9**	**21**	**9**	**41**	**3**	**3**	**4**

Note: Numbers **in bold** deviate significantly from the number for ALL children.

How children cope with online harms

Encountering a risk may or may not result in the experience of harm. For four risks (Table 4), we asked children follow up questions to identify whether they were bothered or upset by what happened and, then, what they did as a result (see Table 3). The purpose is to understand how far children are able to cope with the online risks they encounter.

- **Children with some psychological difficulties report being more likely to be upset by each risk, especially sexual images online.**
- **Children who belong to a discriminated-against group or who speak a minority language at home are more upset by being bullied online.**
- **Disadvantaged or vulnerable children are also more upset by sexting, while disabled children are particularly upset by meeting online contacts offline.**

- The likelihood of children being upset by online risks is raised if their parents who don't use the internet, suggesting the importance of parents getting online, even if they are not very confident users.
- Younger children are less likely to encounter sexual images, bullying, 'sexting' or offline meetings, but generally they are more bothered and upset when they do.
- Inexperienced child users (go online less often than weekly) are also less likely to encounter risk but more likely to be bothered by it when they do, reinforcing the importance of developing digital skills for coping.
- Girls are more likely to be upset by seeing sexual images or receiving sexual messages online than are boys. However, perhaps against common beliefs, girls are not more upset than boys by meeting new online contacts offline.

Table 3: Encountering risks and being bothered, by indicators of potential disadvantage

Child indicators	Sexual images online		Being bullied online		Seeing or receiving sexual messages		Meeting online contacts offline	
	Encountered	Bothered (of those who encountered)	Encountered	Bothered (of those who encountered)	Encountered	Bothered (of those who encountered)	Encountered	Bothered (of those who went to a meeting)
Girls	**12**	**42**	**7**	**84**	**13**	**36**	8	**9**
9-10 years	**5**	**59**	**3**	**84**			**2**	**33**
11-12 years	**8**	**46**	5	**79**	**7**	**46**	**4**	**21**
13-14 years	**16**	35	6	82	**13**	28	9	**10**
15-16 years	**25**	**25**	**8**	81	**22**	**21**	**36**	9
Use the internet less than weekly	**5**	**56**	**2**	**93**	11	**42**	**16**	**37**
Belongs to a discriminated-against group	**17**	35	**10**	**89**	**19**	33	**2**	15
Has a mental/physical/other disability	**14**	30	**8**	**84**	**18**	29	**11**	**22**
More psychological difficulties	**18**	**45**	**10**	84	**19**	**35**	**11**	**17**
Language used at home is minority language	12	32	**8**	**93**	14	**42**	11	**16**
Child says s/he experienced something upsetting online	**43**	**63**	**27**	**87**	**36**	**48**	**18**	**31**
Parent indicators								
Parent education is lower secondary or less	**12**	**37**	5	**88**	13	**32**	8	**14**
Do not use the internet	**11**	**40**	**4**	**86**	12	**43**	6	**18**
Not very/at all confident user	15	**39**	6	82	**16**	29	9	**10**
Worried that child might be contacted by a stranger or see inappropriate material	14	**38**	**7**	**84**	14	**28**	8	12
Parent says child experienced something upsetting online	**31**	**57**	**23**	**89**	**28**	**48**	**14**	**21**
All children	**14**	**34**	**6**	**81**	**15**	**27**	**9**	**12**

Note: Numbers **in bold** deviate significantly from the number for ALL children.

Digital literacy and safety skills

Digital literacy plays a vital role in children's use of the internet, both resulting from and further stimulating the range and depth of children's online activities. It is widely hoped that, as children become more digitally literate, the more they will gain from the internet while also being better prepared to avoid or cope with online risks. Digital literacy includes a broad range of skills and competences, including digital safety skills. Since measuring digital literacy directly is difficult, the *EU Kids Online* survey relied on the child's (aged 11-16) self-reported skills, with the focus on safety and critical skills.

On average, children said they had half of the skills we asked about, leaving plenty of room for improvement (4.2 out of 8; see Table 4).

- **Skills increase markedly with age, as noted in our previous reports. Thus younger children are less** able than older ones to manage the online environment skilfully.

- Girls report very slightly lower skill levels than boys. For 6 of the 8 skills around 1-4% fewer girls than boys claim to have them.

- **Children who use the internet infrequently, and children whose parents do not use the internet (or who are less educated), have fewer digital literacy and safety skills.**

- **Interestingly, discriminated-against children report more skills, suggesting that they have had cause to develop their skills through their increased exposure to risk** (as shown above).

- Relatedly, children who have had upsetting online experiences report higher skills, again suggesting that risk encounters may lead children to find out how to block messages, change privacy settings, and so forth. (It is also possible, however, that those with more skills do more online and so, in consequence, encounter more risks and harm).

Table 4: Children's digital literacy and safety skills ("Do you know how to do these things on the internet?"), by indicators of potential disadvantage

	Bookmark a website	Block messages from someone you don't want to hear from	Find information on how to use the internet safely	Change privacy settings on a social networking profile	Compare different websites to decide if information is true	Delete the record of which sites you have visited	Block unwanted adverts or junk mail/spam	Change filter preferences	Average number of skills
Child indicators									
Girls	**62**	64	**61**	57	**54**	48	49	24	**4.0**
9-10 years									
11-12 years	**49**	**46**	**47**	**35**	**40**	**33**	**34**	**14**	**2.8**
13-14 years	**66**	**66**	**65**	**60**	**58**	**55**	**53**	27	4.3
15-16 years	**75**	**77**	**74**	**72**	**68**	**67**	**64**	**43**	**5.2**
Use the internet less than weekly	**28**	**28**	**42**	**18**	**34**	**19**	**20**	**8**	**1.8**
Belongs to a discriminated-against group	65	**68**	**69**	63	60	**67**	58	34	4.7
Has a mental/physical/other disability	**70**	67	64	58	57	**58**	53	**31**	4.4
More psychological difficulties	60	61	58	54	52	52	48	29	3.9
Language used at home is minority language	65	66	63	53	54	51	52	**34**	4.3
Child says s/he experienced something upsetting online	**77**	**77**	**73**	**68**	**67**	**62**	**62**	37	**5.0**
Parent indicators									
Parent education is lower secondary or less	**58**	**58**	**57**	**49**	**48**	**48**	**48**	25	**3.7**
Do not use the internet	**46**	**49**	**53**	**42**	**43**	**42**	**38**	23	**3.2**
Not very/at all confident user	**71**	**69**	**67**	**62**	**61**	**56**	**56**	28	4.3
Worried that child might be contacted by a stranger or see inappropriate material	64	63	62	56	54	**50**	50	**26**	4.1
Parent says child experienced something upsetting online	**73**	**76**	**71**	**67**	**65**	**58**	**61**	32	**4.9**
All children	**64**	**64**	**63**	**56**	**56**	**52**	**51**	**28**	**4.2**

Note: Numbers **in bold** deviate significantly from the number for ALL children.

Children's sources of safety information

Overall, 63% of European 9-16 year olds have received internet safety advice from parents, 58% from teachers and 44% from peers. In addition, we asked children if they have ever received advice about how to use the internet safely from any of a range of people and places, as shown in Table 5.

- This reveals that **low internet users are most likely to receive no safety information from any source, followed by 9-10 year olds** (though they are the most upset age group when something goes wrong) and disabled children.

- Children who have been upset by something online seem to have found a way to get safety information – from most available sources.

- **Children who come from a discriminated-against group (or who speak a minority language) get less guidance from parents** but more from peers and from other adults whose job it is to give advice.

- **Children whose parents don't use the internet get much less safety guidance from their parents** (though parental confidence, or education, makes little difference – these parents do guide their children).

Table 5: Children's actual sources of information, by indicators of potential disadvantage

	Suggested ways to use the internet safely			Other sources of advice on internet safety							None of these
	Parents	Peers	Teachers	Other relatives	TV etc	Websites	Someone whose job is to give advice	ISPs	Youth, or church or social worker	Librarian	None of these
Child indicators											
Girls	64	44	59	**48**	**21**	**10**	9	**5**	6	5	**9**
9-10 years	**68**	**38**	**50**	45	**10**	**5**	**5**	**3**	**4**	**4**	**12**
11-12 years	**67**	42	58	**49**	19	**9**	**8**	**5**	**5**	6	**9**
13-14 years	64	**47**	**62**	**49**	23	**14**	**11**	**8**	**7**	6	**8**
15-16 years	**55**	**46**	**60**	43	25	**20**	**12**	**10**	**8**	6	**9**
Use the internet less than weekly	**58**	35	49	43	13	**4**	**4**	**2**	**4**	**4**	**14**
Belongs to a discriminated-against group	**55**	47	59	44	18	11	**15**	5	5	**8**	10
Has a mental/physical/other disability	**55**	39	58	48	22	**15**	10	**8**	**8**	7	**12**
More psychological difficulties	**59**	42	58	46	20	13	9	6	**8**	7	11
Language used at home is minority language	**57**	43	**62**	47	**17**	**9**	**17**	7	5	**8**	9
Child says s/he experienced something upsetting online	65	**47**	**65**	**52**	25	**18**	**12**	**10**	**10**	9	**5**
Parent indicators											
Parent education is lower secondary or less	**57**	44	**61**	45	20	**10**	**7**	7	6	6	10
Do not use the internet	**47**	46	58	**43**	20	**9**	**6**	**5**	6	5	**12**
Not very/at all confident user	64	44	**55**	**50**	19	**14**	**11**	6	7	**7**	9
Worried that child might be contacted by a stranger or see inappropriate material	**66**	44	**61**	**50**	21	12	**11**	7	7	6	**7**
Parent says child experienced something upsetting online	**74**	45	**67**	**56**	26	**18**	**11**	**10**	8	8	**5**
All children	63	43	58	46	20	12	9	6	6	6	10

Note: Numbers **in bold** deviate significantly from the number for ALL children.

Sources of support when upset by online experiences

Who do children turn to when they experience something online that bothers or upsets them?

- **Children whose parents don't use the internet are less likely to turn to their mother or father when they experience upsetting sexual images on the internet.**

- On the other hand, children who use the internet infrequently are much more likely to tell someone, especially their parents or siblings, when they experience upsetting sexual images on the internet.

- **Disabled children are less likely to have a friend to turn to** under such circumstances.

- **Children from minority or discriminated against groups are more likely to tell a teacher.**

- Although children with greater psychological difficulties as well as girls are more likely to be upset by seeing sexual images online, **they are no more likely to tell anyone about this.**

Table 6: Responses to seeing sexual images

Child indicators	Seeing sexual images online		Who the child talked to after seeing sexual images online (only children who have been bothered by such images)				
	Encountered	Bothered	Anyone at all	Mother or father	Brother or sister	A friend	A teacher
Girls	12	**42**	56	28	11	36	3
9-10 years	**5**	**59**	61	**47**	8	24	3
11-12 years	**8**	**46**	62	**41**	11	31	6
13-14 years	**16**	35	53	18	11	35	3
15-16 years	**25**	**25**	45	**14**	6	39	2
Use the internet less than weekly	**5**	**56**	74	**57**	24	33	9
Belongs to a discriminated-against group	**17**	35	52	31	8	39	12
Has a mental/physical/other disability	**14**	30	54	26	9	24	5
More psychological difficulties	**18**	45	52	24	12	35	3
Language used at home is minority language	12	32	60	43	26	49	17
Child says s/he experienced something upsetting online	**43**	**63**	57	32	11	33	5
Parent indicators							
Parent education is lower secondary or less	**12**	37	55	20	14	39	4
Do not use the internet	**11**	40	59	**14**	14	42	4
Not very/at all confident user	15	**39**	49	29	9	34	5
Worried that child might be contacted by a stranger or see inappropriate material	14	**38**	52	27	6	30	2
Parent says child experienced something upsetting online	**31**	**57**	70	**48**	12	35	2
All children	**14**	**34**	**53**	**26**	**9**	**34**	**3**

Note: Numbers **in bold** deviate significantly from the number for ALL children.

When it comes to being bullied online:

- Girls are more likely to tell anyone about it than boys - **60% of girls tell a friend about it.** When it comes to telling any other person, however, boys and girls are equally likely to do so.

- **Younger children are more likely to tell a parent or sibling when they are upset by being bullied online, while older teenagers are least likely to tell a teacher.**

- Parents who are aware of a child having been upset by something online are, unsurprisingly, more likely to have a child who tells their parents what happens to them.

- **Those from discriminated-against groups or who speak a minority language at home are much more likely to tell someone than are other children, especially a parent.**

Table 7: Responses to being bullied online

	Being bullied online		Who the child talked to after receiving hurtful or nasty messages online (only children who have been bothered by bullying)				
Child indicators	Encountered	Bothered	Anyone at all	Mother or father	Brother or sister	A friend	A teacher
Girls	**7**	**84**	**85**	47	16	**60**	8
9-10 years	**3**	**84**	78	**51**	**20**	**40**	10
11-12 years	5	**79**	76	**54**	18	**38**	11
13-14 years	6	82	82	39	10	**61**	9
15-16 years	**8**	81	74	**33**	12	57	**3**
Use the internet less than weekly	**2**	**93**	78	52	**30**	41	15
Belongs to a discriminated-against group	**10**	**89**	**88**	53	7	49	6
Has a mental/physical/other disability	**8**	**84**	80	41	14	50	5
More psychological difficulties	**10**	**84**	74	39	14	50	9
Language used at home is minority language	**8**	**93**	**90**	**67**	15	45	10
Child says s/he experienced something upsetting online	**27**	**87**	74	46	17	53	9
Parent indicators							
Parent education is lower secondary or less	5	**88**	78	46	13	48	6
Do not use the internet	**4**	**86**	71	36	11	44	9
Not very/at all confident user	6	82	75	43	11	47	6
Worried that child might be contacted by a stranger or see inappropriate material	**7**	**84**	78	43	16	52	7
Parent says child experienced something upsetting online	**23**	**89**	**87**	**67**	17	49	10
All children	**6**	**81**	**77**	**42**	**14**	**52**	**7**

Note: Numbers **in bold** deviate significantly from the number for ALL children.

Parental mediation of children's internet use

Parents play many roles, to a greater or lesser degree, in relation to their children's internet use. Some are restrictive (e.g. setting rules and restrictions), some involve active sharing of the online experience (e.g. doing things together online, talking about the internet), some involve watching the child's online activities (whether in their presence or later).

In the *EU Kids Online* survey, we asked a series of questions regarding their assessment of the effectiveness of their mediating activities (see Table 8).

- 44% of parents think they are able to help their child online "a lot", 31% say that their actions help their child's internet experience "a lot", and 27% agree "a lot" that their child can deal with things that bother them online.

- However, **parents of children with psychological difficulties feel less able to help.**
- **This is even more the case for parents who do not use the internet.**
- Parents whose child has experienced something upsetting online, interestingly, say they have **adjusted their mediation style** and they feel more confident that they can help, suggesting some degree of 'learning through doing'.
- Children from minority/discriminated groups have parents who **are more likely to doubt their ability to support their child** and who think they should do more to help them.

Table 8: Parents' views of mediation, by indicators of potential disadvantage

Child indicators	Parents' actions help making their child's internet experience better	Parents think they should do more regarding their child's internet use	Parents do things differently because their child has been bothered online	Parents think they are able to help their child on the internet	Parents think their child can deal with things that bother them on the internet
Girls	31	54	16	44	26
9-10 years	**43**	52	16	**48**	**18**
11-12 years	32	**55**	15	45	**21**
13-14 years	**27**	**55**	16	44	**28**
15-16 years	**22**	**49**	14	**38**	37
Use the internet less than weekly	30	51	15	44	**18**
Belongs to a discriminated-against group	33	**60**	**22**	38	21
Has a mental/physical/other disability	29	53	16	**44**	**19**
More psychological difficulties	**26**	59	20	39	25
Language used at home is minority language	31	**58**	**12**	36	23
Child says s/he experienced something upsetting online	29	**56**	20	44	28
Parent indicators					
Parent education is lower secondary or less	**24**	54	16	**38**	25
Do not use the internet	**15**	**62**	19	**26**	23
Not very/at all confident user	30	**59**	14	**39**	24
Worried that child might be contacted by a stranger or see inappropriate material	31	**61**	16	44	**23**
Parent says child experienced something upsetting online	**37**	57	**36**	**53**	28
All children	**31**	**53**	**15**	**44**	**27**

Note: Numbers **in bold** deviate significantly from the number for ALL children.

Parental sources of safety information

Parents were asked to about their sources of information and advice on safety tools and safe use of the internet. Table 9 indicates that parents get internet safety advice first and foremost from family and friends (48%), then traditional media (32%), the child's school (27%), internet service providers (22%) and websites (21%).

- **Those with younger children (9-12 years) are a little more likely to get advice from their child's school.** Interestingly, 13% say they have received safety information from their own child. One in seven parents (13%) reports getting no advice from any of the sources described in the table.

- As children get older, parents get less safety information from their child's school and more from their child him or herself.

- **Parents who don't use the internet, and those whose children use the internet infrequently, are unsurprisingly less likely to gain safety information from their Internet Service Provider or from websites.**

- Parents who are worried about online risks to their child appear **to seek out safety information more often from a range of sources**; so too do parents whose child has experienced something upsetting online.

- Children with a disability tend to have parents more likely to gain information from a range of sources (TV, ISPs, NGOs, websites, etc) but are a little **less likely to get such information from their child's school** (23% vs. 27% for all children).

- Children who have more psychological difficulties have parents who get a little **less information** from most of the sources listed. This is also the case for parents who speak a minority language at home.

Table 9: Parents' actual sources of information, by indicators of potential disadvantage

Child indicators	School	TV etc	ISPs	Government	NGOs	Websites	Manufacturers	Family and friends	From child	Other sources	None of these
Girls	28	32	21	7	4	20	9	49	13	8	13
9-10 years	28	31	**23**	7	4	21	10	**50**	**8**	9	13
11-12 years	**31**	32	22	**8**	4	**19**	10	49	**11**	8	**12**
13-14 years	**25**	33	22	7	**5**	22	10	49	**14**	8	13
15-16 years	**24**	33	**0**	6	4	20	**8**	**44**	16	8	**16**
Use the internet less than weekly	**30**	29	**14**	**5**	4	**15**	**6**	46	**9**	7	**17**
Belongs to a discriminated-against group	26	31	21	**11**	6	19	10	**41**	11	9	**18**
Has a mental/physical/other disability	**23**	35	25	8	8	24	12	50	15	12	13
More psychological difficulties	**29**	30	**19**	6	4	**17**	**8**	47	13	**7**	**16**
Language used at home is minority language	25	**27**	**15**	**3**	3	**15**	**7**	45	11	9	**18**
Child says s/he experienced something upsetting online	27	32	22	7	4	21	10	48	13	8	**11**
Parent indicators											
Parent education is lower secondary or less	27	**26**	**17**	**5**	**3**	**13**	**6**	44	**14**	**5**	**17**
Do not use the internet	**37**	**24**	**7**	4	**2**	**4**	**3**	**37**	**16**	**3**	**24**
Not very/at all confident user	**23**	31	**20**	8	4	**18**	**7**	**54**	**14**	7	**10**
Worried that child might be contacted by a stranger or see inappropriate material	**30**	**35**	**24**	**10**	**5**	**22**	10	**52**	**15**	9	**12**
Parent says child experienced something upsetting online	**30**	34	**26**	**9**	5	22	10	49	**17**	**11**	**6**
All children	**27**	**32**	**22**	**7**	**4**	**21**	**10**	**48**	**13**	**8**	**13**

Note: Numbers **in bold** deviate significantly from the number for ALL children.

Parents' desired sources of safety information

The *EU Kids Online* survey also asked parents where they would like to get information and advice about internet safety from in the future, so as to focus further awareness-raising activities.

- Table 10 shows that the child's school is the most popular choice for parents at 43%, while friends and family drop to third place at 29%. Only around 9% of parents say that they don't want further information on internet safety.

- **Parents who don't use the internet, or whose children use the internet infrequently, are especially likely to want further information from their child's school** and much less likely to want information from ISPs or websites.

- Parents whose **child belongs to a discriminated-against group are slightly more likely to want information from the government and NGOs,** and a little less likely to want information from their child's school (this applies also to those who speak a minority language at home).

- **Parents who are worried about their child online would like more information from most sources**, as would those whose child experienced something upsetting online.

Table 10: Parents' desired sources of information, by indicators of potential disadvantage

	Parents' actual sources of information										
Child indicators	School	TV etc	ISP's	Government	NGO's	Websites	Manufacturers	Family and friends	From child	Other sources	Do not want any more
Girls	43	31	26	19	13	24	16	29	12	6	8
9-10 years	**47**	31	**28**	21	**13**	25	17	30	**9**	6	8
11-12 years	**47**	31	27	20	13	25	16	29	11	7	**7**
13-14 years	42	33	25	19	12	24	16	29	13	6	8
15-16 years	**36**	31	**24**	**18**	11	23	16	**27**	**14**	7	**10**
Use the internet less than weekly	**48**	30	**19**	**17**	11	**21**	**14**	30	11	6	9
Belongs to a discriminated-against group	41	**28**	23	**25**	14	23	16	26	11	7	7
Has a mental/physical/other disability	**40**	32	**33**	21	14	**30**	**19**	30	**15**	**10**	9
More psychological difficulties	**44**	30	25	18	12	21	13	28	13	6	9
Language used at home is minority language	**37**	**26**	**18**	**16**	**8**	**19**	**9**	26	**9**	7	**13**
Child says s/he experienced something upsetting online	44	**34**	29	22	15	28	18	28	**14**	9	6
Parent indicators											
Parent education is lower secondary or less	44	**27**	**20**	17	9	**17**	**11**	28	12	**5**	8
Do not use the internet	**52**	30	**12**	13	8	**10**	8	28	**14**	4	10
Not very/at all confident user	42	31	26	**22**	15	24	17	30	13	**5**	**6**
Worried that child might be contacted by a stranger or see inappropriate material	**50**	36	29	25	16	26	19	31	14	8	8
Parent says child experienced something upsetting online	**49**	37	36	29	18	35	23	28	**15**	11	3
All children	43	32	26	20	12	24	16	29	12	6	8

Note: Numbers **in bold** deviate significantly from the number for ALL children.

Summary of findings by minority group

Children may be disadvantaged by lack of economic or cultural capital or they may be disadvantaged through social or psychological vulnerability. We used several proxy measures to identify these groups. The differences reported here are generally small yet indicative. They pinpoint the importance of targeting safety resources differently for different minority groups.

Demographic factors

- Girls are more likely to be upset by seeing sexual images or receiving sexual messages online than are boys but they are not more likely to tell anyone about it. However, when upset by being bullied girls (60%) are more likely to tell a friend than boys. Notably, there are few or no gender differences concerning harm from meeting new online contacts offline.

- Younger children are less likely to encounter online risks but more likely to be bothered or upset by them when they occur. In part, this may because they have fewer digital literacy and safety skills. Younger children receive more safety guidance from parents and other relatives, but less from peers, teachers, websites and most other sources. Parents of younger children are more confident in their ability to help their child and less confident in their child's ability to cope alone.

Educational or economic disadvantage

- *27% of children have parents with lower secondary education or less*. These children report fewer online risks than the European average, but are more upset when they encounter risk. They also claim fewer digital literacy and safety skills than the average. This relatively inexperienced group in terms of internet risks has parents who feel less confident in supporting their children online, who receive less safety information from a range of sources, and who are less likely to wish for more such information than the average.

- *25% of children have parents who do not use the internet*. These children also report fewer online risks than the European average and they are also more upset when they encounter risk. Their digital skills are even lower than the above group, probably because fewer have the internet at home. Their parents are less confident also that they can support their child online, though they think they should do more. These parents are less likely than most to get safety information from their friends or family, and they especially wish their child's school would provide more such information. These children are less likely to turn to their mother or father when they experience upsetting sexual images on the internet.

- *7% of children use the internet less than once per week*. These children also report fewer online risks than the European average and they are also more upset when they encounter risk. Their digital skills are very low – they have only two of the eight skills we asked about. These children are much more likely to tell someone, especially their parents or siblings, when they experience upsetting sexual images on the internet. Although their parents do not consider their children well prepared to cope with the internet, they do not plan to do more themselves than the average parent, nor do they desire more safety information than others.

Psychological disadvantage or vulnerability

- *41% of children have parents who say they are very worried about their safety online*. Interestingly, these children are no more likely than average to have encountered online risks, nor are they more upset by them and their digital skills are average. However, their parents are a little less confident that their child can cope with online risks, and they think they should do more to support their child online. They are also in receipt of slightly more safety information than the average, and they wish to receive more still, from most sources.

- *34% of children reported more psychological difficulties than most*. These children report more online risks than the average, and they are more upset when they occur. Although children with greater psychological difficulties are more likely to be upset by seeing sexual images online, they are no more likely to tell anyone about this. Their digital skills are just below average and their parents lack confidence in their ability to help their child online, though they are more likely to have adjusted their approach after something upset their child online. These parents neither receive nor wish for more safety information than the average parent.

- *12% of children have experienced something upsetting on the internet*. These children report many more risk and harm experiences than the average, as often recognised also by their parents. Their digital skills are above average, suggesting a readiness to learn to manage the internet better after an upsetting experience. Their parents, too, have changed their approach after their child was upset online, and they are fairly confident in both their and their child's ability to cope in future, compared with the average. Among those parents aware of their child's experience, there is a desire for more safety information from all sources.

Social disadvantage or discrimination

- *6% of children have a mental, physical or other disability*. These children report raised risk levels, especially in relation to contact risks. They find these

more upsetting in relation to meeting new online contacts offline, though not otherwise. Their digital skills are also a little higher than average, though their parents are less confident that their child can cope with what they find online. Disabled children are less likely to have a friend to turn to when they experience upsetting sexual images on the internet. Their parents receive slightly more safety information and, particularly, would like to receive more from ISPs and websites than would most.

- *4% of children belong to a discriminated-against group.* These children report more online risk, though only slightly more harm from these risks. Their digital skills are above average, though their parents tend to lack confidence in themselves and their children in terms of coping with online problems, and they are more likely to have adjusted their approach in response to such problems. These children are more likely to tell a teacher when they experience upsetting sexual images on the internet. Their parents think they should do more to help, and they are more likely to be aware of safety information from the government, and would like yet more, though they get less support from their friends and family.

- *4% of children speak a minority language at home.* Risks encountered by these children are about average though they report being more upset from bullying and 'sexting'. Their digital skills are average, but their parents lack confidence in their own skills and their child's ability to cope, and they think they should do more to support their child online. They receive less safety information from all sources than the average. Though they mostly prefer to receive such information from the child's school, from TV or friends and family, they wish for less not more than does the average parent.

Recommendations to providers

- Girls need more support than boys to cope with sexual content they encountered online but boys need more encouragement to talk to someone about their online bullying experiences.

- Boys and girls equally need attention regarding encounters with online contacts offline which can be similarly harmful to both.

- Similarly, younger children need more support in relation to avoiding or coping with harms associated with internet use, even though they encounter fewer of these than do older children. Older children, however, encounter more risk and so also need the resources to cope with what they find.

- For children whose parents lack economic or cultural/educational resources, the challenge is to build digital skills and resilience given a relative lack of experience of the internet at home.

- It is important to increase the confidence of these parents, and to raise awareness that more safety knowledge would be beneficial. The child's school has a key role here as a trusted source.

- For children with social, familial or psychological vulnerabilities, the challenge is rather different. These children may already be experiencing more risk of harm from internet use, though parental worries are a poor indicator of such experiences.

- Some vulnerable children have increased digital skills already, so the policy priority is less to raise their skills further than to consider other ways of reducing harm.

- This could include helping those parents who think they should do more to support their child, providing 'just in time' guidance for those coping with an upsetting experience, and ensuring a wider range of sources of safety information (e.g. online sources for parents of disabled children, government sources for parents of discriminated-against children.

Recent reports from EU Kids Online

Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K. (2011). *EU Kids Online final report.*

Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full findings.*

Livingstone, S., and Ólafsson, K. (2011) *Risky communication online.*

O'Neill, B., Livingstone, S. and McLaughlin, S. (2011). *Final Recommendations. Policy Implications, Methodological Lessons and Further Research Recommendations.*

Sonck, N., Livingstone, S., Kuiper, E., and de Haan, J. (2011) *Digital literacy and safety skills.*

Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K., and Staksrud, E. (2011) *Social networking, age and privacy.*

Hasebrink, U., Görzig, A., Haddon, L., Kalmus, V. and Livingstone, S. (2011) *Patterns of risk and safety online. In-depth analyses from the EU Kids Online survey of 9-16 year olds and their parents in 25 countries.*

Lobe, B., Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K. and Vodeb, H. (2011) *Cross-national comparison of risks and safety on the internet: Initial analysis from the EU Kids Online survey of European children.*

Görzig, A. (2011) *Who bullies and who is bullied online? A study of 9-16 year old internet users in 25 European countries.*

Garmendia, M., Garitaonandia, C., Martínez, G. and Casado, M.A. (2011) *Riesgos y seguridad en internet. The Spanish report.*

O'Neill, B., Grehan, S. and Ólafsson, K. (2011) *Risks and safety on the internet: The Ireland report.*

Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A. and Ólafsson, K. (2011) *Risks and safety on the internet: The UK report.*

Hasebrink, U., Livingstone, S., Haddon, L. and Ólafsson, K. (eds) (2009) *Comparing children's online opportunities and risks across Europe: Cross-national comparisons for EU Kids Online* (2nd edn).

Staksrud, E., Livingstone, S., Haddon, L. and Ólafsson, K. (2009) *What do we know about children's use of online technologies? A report on data availability and research gaps in Europe* (2nd edn).

Lobe, B., Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K. and Simões, J.A. (eds) (2008) *Best practice research guide: How to research children and online technologies in comparative perspective.*

All may be freely downloaded from www.eukidsonline.net

See also Livingstone, S. and Haddon, L. (2009) *Kids online: Opportunities and risks for children.* Bristol: Policy Press.

Our next book will be published in summer 2012: Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., and Görzig, A. (in press), *Children, risk and safety online*, Bristol: The Policy Press

Endnotes

[1] For definitions of risks, see Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full findings.* At www.eukidsonline.net

[2] Would you say that your child belongs to a group that is discriminated against in this country (for example, in terms of ethnicity, language, religion or other factors) or not really?

[3] Does your child have any of the following difficulties? Physical disability; Physical illness; Mental health difficulty; Behavioural difficulty; Learning difficulty; Other disability.

[4] Psychological Difficulties - adapted from Goodman (1998) 16 item Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, using items measuring psychological difficulties only.

[5] What are the main languages spoken at home? Languages classified according to responses from respondents in the same geographical area.

[6] See Livingstone, S., and Ólafsson, K. (2011) *Risky communication online.* At www.eukidsonline.net