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EU Kids Online II: a large-scale quantitative approach to the study of European children's use of the internet and online risks and safety

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## 1. EU Kids Online II: A large scale quantitative approach regarding European children's use, risk and safety online

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### 1. Contributor Biographies

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*Leslie Haddon:* A senior researcher and part-time lecturer at the department of Media and Communications at LSE. He has carried out research on everyday use, risks and engagements of children and young people with mobile and online technologies. He is also concerned with digital divides, internet use and cross-national research. He has been part of the UK team of EU Kids Online since 2006.

*Anke Görzig*: Lecturer in Psychology at the University of West London and visiting fellow at LSE. Her research interests include adolescents' risk experiences (specifically on the internet, e.g. cyberbullying), stereotyping and discrimination, evaluation of mental health service practices and statistical methods in the social sciences. She was the survey research officer of the EU Kids Online II project.

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### 2. Relevant disciplines
Media and Communications, Psychology, Sociology and Social Policy.

### 3. Academic level
Postgraduate.

### 4. Methods used
Personal interviews
Computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI)
Survey (Random *stratified* sampling)

### 5. Keywords
Internet, media, children, young people, risk, harm, opportunities, uses, parenting and policy provision.

### 6. Link to the research output

- Livingstone, Sonia, Haddon, Leslie, Görzig, Anke and Ólafsson, Kjartan (2011) *Risks and safety on the internet: the perspective of European children: full findings and policy implications from the EU Kids Online survey of 9-16 year olds and their parents in 25 countries.* EU Kids Online.

EU Kids Online Network, London, UK. Retrieved from http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/33731/

- Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K. (2011) *EU Kids Online II: Final Report*. LSE, London: EU Kids Online. Retrieved from http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/39351/
- Livingstone, Sonia and Haddon, Leslie (2012) *EU Kids Online II: enhancing knowledge regarding European children's use, risk and safety online.* EU Kids Online, Deliverable D1.6. The London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK. Final management report retrieved from http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/52636/
- Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., & Görzig, A. (eds) (2012). *Children, risk and safety on the Internet: Research and policy challenges in comparative perspective.* Bristol: The Policy Press.

## 2. Abstract

The EU Kids Online II project built on the previous project's literature review and development of methods to generate detailed cross-national evidence about children's use, risks and harms online. The project aimed to provide comparable survey data that permit the joint elaboration of social policies for internet use and protection for young people. It conducted in-home, face to face personal interviews with 9-16 year olds and, separately, with one of their parents of each child interviewed, across 25 countries in Europe. Nationally representative survey samples were drawn in each country, resulting in just over 25,000 interviews with children (and parents) being carried out in total. The interviews were primarily closed-ended, with an open-ended (qualitative) element and with sensitive questions being asked privately in confidence. There are several key findings from the data collected. First, while higher use is positively correlated with higher risk online, this is not necessarily problematic as it can allow children to build resilience. Second, a majority of children are online and mobile already, making their online lives potentially as important as their offline lives. Finally, the project makes a series of recommendations for stakeholders in regards to online opportunities, awareness-raising, digital and safety skills, active and restrictive forms of parenting, and children's coping strategies, all of which can positively or negatively affect a child's engagement with the online environment.

## 3. 3-5 learning outcomes

By the end of the case, readers should have:

A. Become aware of the importance of adjustment tools in survey-based methods when undertaking research on children

B. Developed an understanding of how to appropriately deal with sensitive issues that may arise during the data collection process

C. Considered the difficulties of cross-national survey research in regards to language, subjective responses and comparability

D. Learnt how to be systematic and rigorous in selecting units for comparison in sampling and analysis

## 4. Discussion questions

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of choosing children's perceptions as the unit of analysis? Do you think the methods chosen were appropriate? What other methods could be used?

- Can you think of further ways to optimise cross-national comparability? What do you think of the steps taken by the EU Kids Online project?

- Assess and discuss how translation and back-translation of the survey in this project could have affected results and how you might work to minimise measurement errors.

- If you were to adapt this study outside of Europe to a country of your own choosing, what are some of the differences and problems you would have to deal with and can you think of ways to deal with them?

## 5. MAIN BODY OF THE CASE

**Research Context**

The EU Kids Online II project was organised as a direct follow-up from a previous EU Kids Online I project (2006–09), which reviewed the available research in 21 European countries into how children and young people use new media, and the opportunities and risks that arise. The first project revealed a dearth of rigorous, comparative data regarding children's internet use, which could inform the development of internet safety policy at the crucial moment when internet access was rapidly spreading across Europe. It provided the context for the design and conduct of a 25-country comparative study of internet use among 9–16 year olds in Europe. The research was invited and, subsequently, widely used by the European Commission's

Safer Internet Programme, a body designed to coordinate policy and safety initiatives across Europe.

**Research topic/theme**

The rapidity with which children and young people are gaining access to online, convergent, mobile and networked media is unprecedented in the history of technological innovation. Parents, teachers and children are acquiring, learning how to use, and finding a purpose for the internet within their daily lives. Stakeholders – governments, schools, industry, child welfare organisations and families – seek to maximise online opportunities while minimising the risk of harm associated with internet use (Livingstone, 2009b).

Diverse and ambitious efforts are underway in many countries to promote digital technologies in schools, e-governance initiatives, digital participation and digital literacy. As many families are discovering, the benefits are considerable. New opportunities for learning, participation, creativity and communication are being explored by children, parents, schools, and public and private sector organisations.

The EU Kids Online I research identified a complex array of online opportunities and risks associated with children's internet use. It argued that risks may arise when children are sophisticated, confident or experimental internet users, as observed in 'high use, high risk' countries, or when, as in 'new use, new risk' countries, children gain internet access in advance of an infrastructure of awareness-raising programmes, parental understanding, regulation and safety protection (Livingstone and Haddon, 2009a). Although the popular fear that the internet endangers all children has not been supported by evidence, there are grounds for concern and intervention. The original project also argued that, despite the popular rhetoric of 'digital natives', many children still lack resources to use the internet sufficiently to explore its opportunities or to develop vital digital literacy skills (Helsper and Eynon, 2010), highlighting the importance of encouraging and facilitating children's confident and flexible internet use. Evidence was needed to guide the difficult balancing act faced by stakeholders: promoting online opportunities without careful attention to safety may also promote online risk, but measures to reduce risk may have the unintended consequence of reducing opportunities (Livingstone and Helsper, 2010).

**Aims and objectives**

The aim was to identify comparable research findings across Europe on the basis of which recommendations for child safety, media literacy and awareness could be formulated. The project members invited communications from the wider community, practitioners and researchers with a view to achieving this goal.

The project aims were framed in accordance with the 2008 Safer Internet plus Programme, namely: 'To enhance the knowledge base regarding children's and parents' experiences and practices regarding risky and safer use of the internet and new online technologies in Europe, in order to inform the promotion of a safer online environment for children.'

Enhancing the knowledge base is here understood as:

1. Producing new, relevant, robust and comparable findings regarding the incidence of online risk among European children;

2. Pinpointing which children are particularly at risk and why, by examining vulnerability factors (at both individual and country levels);

3. Examining the operation and effectiveness of parental regulation and awareness strategies, and children's own coping responses to risk, including their media literacy.

Building on existing knowledge and experience, this aim was operationalised in the *EU Kids Online II* project as specific objectives:

• To design a thorough and robust survey instrument appropriate for identifying the nature of children's online access, use, risk, coping and safety awareness;

• To design a thorough and robust survey instrument appropriate for identifying the nature of parental experiences, practices and concerns regarding their children's internet use;

• To administer the survey in a reliable and ethically sensitive manner to national samples of internet users aged 9–16, and their parents, in Europe;

• To analyse the results systematically so as to identify both core findings and more complex patterns among findings on a national and comparative basis;

• To disseminate the findings in a timely manner to a wide range of relevant

stakeholders nationally, across Europe, and internationally;

- To identify and disseminate key recommendations relevant to the development of safety awareness initiatives in Europe;
- To identify any remaining knowledge gaps and methodological lessons learned, to inform future projects regarding the promotion of safer use of the internet and new online technologies;
- To benefit from, sustain the visibility of, and further enhance the knowledge generated by the *EU Kids Online* network.

**Resources, governance and coordination**

The project was funded by the EC Safer Internet Programme from 2009–11. The overall funding provided by the EC was 2,500,000 Euro, with the majority of the funding going towards the cost of the data collection. The project was coordinated by a central coordinating team located at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE): Sonia Livingstone (principal investigator, PI), Leslie Haddon (postdoctoral project manager), Anke Görzig (postdoctoral research officer) and Kjartan Ólafsson (comparative research advisor). The PI was responsible for the overall success of the project in terms of finances, management and scientific output. The coordinating team worked with a Management Group drawn from four further national teams: Germany, Portugal, Slovenia and Ireland, and was advised by the International Advisory Panel (see the project website for full details: www.eukidsonline.net). The survey was conducted by the fieldwork agency Ipsos MORI, subcontracted to the LSE.

Network members for the 25 countries were drawn from the existing EU Kids Online network, carried out from 2006–09, with 21 countries, including some additions to ensure the satisfactory representation of all countries participating in the project. One key contact was identified for each country, although other colleagues at the same institution could also participate in national meetings, collaborative working, and other activities.

The network included expertise from previous Safer Internet Programme projects (SAFT, Mediappro, Eurobarometer), with researchers knowledgeable in the fields or subfields of media education, digital literacy, child psychology, youth media,

sexuality, media globalisation, adolescence and identity, health communication, legal and regulatory perspectives on online safety and risk, ethical / citizenship dimensions, gender, consumption, family studies, minorities and comparative childhood studies.

Importantly, the research teams encompassed considerable methodological sophistication spanning qualitative and quantitative methods, including specific experience in handling large datasets and comparative data analysis at both European and international levels, and several members who had recently completed national surveys of children's internet use.

**Professional and ethical standards**

Children's exposure to risks on the internet is a particularly sensitive topic. It was therefore paramount that fieldwork should be conducted in an appropriately ethical manner. As our earlier research had established, many universities impose no ethical requirements on researchers in many European countries (Stald and Haddon, 2008). Therefore, the decision was taken for the coordinator to apply for research ethics clearance from LSE's Research Ethics Committee on behalf of fieldwork in all countries. Additionally, the fieldwork agency, Ipsos MORI, works according to the standards of the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR), which has worldwide reach. In practice, the LSE Research Committee applied higher standards than those of ESOMAR, for example by requiring parental permission for young people under 18 rather than 16 years old, and requiring permission from children as well as parents.

All aspects of the methodology and approaches to survey implementation were developed with child and respondent wellbeing in mind. Particular attention was paid to ensuring informed consent from both the parent and the child.

Accordingly, each household received written information about the study, which interviewers explained carefully to parents and children verbally. The letter (translated into local languages) contained contact information for the Coordinator (LSE), national research team and fieldwork agency subcontracted to Ipsos MORI. Further information about the project was provided on the EU Kids Online website. The letter informed families about the funding and purposes of the project, the nature

of the interview, and the value of the project to policy makers seeking to improve internet safety for children. Where a parent wished for more time to consider taking part, the information letter was left with the household for several days before the interviewer returned at a later date.

A signature was required from parents confirming consent to their own interview and consent to the project team approaching the child to invite their participation in the child interview in all countries except Germany, where local laws prohibited written signatures being obtained, and where, instead, interviewers were asked to sign to confirm that the parent had given permission for the interview to take place. Child consent was recorded by the interviewer signing in writing that it had been given verbally by the child.

Efforts were made to ensure that the description of the project and interview were age appropriate. In all countries / languages, separate versions of the text were tailored for children of different ages. Anonymity and confidentiality of responses were guaranteed to both parents and children, with the exception that, if the child reported being harmed in some way, the promise of confidentiality would be limited, and action would be taken.

In view of the topics considered in the project, prior to the fieldwork, Ipsos MORI and the LSE agreed an approach to intervention, which was cleared by the LSE Research Ethics Committee, regarding what would happen if it became apparent that a child was at risk of harm. Thus only conditional confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed, with the proviso that, if the interview provided an indication of a child being at risk (defined as the fieldwork witnessing 'something any reasonable person could not ignore'), the fieldworker would inform his/her supervisor in case further action was required. Importantly, and reassuringly, no such incidents were reported during fieldwork. However, the national and LSE contacts were called by a few parents to check the legitimacy of the survey. Lastly, interviewers were instructed not to close a door against parents or to prevent those who wished to remain in the vicinity of their child as they completed the interview from doing so. Parental proximity was recorded as part of the data collection. Children were clearly advised that they could stop the interview at any point or choose not to answer any question if

they felt uncomfortable doing so.

Interviewers were selected by the national fieldwork agencies for their experience of working with children, which was a requirement of the contract between LSE and Ipsos MORI. Relevant security checks were carried out on interviewers where appropriate according to country specific legal requirements. Interviewers were instructed to explain to all children that if they have experienced harm, they should tell a trusted adult, and all respondents, parents and children, were provided with an information leaflet at the end of the survey visit, containing tips and advice about online risk and safety. The leaflet was also posted on a section of the website containing information for parents in the 25 national languages. The leaflet contained nationally specific contacts for advice services, helplines, and internet safety guidance provision. These leaflets were developed for the project by the national Insafe nodes of the EC's Safer Internet Programme, with input also from Child Helpline International see ([www.childhelplineinternational.org](www.childhelplineinternational.org)). Finally, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed during the data processing stage of the project by removing key identifiers from the data set.

**Rationale for research design**
The research design built on the EU Kids Online network's prior review of some 400 studies conducted on children's internet use in Europe in the preceding decade or so (Livingstone and Haddon, 2009b). Since the project was designed to fill key knowledge gaps, and to advance national and international policy, it was explicitly comparative across countries, prioritising the administration of standard questions in all countries over the representation of local concerns. However, to ensure that such a standardised approach was meaningful in each country, the survey built on the comparative insights gained from the earlier literature review as well as the expertise of national network members.

A total of 25,142 children who use the internet were interviewed, as was one of their parents, mainly during Spring and Summer 2010, across 25 European countries. To identify the support children can call on at home, the EU Kids Online survey interviewed the parent or carer 'most involved in the child's internet use', while also recording the existence of other adults in the household. The 'parent' was most often

the mother or female carer (three out of four cases) than father (one in four cases), with some variation by country.

Countries were selected for comparison as follows: Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Cyprus (CY) the Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (EL), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Lithuania (LT), the Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovenia (SI), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE), Turkey (TR), the United Kingdom (UK). Countries were selected on the basis of region (Northern, Central, Western or Mediterranean Europe), country size (population above or below 12 million), and internet diffusion compared with the European average for children (average, or above or below average). Certain EU member states, for example Malta and Luxembourg, had very small populations, making sampling of children very expensive. Turkey was included as a country where high internet risk issues had been identified by the European Commission, and was therefore of particular interest. Norway was included as it had conducted an influential series of surveys over the previous decade and could thus provide a point of comparison over time. A few decisions were made on the basis of cost to fit maximum diversity of countries within a fixed fieldwork budget.

The research design was comparative in several ways. Firstly, comparisons across countries were designed to reveal national similarities and differences by testing a series of hypotheses derived from the literature review (summarised in Hasebrink et al., 2009). The survey was also designed to be comparative across the range of risks experienced by children online, with parallel questions asked regarding cyberbullying, online pornography, sexual messaging ('sexting') and meeting online contacts offline ('stranger danger'). It was, finally, comparative in seeking to identity similarities and differences according to the child's age, gender and socio-economic status (SES).

Key features of the survey included:

- Two rounds of cognitive testing, in addition to piloting, to check thoroughly children's understandings of and reactions to the questions
- Random stratified survey sampling of some 1,000 children (9–16 years old) per country who use the internet

- Survey administration at home, face-to-face, with a self-completion section for sensitive questions

- A detailed survey that questions children themselves, to gain a direct account of their online experiences

- Equivalent questions asked of each type of risk to compare across risks

- Matched questions to compare online with offline risks, to put online risks in proportion

- Matched comparative questions to the parent most involved in the child's internet use

- Measures of mediating factors: psychological vulnerability, social support and safety practices

- Follow up questions to pursue how children respond to or cope with online risk

- The inclusion of the experiences of young children aged 9 and10, who are often excluded from surveys

**Rationale for the research methods**

The questionnaires used in the survey were developed by EU Kids Online network in collaboration with the fieldwork agency Ipsos MORI. They were then tested and refined through a two-phase process of cognitive interviewing and pilot testing.

Phase one cognitive testing involved 20 cognitive interviews (14 with children and six with parents) in England using an English language questionnaire. Several refinements were then made to the questionnaires. The amended master questionnaires were translated and cognitively tested via a total of 113 interviews across the remaining 24 countries (at least 4 in each country), to ensure testing in all main languages. Again, amendments to the questionnaires were made for the final versions, clarifying terms such as the translation of 'bullying', simplifying phrasing, defining technical terms, such as internet service provider or social networking site.

Prior to main-stage fieldwork, a pilot survey was conducted to test all aspects of the survey including sampling, recruitment and the interview process. A total of 102 pilot interviews (43 with children aged 9 and 10 years and 59 with children aged 11−16 years) were carried out across five countries, selected for diversity in region, internet penetration and population size: Germany, Slovenia, Ireland, Portugal and the UK.

While children for the cognitive test were selected somewhat randomly, the pilot testing process was designed also to test the final recruitment process, and therefore involved the random (door-to-door) selection subsequently employed in the main sampling phase.

In terms of the scope and topics the questionnaire was based on previous work carried out in the EU Kids Online network (Livingstone and Haddon, 2009b). This involved amongst other things a comprehensive review of existing research on children's internet use in Europe both in terms of findings and the questionnaires used.

An initial draft of the questionnaire was prepared by the LSE, as project coordinator, in close conjunction with the EU Kids Online network in the autumn of 2009. This development stage took the research design from scoping of the theoretical framework and pressing research and policy issues, through to a draft questionnaire to children and parents that encompassed the key issues to be addressed, and sought to optimise question formats and response options to make them readily comprehensible by children.

Following this early development work, the fieldwork agency (Ipsos MORI) was involved in numerous revisions of the draft questionnaires, making recommendations to ensure question wordings conformed to best practice for generating accurate and meaningful answers from respondents, and in particular making recommendations for the approach to child question elements.

**Conceptual issues**

Conceptually, the project took the child as the primary unit of analysis, examining both individual (demographic, psychological) factors and factors relating to their socially mediated environment, centred on parental, school and peer relations. This approach permitted the analysis of the processes and consequences of online engagement contextualised within the meso and macro circumstances of children's lives. By taking the child as the unit of analysis, it was possible to trace the complex processes in each country, which connect access, use, opportunities, risks, parental responses and, importantly for our child-centred approach, children's own developing digital skills and coping responses. Figure 1 shows the path followed from children's

risk encounters to self-reports of harm and, then, coping strategies.

**Figure 1: The EU Kids Online model of factors influencing harmful outcomes for child internet users**
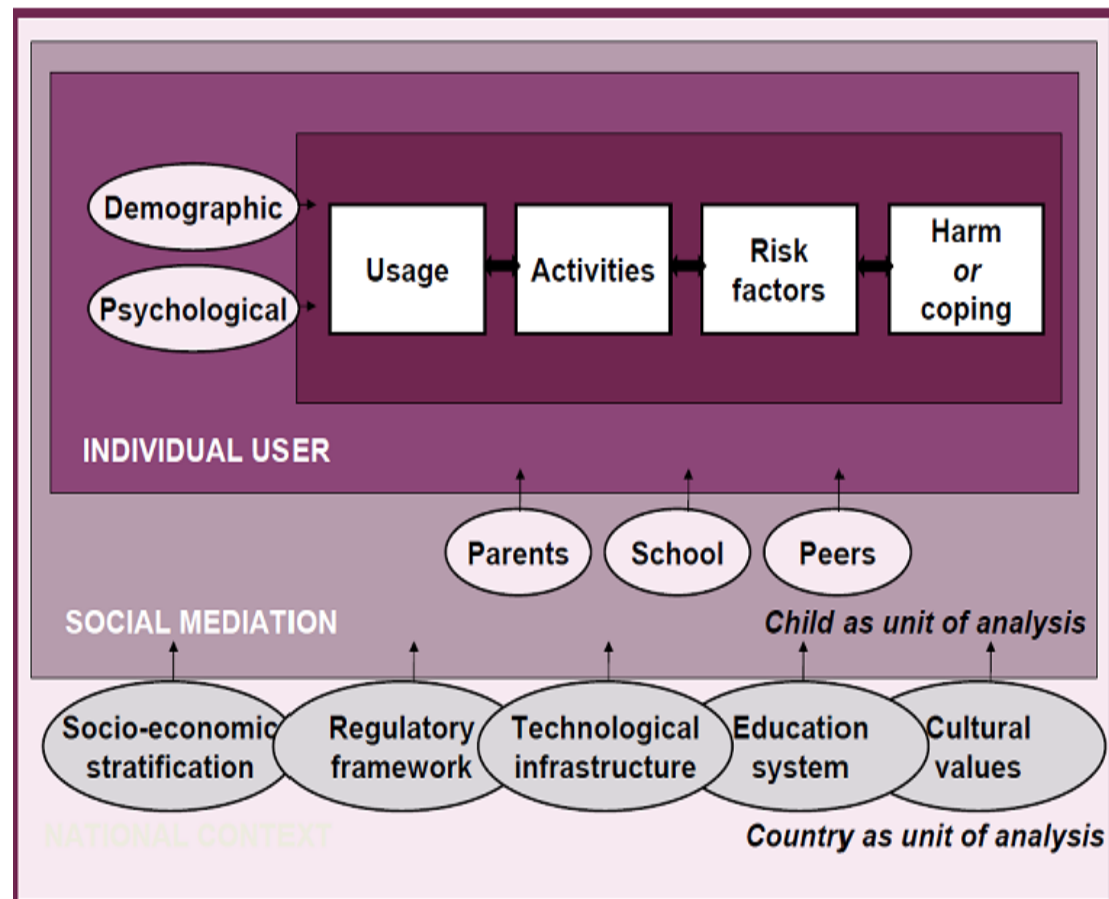


Since, crucially, exposure to online risks does not in and of itself address any associated experience of harm, the project was designed to explore the consequences of exposure, examining how these depend on the child and the context, i.e. on the multiplicity of factors that lead a child to encounter a risk. Of the possible outcomes, EU Kids Online concentrated on two: self-reported harm, operationalised as the child saying that the risk bothered or upset them, and coping, where we asked children about a range of possible coping strategies, to understand which are more effective. Forms of social mediation, especially but not only from parents, may also help children avoid exposure to online risk or its adverse consequences.

We argued that it is highly problematic for researchers or policymakers to take

findings produced in one country and assume they may be straightforwardly applied in another. Similarly, it is equally problematic to present one's own findings in unthinkingly universalistic terms, as if concepts such as 'children', 'the internet', 'risk' and 'parenting' have the same meaning everywhere. To recognise how children's experiences may be conceptualised differently across countries, the second level of investigation treated the country as unit of analysis, focusing on factors of socio-economic stratification, regulatory framework, technological infrastructure, education system and cultural values.

**Data Collection and analysis**

Fieldwork started in April 2010 and was completed by October 2010 (week 26); more than half the countries completed by early July (week 11), since fieldwork length varied by country for a range of local and cultural reasons. All countries recruited interviewers based on their experience, not just in research, but more specifically with face-to-face survey and random walk procedures as appropriate, and experience of research with children. National agencies (see Livingstone et al, 2010 for the full list) acknowledged the complexity and sensitive nature of the questionnaires and allocated the individuals they thought would achieve the best results. The number of interviewers working on the project ranged from 27 in Turkey, to 400 in Germany, largely for internal organisational reasons in local fieldwork agencies (Görzig, 2012). The number of interviewers and a range of other factors, including Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) versus Paper-Assisted Personal Interviewing (PAPI), were checked for their possible influence on the findings, but were found to be unimportant.

All interviewers received intensive project-specific training and briefings and written guidance materials, covering all aspects of survey implementation, including guidance on how to conduct sensitive interviews with children. The project managers and interviewers were supplied with detailed and uniform instructions by the Ipsos coordination centre.

Questionnaires were administered using either CAPI or PAPI. Some sections were interviewer-administered, while sensitive questions among children were administered via a self-completion questionnaire. The interview length was measured

per household, encompassing the length of time it took to complete the parent, child face-to-face and child self-completion questionnaires. The average across all countries was 55.8 minutes. Country differences and national response rates are reported in detail in Sonia Livingstone et al. (2010).

CAPI captures respondents' answers electronically during fieldwork, so no data entry is required. For countries using PAPI, the data from paper questionnaires were either scanned or were entered by local data processing teams. Industry standard quality control and back-check procedures were carried out to ensure a high quality of data. Although all local agencies processed their own data, a uniform collection of data across all countries was ensured through the use of a single data map provided centrally by the core survey team. Raw datasets were uploaded by agencies to a centralised online data processing platform with each case containing contact sheet, screening, parent and child questionnaire data for one household. To ensure that data were processed correctly, local agency datasets had to pass a series of basic quality checks before being accepted by the online platform. Such checks included considering whether responses were valid and whether ID variables were consistent. A range of further quality, consistency and edits checks were considered centrally by the core project team using initial data.

In designing the questionnaire, several measures were also put in place to make the child as comfortable as possible. The most sensitive questions relating to risky behaviour were asked in a self-completion format where children were assured that neither the interviewer nor the parent would be able to see their answers: for CAPI the screen was turned so that only they could see it, and for PAPI a pen-and-paper questionnaire was provided along with a sealed envelope for the child to use to record their answers.

Discretion was used to consider whether questions were suitable for the youngest participants; the most sensitive and more mature themed questions were only asked to those aged 11 years and above. A 'Prefer not to say' option was also included in those questions where a child might feel uncomfortable about disclosing their behaviour.

The dataset was thoroughly checked for consistency, and a series of data cleaning

procedures were undertaken. Particular attention was paid to the child self-completion questionnaires. The first step was to investigate any inconsistencies found with fieldwork agencies to identify possible courses and solutions, for example checking for any data entry errors that could be corrected, or raising issues with interviewers to establish why a discrepancy might have occurred. Where inconsistencies still remained, data editing was considered, and applied where logical to support data quality and consistency. Importantly, edits were also applied in ways that supported consistency with edit checks and routing implemented in CAPI. The level of editing required was low reflecting the fact that children had a good level of understanding of the questionnaire.

The following edits were applied:

- Routing: A check was carried out to identify instances where questions with filtered bases routed from responses to previous questions had been answered by the respondents whose previous responses indicated eligibility to proceed. Based on a review of the responses to those follow-up questions, edits were applied to route respondents out of later questions where earlier responses indicated that the questions were not relevant to them. For example, a review of follow-up responses identified that in many cases respondents had coded response options such as 'don't know' or 'not very much', or 'not applicable'. This approach also provided consistency between PAPI and the routing built into CAPI. Routing and introductions to questions ensured that the interview does not introduce the child for the first time to ideas or material that may be ethically problematic. For example, children were immediately routed out of sections about risky behaviour if it became apparent that they had not experienced the risk, and introductory wording was used where appropriate to forewarn of the nature of the subsequent questions.

- Inappropriate multi-coding: Some instances occurred where multiple codes were selected at single code questions. In these cases, it was not possible to know which was the 'correct' answer; items were therefore coded as 'no answer'. In some instances of multi-code questions, a respondent had chosen one or more answer options and also a 'don't know' or 'prefer not to say' option. In these cases, based on a review of the data, it seemed appropriate to edit out the 'don't

know / prefer not to say' response, because the main response codes seemed likely to be valid.

- Addressing inconsistent responses: A range of consistency checks were carried out to check responses that were illogical based on responses to other questions, or general reasonableness.

Inevitably, the project has its limitations, and these should be borne in mind when using the dataset and interpreting the results:

- Limits on sampling: Despite repeated return visits to sampled households and every effort made to encourage participation, it must be acknowledged that the recruitment process may not have reached the most vulnerable or marginalised children.

- Questionnaire limits: The questionnaire was designed to take, on average, 30 minutes for children to complete (and 10 minutes for parents), although in practice, it took rather longer than this: just under one hour for the child and parent interviews combined. It is not easy to hold children's attention for longer. Difficult decisions therefore had to be taken about which questions to include or exclude. For reasons concerning the technical facility of national fieldwork agencies, in over half the countries, the self-completion section of the questionnaire was completed by pen and paper, which limited the degree of routing, i.e. the degree to which questions could follow up on children's answers (see Livingstone et al, 2010), but without apparently affecting the findings (Görzig, 2012). Lastly, for ethical reasons, as confirmed by cognitive testing and pilot interviews, intimate, embarrassing or certain explicit questions could not be asked, for example details about the kinds of pornography viewed by young children or in certain countries, such as Greece, Italy and Turkey.

- Survey context: Every effort was made to encourage honest answers, to promise anonymity and privacy, including reassuring children that their parents would not see their answers. However, any survey takes place within a social context. Here, the fact that it was conducted in homes with parents in the vicinity may have influenced the answers of some children, meaning that they gave more 'socially desirable' answers. As detailed in the online technical report, in two-thirds of cases, interviewers reported that parents were wholly uninvolved in the child's interview; in a fifth of cases they were 'not very much' involved, and in

one in seven cases they were more involved. Parental presence had a slight effect on reporting of risk by children, although the exact pattern of findings was complex (Görzig, 2012).

**Interpretation and dissemination of findings**

A thorough review of all findings is provided online at www.eukidsonline.net. In particular, see Livingstone et al. (2011a; 2011b; 2012). For a detailed discussion of the process of working with and disseminating findings to stakeholders, see Livingstone (2013).

It was important to ensure that EU Kids Online works independently of governmental, charitable and industry interests and that it strives to meet the exacting standards of the academic community, which it does by making its methodology transparent, its data available and its analyses open to critical peer review. Nonetheless, the politics and values of the research team inevitably direct the methodological choices made, and these have been the subject of much discussion within the network. A major priority, early agreed upon, was to frame the work of EU Kids Online within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This has meant foregrounding children's experiences and perceptions, adopting a child-centred methodology insofar as possible and advocating for children's rights when these need re-affirming; they are easily lost, for instance, in the struggle between child protectionists and the free (adult) speech lobby.

More dialogically, given that we were always addressing a particular audience (industry, child protection, government, parents), we found that a good rule of thumb was to question the assumptions and conclusions of each particular audience: for example, industry can be challenged if it hopes to rely on parents for child protection, but parents can be challenged to step up when they expect governments to manage the internet for their children. Since our findings provide qualified support for the safety contributions of each of a range of stakeholders, this strategy is consistent with both the evidence and our independence from the audience being addressed. Lastly, the EU Kids Online network found it had to work very hard not so much to disseminate its findings as to preclude misinterpretation of the findings by media, policy makers and the public who tend to misread statistics, to magnify claimed differences, or to

appropriate the findings to endemic moral panics regarding the harms of the internet (for the main presentation of findings and recommendations for policy makers, see O'Neill et al., 2011).

The project was deemed a success by the European Commission, whose formal evaluation pronounced it 'excellent'. As of 2011–14, the EU Kids Online embarked on a third phase of research, this time prioritising qualitative methods.

**Lessons learned**

The EU Kids Online II project was successful in designing a high quality survey instrument to investigate the experiences, practices and concerns regarding children's internet use. The survey was administered in a reliable and ethically-sensitive manner to national samples of internet-using children aged 9–16, and their parents, in Europe, and enabled the research team to draw the following lessons:

- Such a complicated task required very close collaboration between the coordinator, fieldwork agencies and national network members. By implication, a project of this magnitude and complexity is not possible without access to adequate funding (for coordination as well as fieldwork) and appropriate human resources in terms of expertise and time commitment.

- In conducting a comparative survey in 25 languages, the task of translation and back translation required interpretation as well as technical translation to ensure that questions were expressed in terms that children would understand. The inclusion of cognitive interviewing in several languages / contexts, as part of the survey design also proved a vital opportunity to make significant adjustments to the interview questions and process

- In dealing with the hazards of complex routing in the questionnaire design, it is necessary to try and minimise the time spent by children in answering the survey, which requires careful administration by the interviewees. The resultant dataset, with multiple bases depending on routing, along with multiple sources of missing data, proved complex for novice statisticians to manage, thereby limiting the usability of the dataset by less expert network members and other researchers. Care is also required in reporting the findings, as policy makers and journalists are wont to confuse the bases for particular percentages or other

findings.

- Even though the target population was internet-using children, the hope was that team members would gain information from fieldwork contact sheets about internet access enabling them to make an assessment of the number and demographics of non-internet-using children. As we learned, trying to gain such additional information from the recruitment process (i.e. to gain information on those outside the sampling frame) did not fit with the usual practices of fieldworkers who are paid for completed interviews and so have limited incentive to record information on visits that did not lead to successful interviews.

## 6.    Further readings (Up to six)

- Barbovschi, M., Green, L. and Vandoninck, S. (2013). *Innovative approaches for investigating how children understand risk in new media: dealing with methodological and ethical challenges.* EU Kids Online Network, London, UK. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/53060/
- Livingstone, S., and Görzig, A. (2014). When adolescents receive sexual messages on the internet: Explaining experiences of risk and harm. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 33 (8-15).
- Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., & Görzig, A. (eds) (2012). *Children, risk and safety on the Internet: Research and policy challenges in comparative perspective.* Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Livingstone, S., and Smith, P. (2014) Annual research review: children and young people in the digital age: The nature and prevalence of risks, harmful effects, and risk and protective factors, for mobile and internet usage. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry: Annual Research Review 2014.* Online first: doi:10.1111/jcpp.12197
- Helsper, E., Kalmus, V., Hasebrink, U., Sagvari, B. and De Haan, J. (2013). *Country Classification: Opportunities, Risks, Harm and Parental Mediation* LSE, London: EU Kids Online.  http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/52023/
- O'Neill, B., Livingstone, S. and McLaughlin, S. (2011) *Final Recommendations for Policy, Methodology and Research*, LSE, London: EU Kids Online. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/39410/

## 7.    Web resources
Barbovschi, Monica, Green, Lelia and Vandoninck, Sofie (2013) *Innovative approaches for investigating how children understand risk in new media: dealing with methodological and ethical challenges.* EU Kids Online Network, London, UK. Available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/53060/

Livingstone, Sonia, Ólafsson, Kjartan and Haddon, Leslie (2013) *How to research children and online technologies? Frequently asked questions and best practice.* EU Kids Online, EU Kids Online Network, London, UK. Available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/50437/

Webpages:
**http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/Home.aspx**
**http://www.netchildrengomobile.eu**
**http://mediasmarts.ca/ycww**
**http://www.fosi.org**
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**http://www.ofcom.org.uk**
**http://cyber.law.harvard.edu**

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- Görzig, A. (2012) 'Methodological framework: the EU Kids Online project', in S. Livingstone, L. Haddon, and A. Görzig (eds), *Children, Risk and Safety Online: research and policy challenges in comparative perspective*, Bristol: The Policy Press, pp. 15–32.
- Hasebrink, U., Livingstone, S., Haddon, L. and Ólafsson, K. (2009) *Comparing Children's Online Opportunities and Risks across Europe: cross-national comparisons for EU Kids Online* (2nd edn), LSE, London: EU Kids Online. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/24368/
- Helsper, E. and Eynon, R. (2010) Digital Natives: where is the evidence? *British Educational Research Journal*, 36 (3): 502–20.
- Livingstone, S. (2009) *Children and the Internet: great expectations, challenging realities*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Livingstone, S. (2013) '"Knowledge enhancement": on the risks and opportunities of generating evidence-based policy', in B. O'Neill, E. Staksrud and S. McLaughlin (eds), *Children and Internet Safety In Europe: policy debates and challenges*, Goteborg: Nordicom.
- Livingstone, S. and Haddon, L. (2009a) *Kids online: opportunities and risks for children*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Livingstone, S. and Haddon, L. (2009b) *EU Kids Online: final report*, LSE, London: EU Kids Online. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/24372/
- Livingstone, S. and Helsper, E. (2010) 'Balancing opportunities and risks in teenagers' use of the internet' *New Media & Society*, 12 (2): 309–29.
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- Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K. (2011b). *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full findings*. LSE, London: EU Kids Online. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/33731/

- Livingstone, S., Haddon, L. and Görzig, A. (eds) (2012) *Children, Risk and Safety Online: research and policy challenges in comparative perspective*, Bristol: The Policy Press. http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/Abstracts,EUKidsOnlinebook.pdf
- O'Neill, B., Livingstone, S. and McLaughlin, S. (2011) *Final Recommendations for Policy, Methodology and Research*, LSE, London: EU Kids Online. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/39410/
- Stald, G. and Haddon, L. (eds) (2008) *Cross-cultural Contexts of Research: factors influencing the study of children and the internet in Europe*. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/24380/