

Digital Agenda: survey of children's Internet use; competition for high quality online content

Children in Europe are on average starting to use the Internet at the age of 7 but only one in three 9-12 year olds feel that there are enough "good things for kids" of their age online, according to a pan-European survey published by the European Commission. The study also shows that one in eight children have upsetting experiences online and they still lack skills and confidence using Internet. To help deal with these problems, the Commission has launched a competition to encourage the creation of online high quality content for children. The Commission is committed to helping parents and their children keep safe online as part of the Digital Agenda for Europe (see [IP/10/581](#), [MEMO/10/199](#) and [MEMO/10/200](#)).

Neelie Kroes, Vice President of the European Commission for the Digital Agenda, said: "Children start going online younger and younger, and we need to make sure they are confident online, and that they can find exciting, safe, educational and age-appropriate content as they surf the web".

Children online longer and younger

Children are going online younger than ever, according to the survey. Children now aged 15 to 16 first used the Internet when they were 11, while 9-10 year olds declared that they first used the Internet when they were 7. There are also differences between countries: children go online the earliest in the Nordic countries, Estonia, The Netherlands and UK and later in Austria, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Romania. Half of children go online daily for an average of one and a half hours. 15-16 year olds are even more active Internet users, with 77% going online daily.

Children in the survey say they use the Internet primarily for school work or watching videos (84% and 83% respectively). Playing games (74%) and communicating via instant messaging (61%) are the next most popular activities online.

Children go online mainly at home (85%), with more than half of 13-16 year olds accessing the Internet in their bedroom. School is the second most common place to access the Internet (63%). While most children go online via PCs or laptops, one out of three youngsters now connect via their mobile phones or other portable devices.

Online risks falling but children still lack basic safety skills

The survey also shows that children face fewer risks online than previous surveys have shown. 5% of children in Europe say that they have been bullied online, with a high of 14% in Estonia and Romania. However, one in eight have been bothered or upset by something they found online.

At the same time, the report shows that although adults may consider children to be "digital natives", half of younger children lack basic safety skills such as knowing how to set privacy settings or block unwanted contacts.

30% of 11-16 year olds have experienced symptoms linked to excessive Internet use, such as surfing the Internet when they are not really interested, spending less time with friends, family or doing schoolwork because of time spent online or feeling irritated when they cannot be online. The [EU's Safer Internet Programme](#) will co-fund a project to better understand this problem in 2011.

Promoting innovative and age-appropriate content

The European Commission and Safer Internet Centres in 14 countries have just announced a competition for the *European Award for Best Children's Online Content*. This is open to producers of online content in two categories: 12-17 years old and adults and seeks to stimulate the production and dissemination of high quality online content appropriate for children and young people. It takes place in 14 countries: Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain. The winners of both categories in the national competitions will compete for the European Award, which will be presented in June 2011.

Background

The EUKidsOnline survey was conducted with more than 23 000 children and one of their parents in the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and UK. The survey is part of the EUKidsOnline II project, funded by the Safer Internet Programme and coordinated by the London School of Economics and Political Science.

The Commission has brokered self-regulatory agreements with some of the main providers of online services that are most popular among younger generations (social networks, mobile phone operators) (see [IP/10/144](#)). Further development of self-regulatory measures regarding online safety for children is being considered as part of the Digital Agenda policy to build trust and security in new technologies.

In 2009 the European Commission supported a campaign against cyberbullying in all EU Member States run by the INSAFE network of awareness centres (MEMO/09/58). The INSAFE network has also set up help-lines where children, parents and teachers can ask for personalised advice on safety issues, including cyberbullying.

For more information:

The full report is available online:

www.eukidsonline.net

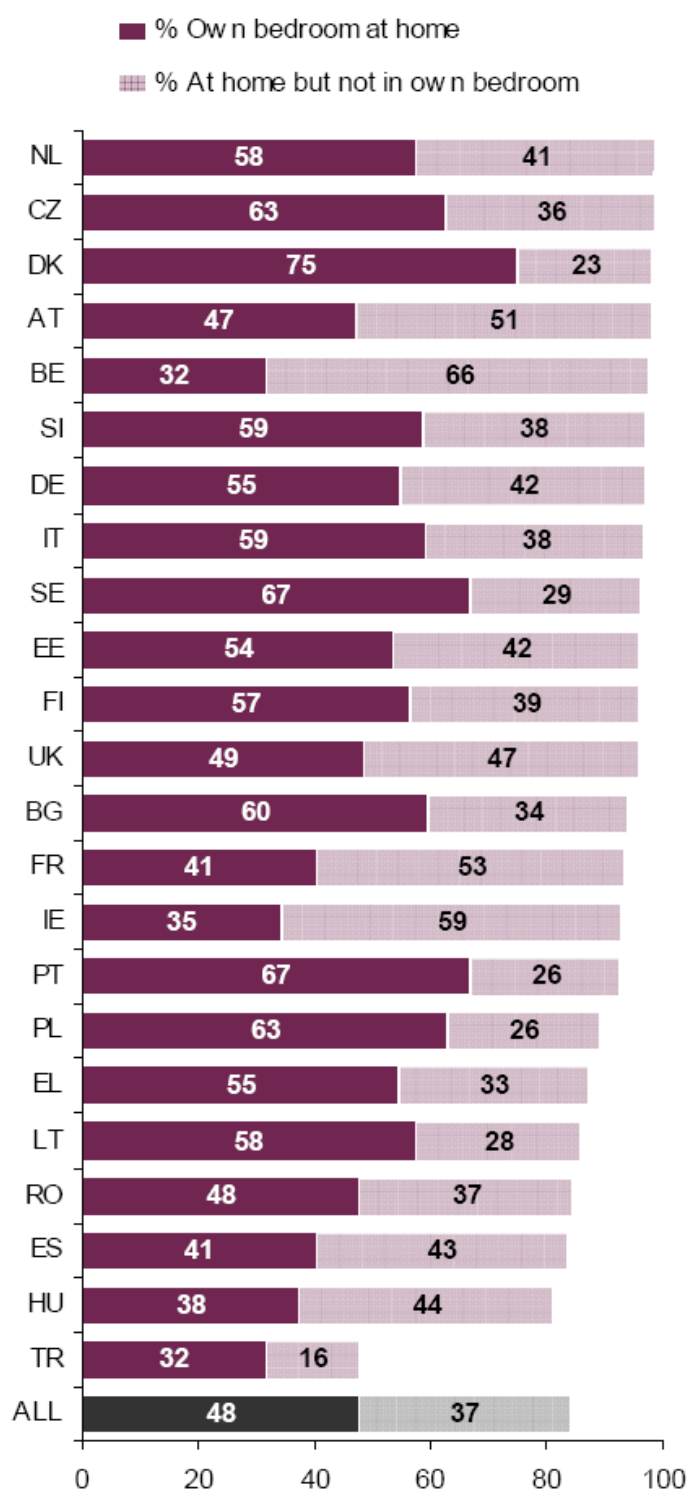
More information on the Safer Internet Forum:

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/events/forum/index_en.htm

More information on the competition:

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/events/competition/index_en.htm

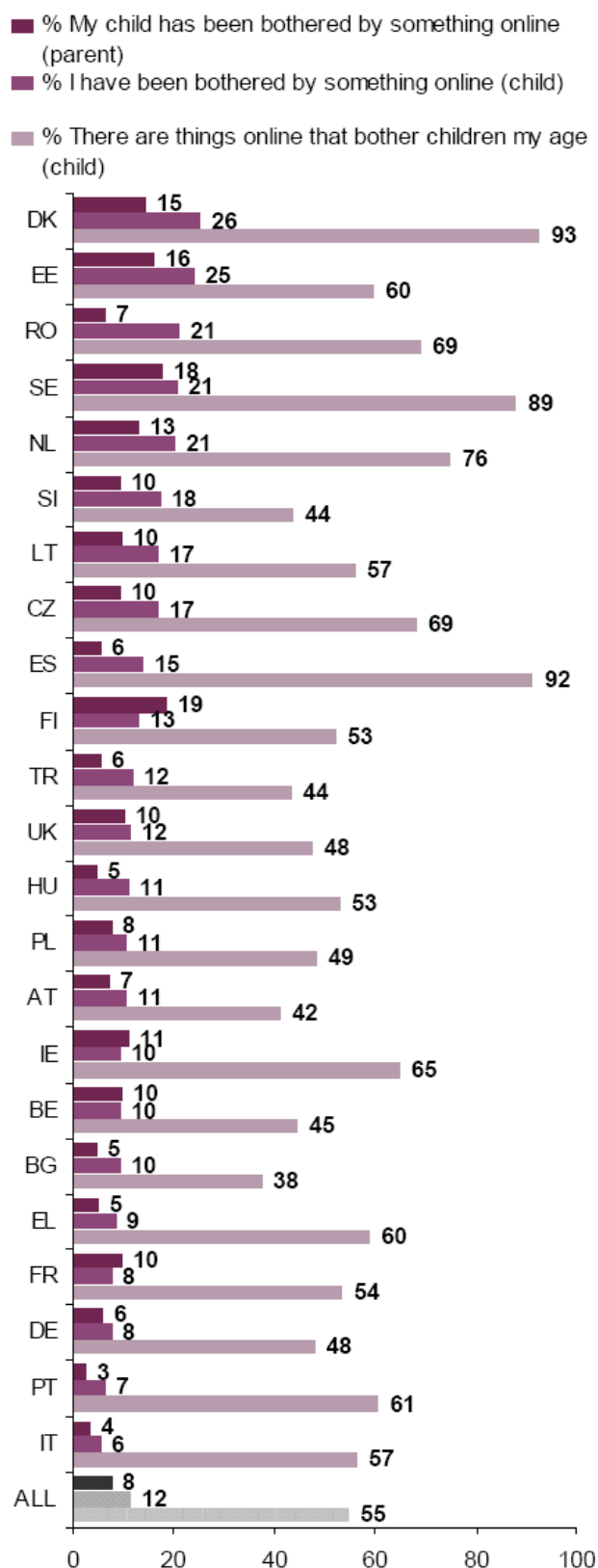
Figure 6: Children's use of the internet at home, by country



QC301a, b: Looking at this card, please tell me where you use the internet these days.

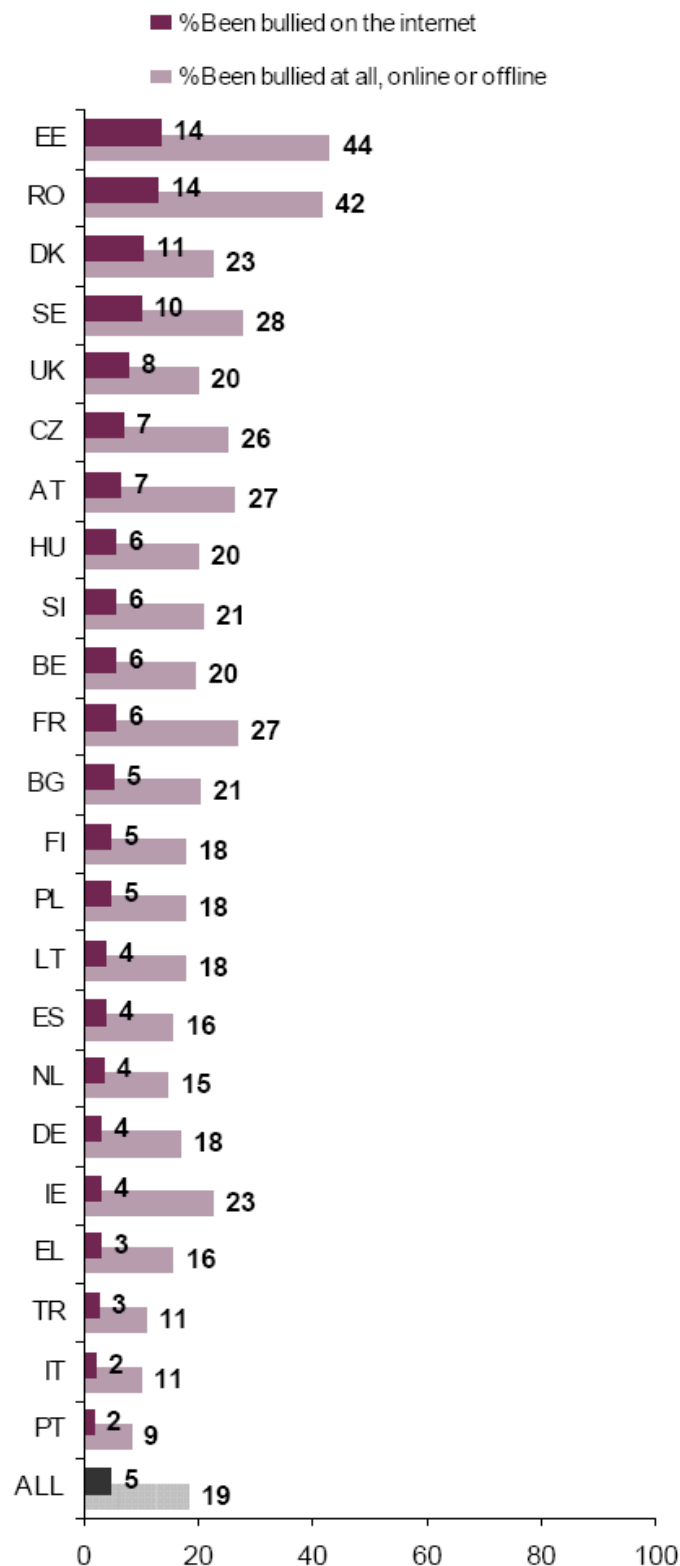
Base: All children who use the internet.

Figure 30: Online experiences that have bothered children, according to child and parent, by country



QC110: In the PAST 12 MONTHS, have you seen or experienced something on the internet that has bothered you in some way? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen it. QP228: As far as you are

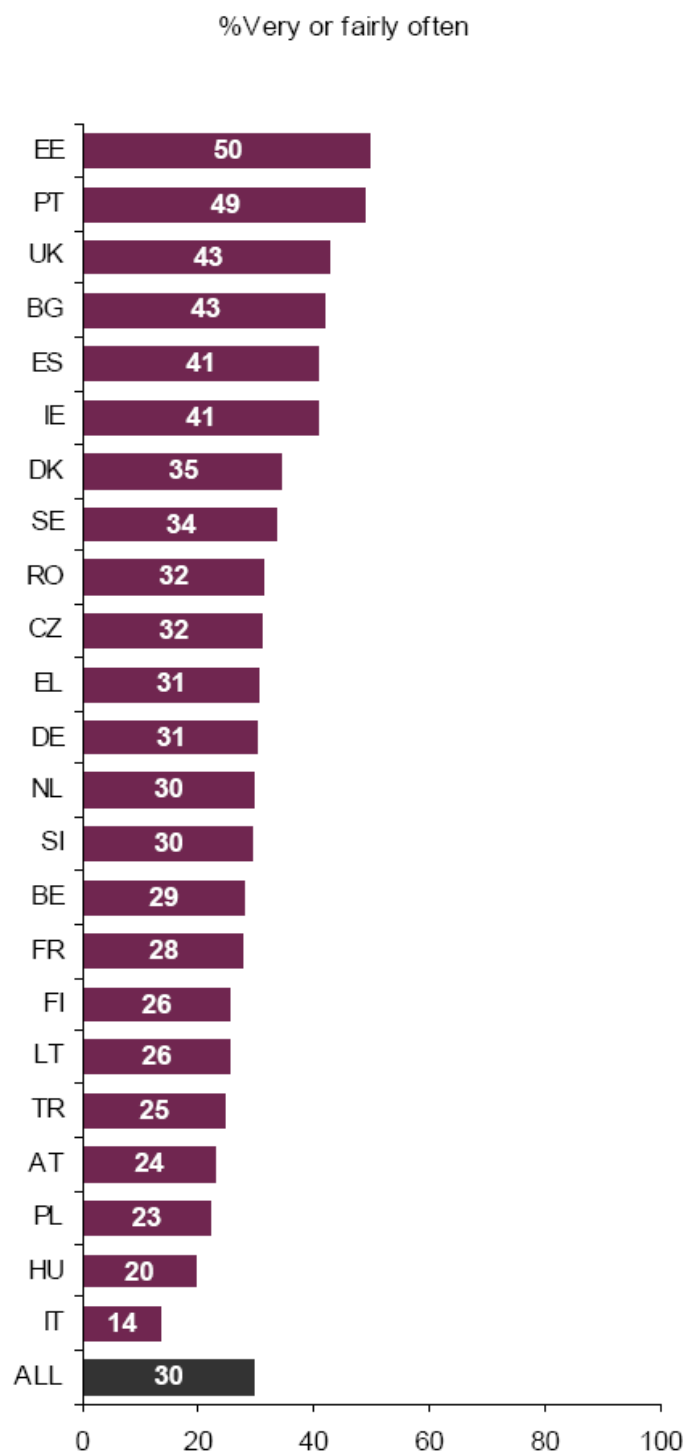
Figure 41: Child has been bullied online or offline in past 12 months, by country



QC112: Has someone acted in this kind of hurtful or nasty way to you in the past 12 months? QC115: At any time during the last 12 months has this happened on the internet?

Base: All children who use the internet.

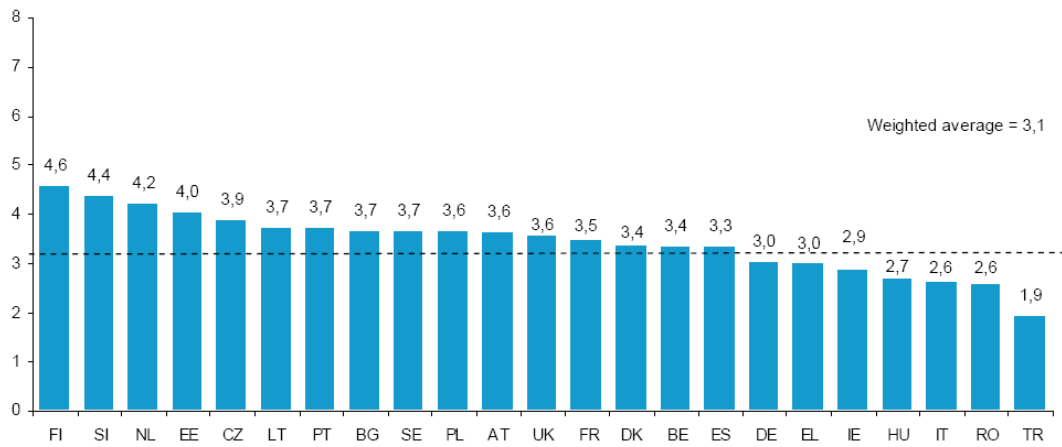
Figure 18: Child has experienced one or more form of excessive internet use fairly or very often, by country (age 11+)



QC144a-e: How often have these things happened to you? The graph shows the percentage of children who answer 'fairly' or 'very often' to one or more of the five statements in Figure 16.

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

Figure 14: Children's digital literacy and safety skills, by country (age 11+)



QC320a-d and QC321a-d: Which of these things do you know how to do on the internet? Please say yes or no to each of the following...
If you don't know what something is or what it means, don't worry, just say you don't know. (Scale shows average number out of the 8 skills asked about in Table 4)

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