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## Social networking, age and privacy

### Report

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## Social Networking, Age and Privacy

Sonia Livingstone, Kjartan Ólafsson and Elisabeth Staksrud

### Summary

Social networking sites (SNS) are popular among European children: 38% of 9-12 year olds and 77% of 13-16 year olds have a profile. Facebook is used by one third of 9-16 year old internet users.

Age restrictions are only partially effective, although there are many differences by country and SNS. One in five 9-12 year olds have a Facebook profile, rising to over 4 in 10 in some countries.

The report also shows that:

- Younger children are more likely than older to have their profile 'public'. Over a quarter of 9-12 year old SNS users have their profile 'set to public'.
- Parental rules for SNS use, when applied, are partly effective, especially for younger children.
- A quarter of SNS users communicate online with people unconnected to their daily lives, including one fifth of 9-12 year old SNS users.
- One fifth of children whose profile is public display their address and/or phone number, twice as many as for those with private profiles.
- The features designed to protect children from other users if needed are not easily understood, by many younger and some older children.

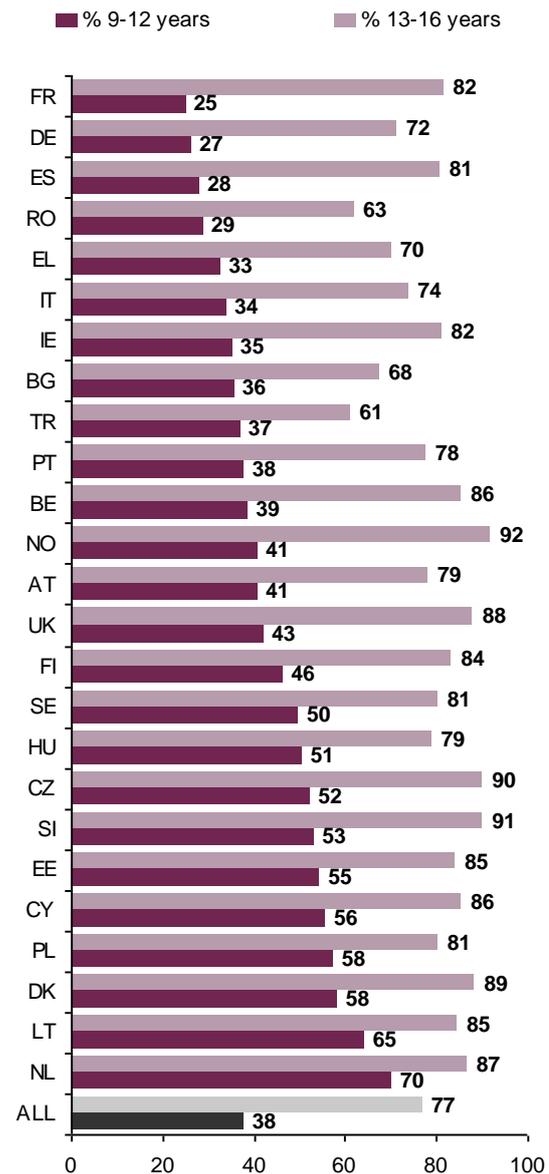
### Widespread social networking by youth

- Over one third of 9-12 year olds and three quarters of 13-16 year olds who use the internet in Europe have their own profile on a social networking site (SNS).<sup>1</sup> Social networking has become one of the most popular activities online, as shown by the *EU Kids Online* survey of 9-16 year old internet users in 25 countries (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 59% of 9-16 year old internet users in Europe have an SNS profile. See Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full Findings*. LSE, London: EU Kids Online.

<sup>2</sup> The unweighted total number of respondents with a SNS profile was 15,303. For the 23% of internet users who say they have more than one profile, this report concerns the SNS they use *the most*. The data in this report are weighted using (i) design weights to adjust for unequal probabilities of selection; (ii) non-response weights to correct for differing levels of response across population subgroups; and (iii)

Figure 1: Children's use of SNS by country and age



QC313: Do you have your OWN profile on a social networking site that you currently use, or not?

Base: All children who use the internet.

a European weight to adjust for country contribution to the results according to population size. For analysis within countries, design- and non-response weights are used. For analysis across countries, all three weights are used. Thus the proportion of children using each SNS is estimated as if the sample were a simple random sample of all internet-using children in Europe.

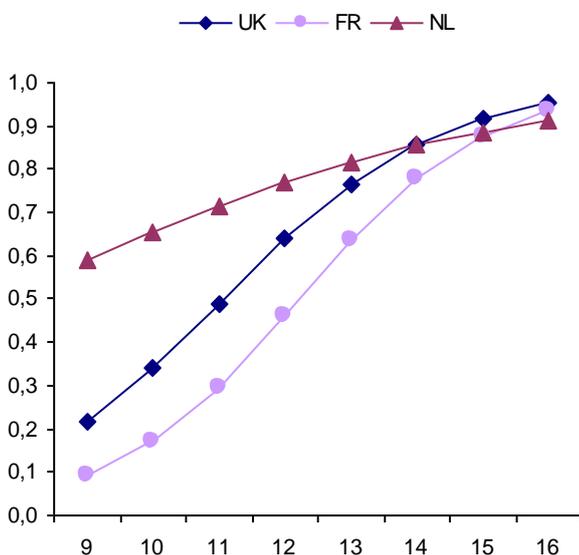
- **Gender makes little difference:** although girls are traditionally thought to communicate more than boys, there are few gender differences – 60% of girls and 58% of boys have their own SNS profile.
- **Social networking varies greatly by country:** in Nordic and some Eastern European countries, SNS use is higher than in Southern and middle European countries. Differences among countries are particularly striking for the younger age group.

This report examines the social networking practices of European children by age, by SNS and by country. The focus is on the users' age, skills and privacy practices, together with the restrictive practices of their parents. The intention is to inform evidence-based policy regarding child internet safety, identifying the array of practices that occur in order to provide the means for deliberation over future policy initiatives.

## Age trends by country

To interpret the ratio of younger versus older children using SNS in each country, Figure 2 illustrates contrasting age patterns by country.

Figure 2: Patterns of SNS use by age and country



- The UK is fairly typical of Europe: the likelihood of a child using SNS ranges from 20% for nine year olds and grows to around 90% for 16 year olds.
- France also shows a steady increase in use from younger to older children, but SNS use is lower for the youngest group and rises steeply with age.

- The Netherlands is different: nine year old children are much more likely to have a SNS profile than children in other countries; hence the flatter curve.

How can these differences be explained? Is it a matter of cultural factors operating in specific countries such as peer norms, parenting styles, familiarity with the internet, practices of regulation or other variables? Or, is it a matter of the design and management of the particular SNS that predominates in that country?

In The Netherlands, for instance, Hyves is the main SNS but, also, Dutch peer culture (or parenting) may encourage young children to join in social networking. In this report, we point to country and/or SNS factors where appropriate, and will pursue these differences in future *EU Kids Online* reports.

## The policy context: self-regulation

By combining chat, messaging, photo albums and blogging, SNS integrate online activities more seamlessly than ever. This offers children many opportunities, but possibly also more risks. To minimise these, the European Commission's *Safer Internet Programme* facilitates self-regulation by the major providers. All of the top SNS identified in this report (see Table 1) except Hi5 have signed the *Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU*.<sup>3</sup> The implementation of this agreement is monitored by the EC.<sup>4</sup> It recommends that:

- **Services should be age appropriate**, with measures in place to ensure that under-age users are rejected and/or deleted from the service.
- **Privacy provisions should ensure** that profiles of minors are set to 'private' by default, and that users can control who can access their full profile and be able to view their privacy settings at all times.
- **SNS should encourage and enable users so they can safely manage personal information.**<sup>5</sup>
- SNS services should provide an **easy-to-use mechanism for children to report** inappropriate content or conduct by other users.

<sup>3</sup> European Commission (2009) *Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU*. Luxembourg: European Commission.

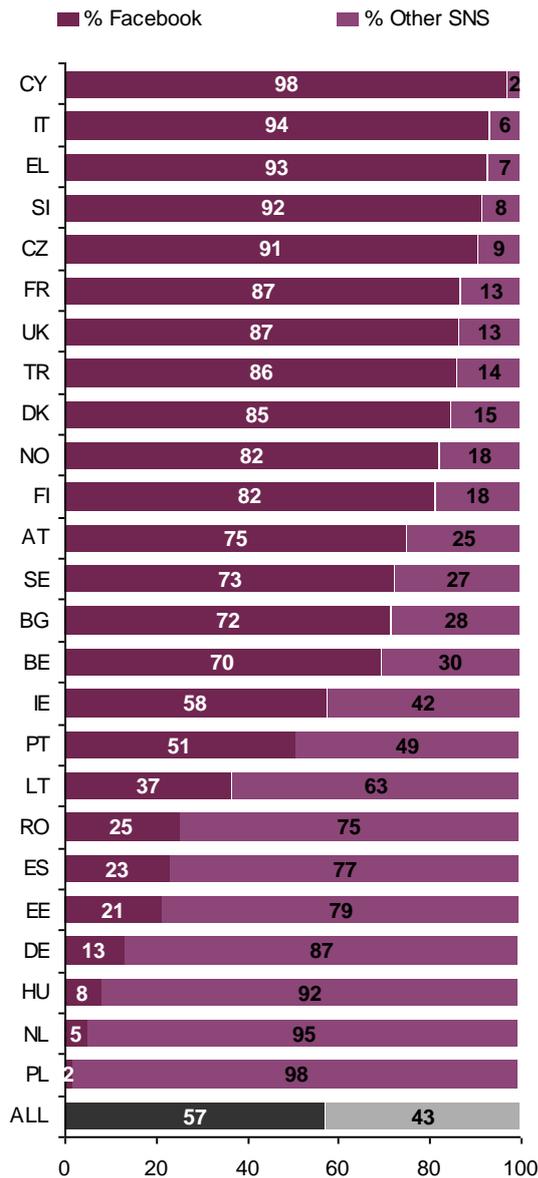
<sup>4</sup> Staksrud, E., & Lobe, B. (2010) *Evaluation of the Implementation of the Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU Part I: General Report*. Luxembourg: European Commission.

<sup>5</sup> This includes giving the user control over their personal information (e.g. that used for initial registration or which is visible to others) so they can make informed decisions about what they disclose online.

## SNS differences: Facebook dominates

- 57% of European 9-16 year olds with an SNS profile use Facebook as their only or most used SNS (see Table 1). It is the most popular SNS in 17 of the 25 countries and second most popular in another five countries.

Figure 3: Children's use of Facebook by country



QC315: Which social networking profile do you use? If you use more than one, please name the one you use most often.

Base: All children aged 9-16 with an SNS profile on the internet.

- Facebook has a unique position:** no other SNS is dominant in more than one country. Despite the lack of data to compare over time, it seems clear that children are moving to Facebook (Figure 3).
- Across all internet using children in Europe, Facebook is used by one third of 9-16 year olds and one fifth of 9-12 year olds (Table 2).

Table 1: Top SNS used by children in Europe

SNS	% users in Europe	Where mainly used
Facebook	57	Pan-European
Nasza-Klasa	8	Poland
schülerVZ	7	Germany
Tuenti	5	Spain
Hyves	4	The Netherlands
Hi5	2	Romania
All other SNS	16	Various
<b>All SNS</b>	<b>100</b>	

QC315: Which social networking profile do you use? If you use more than one, please name the one you use most often.

Base: All children aged 9-16 with an SNS profile on the internet.

## Young SNS users

Famously on the internet no-one knows if you are a dog. Equally, no-one knows who is a child. This poses a regulatory challenge insofar as SNS guidance centred on age restrictions relies heavily on the user's *professed age*. Evidence about SNS users' actual age has been scarce until examined by *EU Kids Online*.

- The survey shows that **38% of 9-12 year olds use SNS, as do 77% of 13-16 year olds** (as noted above, in Figure 1). The pattern of SNS use by country varies considerably for the younger age group in particular, ranging from 70% of Dutch down to 25% of French 9-12 year olds using SNS.

Is this variation best explained by national/cultural factors, or does it depend on the particular SNS that predominates in a particular country? Disentangling these two factors may be informed by analysing practices of use. Hence, this report analyses findings for the most popular SNS in each country. Additionally, to distinguish between country versus SNS factors, for countries where Facebook is the main SNS used we report practices of use by country and for Facebook overall (Table 2).

**Table 2: Children with an SNS profile by site and age**

	SNS	% 9-12 years	% 13-16 years	% 9-16 years	Children 13-16, for every child 9-12
AT	Facebook	26	63	47	2.5
BE	Facebook	20	66	45	3.2
BG	Facebook	24	50	39	2.1
CY	Facebook	53	86	71	1.6
CZ	Facebook	46	84	66	1.8
DE	schülerVZ	16	46	32	2.8
DK	Facebook	42	82	64	1.9
EE	All SNS	40	69	56	1.7
EL	Facebook	31	65	51	2.1
ES	Tuenti	20	61	42	3.1
FI	Facebook	34	71	55	2.1
FR	Facebook	21	73	47	3.5
HU	Myvip	16	40	29	2.6
HU	Iwiw	28	32	30	1.1
IE	Facebook	21	47	34	2.3
IT	Facebook	32	70	53	2.2
LT	All SNS	45	50	48	1.1
NL	Hyves	63	77	71	1.2
NO	Facebook	24	84	57	3.5
PL	Nasza-Klasa	53	70	63	1.3
PT	Facebook	17	42	30	2.5
RO	Hi5	17	36	27	2.1
SE	Facebook	28	65	49	2.3
SI	Facebook	48	84	68	1.7
TR	Facebook	33	53	42	1.6
UK	Facebook	34	79	58	2.3
	All Facebook	20	46	34	2.3
	SNS combined	38	77	59	2.0

QC315: Which social networking profile do you use? If you use more than one, please name the one you use most often.

Base: All children aged 9-16 on the internet.

- Table 2 shows that in Austria, for example, Facebook is the most popular SNS, used by 26% of the 9-12 year old internet users and 63% of the 13-16 year olds. In the UK, 34% 9-12 year olds use Facebook, compared with 79% 13-16 year olds.<sup>6</sup>
- For some SNS in some countries, younger children are more likely to have a profile than younger children in other countries. The ratio between use by younger and older children is

<sup>6</sup> Only SNS for which the number of users in the sample exceeds 100 are included. In Estonia and Lithuania, no single SNS dominates so figures are given for all SNS. See Table 10 for more detail.

shown in the final column of Table 2. For example, in Austria, for every child aged 9-12 who uses Facebook there are 2.5 13-16 year olds who use it.

- In Hungary (Iwiw), Lithuania (all SNS) and the Netherlands (Hyves), almost as many younger as older children use the top SNS. But in Norway, France and Belgium, three times as many older as younger children use the top SNS.
- Some factors depend on the SNS used: schülerVZ (Germany) has few 9-12 year old users (Table 2), as does Hi5 (Romania) and Tuenti (Spain), as expected from their age restrictions (see Table 3). Yet Facebook (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Slovenia, Turkey) has many 9-12 year old users despite its lower age limit of 13 years.
- Variation in ratios for Facebook across countries is intriguing, suggesting differences in culture or, possibly, in Facebook's implementation of age-based protections by country or language versions.

## Under-age SNS users

Many providers ban users under 13 and many apply particular technical protection mechanisms and moderated services for minors under 18. **But without widely-employed age verification techniques, it has been suspected that some users are 'under-age' – as confirmed by this report.**

Table 3 shows the age restrictions set by each SNS and what children themselves say about the age shown on their profile.<sup>7</sup>

- More younger (often but not always under-age) children than older children display an incorrect age of their profile.

<sup>7</sup> Note that the exact question asked was whether the child displayed 'An age that is not your real age', following the question, 'Which of the following bits of information on this card does your profile include about you?' This was not asked in the private part of the survey. It seems that some children may have forgotten what age, or date of birth, they first stated, or that they have worked out how to hide this information from their profile.

**Table 3: Children with a profile on a particular SNS who display an incorrect age, by age**

	SNS	Age restriction <sup>8</sup>	Display incorrect age among those who use the SNS	
			% 9-12 years	% 13-16 years
AT	Facebook	13	21	11
BE	Facebook	13	37	13
BG	Facebook	13	17	5
CY	Facebook	13	50	11
CZ	Facebook	13	29	6
DE	schülerVZ	12	13	9
DK	Facebook	13	64	9
EE	All SNS	--	20	18
EL	Facebook	13	36	14
ES	Tuenti	14	60	20
FI	Facebook	13	40	5
FR	Facebook	13	39	11
HU	Myvip	None	4	1
HU	Iwiw	None <sup>9</sup>	1	1
IE	Facebook	13	49	14
IT	Facebook	13	39	13
LT	All SNS	--	8	9
NL	Hyves	None <sup>10</sup>	5	6
NO	Facebook	13	55	8
PL	Nasza-Klasa	None	4	2
PT	Facebook	13	48	19
RO	Hi5	13	24	11
SE	Facebook	13	56	8
SI	Facebook	13	34	14
TR	Facebook	13	27	16
UK	Facebook	13	47	12
	All Facebook	13	38	12
	All SNS	--	27	10

QC315: Which social networking profile do you use? QC318g: Which of the bits of information on this card does your profile include about you? An age that is not your real age.

Base: All children aged 9-16 with a profile on the named SNS.

<sup>8</sup>Age restrictions are identified from the SNS site and/or from Lobe, B., & Staksrud, E. (Eds.). (2010). *Evaluation of the Implementation of the Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU Part II: Testing of 20 Providers of Social Networking Services in Europe*. Luxembourg: European Commission.

<sup>9</sup> There is no minimum age, but users under 14 years old are required to provide parental approval.

<sup>10</sup> Parental consent needed for those under 16.

- The SNS with the highest lower age limit (Tuenti) also has the greatest percentage of young children displaying an incorrect age. By contrast, schülerVZ, which has the lowest age limit (12 years) has few 9-12 year olds registered on it and also few who display an incorrect age.

- On sites with no age restriction (e.g. Myvip, Iwiw, Hyves and Nasza-Klasa), very few children say they have displayed an incorrect age. However, it may be judged more significant that on these sites, especially Hyves and Nasza-Klasa, far more 9-12 year olds have their own profile (Table 2).

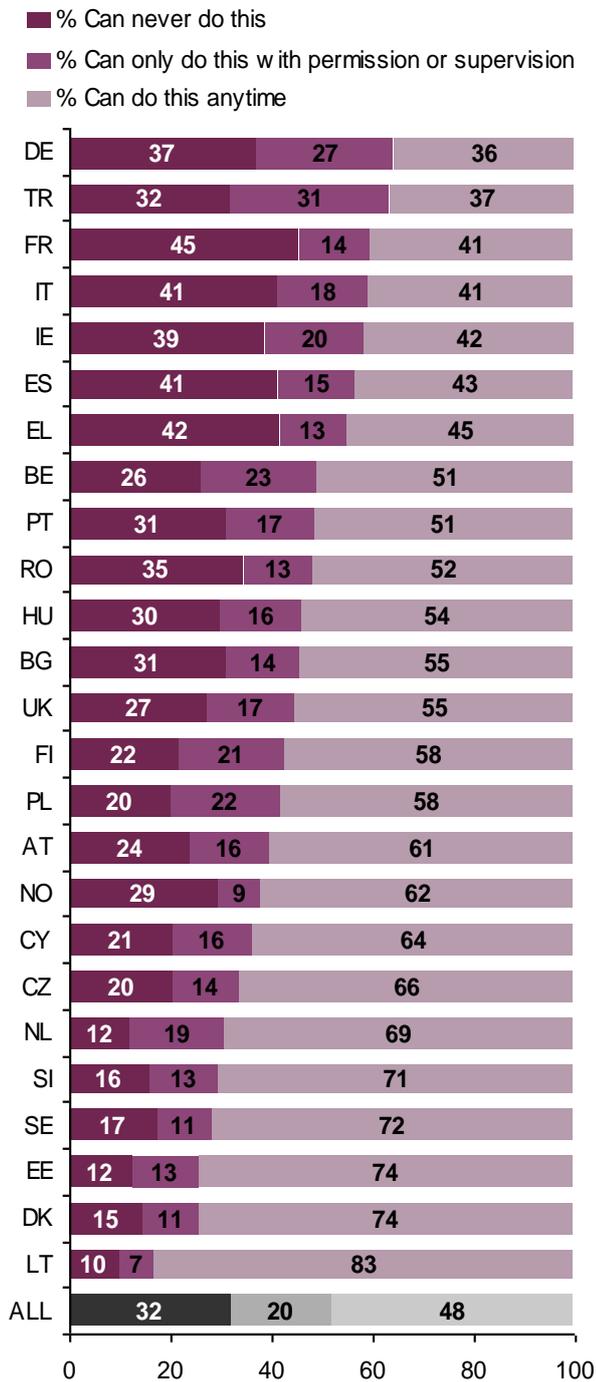
## Parental restrictions on SNS usage

We have suggested that variation in social networking depends on country factors or on the age restrictions of the SNS in question. But is children's SNS use responsive to restrictions set by parents? Among all the ways that parents mediate their child's internet use,<sup>11</sup> Figure 4 shows their actions regarding children's SNS use.

- **One third (32%) of parents of the children surveyed say their child is not permitted to have an SNS profile. A fifth (20%) say their child can only use SNS with supervision. Half say they do not restrict their child's use of SNS.**
- Country (or cultural) differences are notable. Nearly half of French children (45%) are not allowed to use SNS, something that might explain the comparatively low number of under aged SNS users, and such a ban also seems common in Southern Europe: 42% of Greek and 41% of Italian and Spanish children are not allowed to use SNS.
- Fewest restrictions are experienced by children in Northern Europe – Lithuania, Estonia, the Netherlands and Denmark.

<sup>11</sup> See Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full Findings*. LSE, London: EU Kids Online.

**Figure 4: Parental restriction of child's SNS use by country**



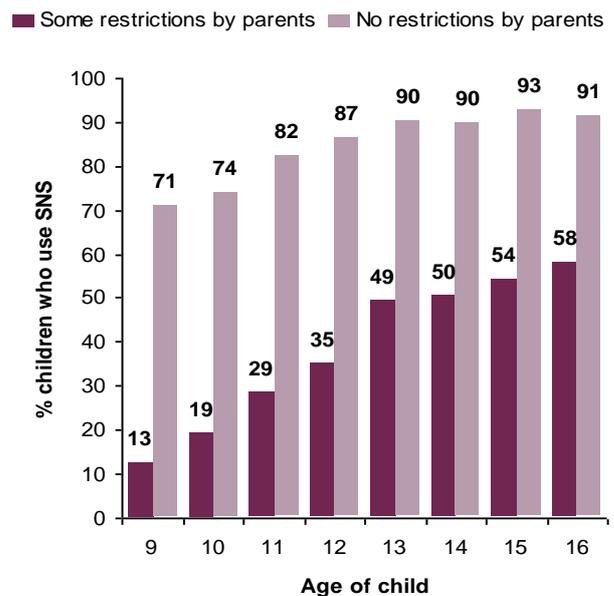
QP221d: Whether child is allowed to do this all of the time, only with permission/supervision or never allowed: Have his/her own social networking profile.

Base: Parent of an internet-using child aged 9-16.

Crucially, parental restriction is partially effective, as shown in Figure 5. Moreover, there is a clear relation between parental restrictions and age.

- Among children whose parents impose no restrictions, most have an SNS profile, including three quarters of the youngest ages.
- However, among those whose parents restrict their SNS use, the age difference is marked. **Younger children appear to respect parental regulation and, for the most part, do not have a profile at all.** However, among teenagers whose parents restrict their use, over half of them do have a profile. For some, this is in opposition to a parental ban, for others their use is subject to parental monitoring.

**Figure 5: Children's use of SNS by age and whether parents regulate their SNS use**



QP221d: Whether child is allowed to do this all of the time, only with permission/supervision or never allowed: Have his/her own social networking profile. QC313: Do you have your own profile on a social networking site that you currently use, or not?

Base: All children aged 9-16 who use the internet and one of their parents.

## Privacy settings

What, then, are the safety issues at stake? Does it matter if young children use SNS? In what follows, we ask whether the youngest users are able to protect their privacy and understand the embedded safety tools and services (see Table 4), as these are vital skills for self-protection to be effective.

**Table 4: Children who have set their SNS profile to 'public', by country**

	SNS	% 9-12 years	% 13-16 years	% 9-16 years
AT	Facebook	25	17	19
BE	Facebook	35	26	27
BG	Facebook	28	31	30
CY	Facebook	23	31	29
CZ	Facebook	37	30	32
DE	schülerVZ	11	24	21
DK	Facebook	18	16	17
EE	All SNS	40	27	31
EL	Facebook	33	38	37
ES	Tuenti	16	10	11
FI	Facebook	21	27	26
FR	Facebook	16	20	19
HU	Myvip	55	53	53
HU	Iwiw	70	52	60
IE	Facebook	14	8	10
IT	Facebook	39	34	35
LT	All SNS	33	30	31
NL	Hyves	13	22	18
NO	Facebook	20	12	13
PL	Nasza-Klasa	41	39	40
PT	Facebook	29	22	24
RO	Hi5	40	35	37
SE	Facebook	30	26	27
SI	Facebook	20	25	24
TR	Facebook	46	46	46
UK	Facebook	9	11	10
	All Facebook	28	25	26
	All SNS	29	27	27

QC317: Is your profile set to ...? Public, so that everyone can see; partially private, so that friends of friends or your networks can see; private so that only your friends can see; don't know.

Base: All children aged 9-16 with a profile on the named SNS.

- On average, the proportion of children who have set their profile to 'public' varies greatly, from 60% of Hungarian Iwiw users to 10% of UK Facebook users. That the UK and Ireland have fewer children

with public profiles on Facebook may be a result of effective awareness-raising campaigns in these countries or of safety features being more advanced in the English versions of the site.

- Over a quarter of 9-12 year old SNS users have their profile 'set to public', only just different from the proportion of 13-16 year olds. Although fewer 9-12 year olds have profiles, it is a concern that among those who do, they are not more likely to keep their profile private – in 15 of the 25 countries 9-12 year olds are *more likely* than 13-16 year olds to have public profiles.
- Compared to schülerVZ, Tuenti or Hyves it is notable that younger Facebook users, and even more so younger users of Nasza-Klasa, Hi5, Myvip, Iwiw, are more likely to have public profiles.

## Digital safety skills

Given the possible risks, as well as the many opportunities afforded by social networking, and since much SNS usage occurs away from adult supervision, children's own digital skills are crucial. This includes children's ability to use the safety features embedded in the sites, although their skills in this respect are dependent on the usability of the features themselves.

As already noted, the availability and usability of SNS safety features to users is an important component of the European self-regulatory guidance. Table 5 shows children's self-assessed ability to change their privacy settings as well as their ability to block other users.

**Table 5: Children's ability to use safety features by SNS (only children aged 11+)**

SNS	Change privacy settings			Block another user		
	% 11-12	% 13-14	% 15-16	% 11-12	% 13-14	% 15-16
Facebook	55	70	78	61	76	80
Nasza-Klasa	64	80	85	56	71	83
schülerVZ	61	73	81	62	72	78
Tuenti	53	72	82	67	84	91
Hyves	68	77	89	79	88	94
Hi5	42	63	56	51	65	73
All SNS	56	71	78	61	75	81

QC321: And which of these things do you know how to do on the internet?

Base: All children aged 11-16 with a profile on the named SNS.

- Just over half of the 11-12 year olds rising to over three quarters of the 15-16 year olds know how to change the privacy settings on their profile. Children's ability to manage privacy settings vary somewhat by SNS, suggesting differences in design, none of the SNS stands out as particularly successful in providing settings that children can manage.
- Given its popularity, it is of concern that almost half of the younger Facebook users, and a quarter of the older Facebook users say they are not able to change their privacy settings. Even fewer children who use Hi5 say they can manage its privacy settings, while users of Nasza-Klasa and Hyves are more confident in this regard.
- Since not all children can manage privacy settings, it is possible that those whose profiles are set to 'public' have not done so on purpose.
- A similar lack in knowledge, among younger children especially, is evident in relation to children's ability to block another user, a vital skill should an online contact become unpleasant or abusive. While 61% of the younger children, rising to and 81% of the older children know how to block other users, this leaves a substantial minority who cannot do this.

## Children's SNS contacts

Does it matter that younger children are using SNS? While examining the possibilities of risky or harmful encounters is beyond the scope of this report, in what follows we consider three *possible* indicators of risk:

- The percentage of children, by age, who have more than 100 contacts on their SNS profile, taking this as indicative of some degree of risk;
- The percentage of children, by age, who are in contact online with people that they first met online and who have no connection to their offline lives;<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Across all forms of online communication, 30% of European children have had contact with someone online they have not met face to face; See Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., & Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full Findings*. LSE, London: EU Kids Online.

- The percentage of children, by age, who on their SNS profile disclose information that can be used to identify them.

In examining each of these, we acknowledge that these practices (having many contacts, meeting new people and disclosing personal information) can be fun and harmless, and may be part of the pursuit of online opportunities. Yet since opportunities and risks often go hand in hand, in the present context we consider them as part of the discussion of risk associated with SNS use.

Firstly, Table 6 shows which children have more than 100 contacts on their SNS profile.

**Table 6: Children with 100+ contacts by SNS and country**

	SNS	% 9-12 years	% 13-16 years	% 9-16 years
AT	Facebook	11	31	26
BE	Facebook	16	56	48
BG	Facebook	0	10	7
CY	Facebook	12	27	22
CZ	Facebook	12	33	26
DE	schülerVZ	1	15	12
DK	Facebook	11	41	32
EE	All SNS	7	24	9
EL	Facebook	19	45	38
ES	Tuenti	14	38	32
FI	Facebook	10	23	20
FR	Facebook	13	39	33
HU	Myvip	47	49	38
HU	Iwiw	23	61	57
IE	Facebook	8	35	27
IT	Facebook	22	40	35
LT	All SNS	10	29	21
NL	Hyves	22	48	38
NO	Facebook	17	45	40
PL	Nasza-Klasa	22	41	34
PT	Facebook	17	31	27
RO	Hi5	6	8	7
SE	Facebook	16	52	43
SI	Facebook	14	36	29
TR	Facebook	9	32	23
UK	Facebook	33	48	44
	All Facebook	16	38	32
	All SNS	15	35	29

QC316: Roughly how many people are you in contact with when using [social networking profile]?

Base: All children aged 9-16 with a profile on the named SNS.

- Generally, older children are more than twice as likely to have 100+ contacts compared with younger children. But as before, differences by SNS (and/or country) are noteworthy.
- Among 13-16 year olds, Belgian, Danish, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Dutch, Norwegian, Polish, Swedish and British children are all more likely to have 100+ contacts than children from other countries.
- Myvip (Hungary) and the UK stand out among 9-12 year olds with many SNS contacts: since the UK children are 'under-age', this is noteworthy. In other cases, comparatively few children have over 100 contacts – German children who use schülerVZ, Romanian users of Hi5, Bulgarian users of Facebook are all instances where the number of contacts among 9-12 year olds is relatively low.

Secondly, Table 7 shows how many children communicate via SNS with people they have not met face to face.

- One in four SNS users have such contacts. In most countries this activity is more prevalent among 13-16 year olds than with 9-12 year olds. However, for Turkish Facebook users and Hungarian Myvip users, the younger children are more likely than the older to have contact with people who have no connection to their offline lives.
- The contact patterns that can be observed vary greatly, from half of the Facebook users in Sweden having contacts only met online, compared to only about one in eight in Turkey.

**Table 7: Children's contact with people online that they have no other connection with outside the internet, by SNS and country**

	SNS	% 9-12 years	% 13-16 years	% 9-16 years
AT	Facebook	29	45	42
BE	Facebook	27	36	34
BG	Facebook	27	35	33
CY	Facebook	24	38	35
CZ	Facebook	31	50	46
DE	schülerVZ	11	46	37
DK	Facebook	36	34	35
EE	All SNS	39	50	48
EL	Facebook	35	46	44
ES	Tuenti	13	23	21
FI	Facebook	32	40	39
FR	Facebook	36	39	38
HU	Myvip	30	22	24
HU	lwiw	18	24	23
IE	Facebook	25	22	22
IT	Facebook	14	20	19
LT	All SNS	33	44	41
NL	Hyves	31	38	31
NO	Facebook	39	41	41
PL	Nasza-Klasa	10	13	12
PT	Facebook	22	29	28
RO	Hi5	36	49	47
SE	Facebook	40	55	53
SI	Facebook	23	28	27
TR	Facebook	20	10	13
UK	Facebook	17	21	20
	All Facebook	24	29	28
	All SNS	19	28	25

QC310: Had contact with people - first met on the internet, but who have no other connection to your life outside of the internet

Base: All children aged 9-16 with a profile on the named SNS.

Thirdly, Table 8 shows the personal information that children disclose on their SNS profile. This has safety implications since the more information displayed about the child, the easier it is for other users, including adults, to initiate contact. Here we focus on the percentage of children who display their address or phone number or the name of their school on their SNS.

**Table 8: Children who display their address, phone or school on their SNS, by SNS and country**

	SNS	Address or phone		School	
		% 9-12 years	% 13-16 years	% 9-12 years	% 13-16 years
AT	Facebook	10	13	29	38
BE	Facebook	12	15	39	46
BG	Facebook	12	9	11	28
CY	Facebook	6	6	26	21
CZ	Facebook	13	22	15	28
DE	schülerVZ	14	9	71	72
DK	Facebook	10	15	16	40
EE	All SNS	21	33	51	54
EL	Facebook	10	13	13	14
ES	Tuenti	7	12	41	31
FI	Facebook	11	7	9	32
FR	Facebook	5	8	25	43
HU	Myvip	40	41	49	68
HU	Iwiw	25	21	54	57
IE	Facebook	6	11	11	58
IT	Facebook	11	18	21	
LT	All SNS	42	42	25	29
NL	Hyves	14	16	45	63
NO	Facebook	7	20	9	43
PL	Nasza-Klasa	14	26	61	74
PT	Facebook	4	8	5	11
RO	Hi5	21	18	20	17
SE	Facebook	7	13	12	51
SI	Facebook	15	15	19	33
TR	Facebook	21	27	35	40
UK	Facebook	2	8	31	51
	All Facebook	11	14	26	43
	All SNS	12	15	34	47

QC318: Which of the bits of information on this card does your profile include about you?

Base: All children aged 9-16 with a profile on the named SNS.

- Around half of the children who use SNS say that they have included at least one of these three things on their SNS profile; their address, their phone number or the name of their school. By far the most common is the name of their school.<sup>13</sup>
- There is considerable variation across countries in terms of what children show on their SNS profile.

<sup>13</sup> More children display their school on Nasza-Klasa and schülerVZ because these SNS are based on school affiliation.

- Given that younger children are more likely to have their profile set to public, it is reassuring that they are slightly less likely to disclose their address, phone or the name of their school on their profile.

Information displayed differs for those whose profiles are public or private (Table 9). Specifically:

- **Children are rather more, not less, likely to post personal information when their profiles are public rather than private or partially private.**<sup>14</sup>
- **One fifth of children whose profile is public display their address and/or phone number, twice as many as for those with private profiles.** It cannot be determined here whether this is deliberate or is because some children struggle to manage the privacy features of their SNS.
- The greater disclosure of personal information if a profile is public (compared to private) is most notable for Facebook and Nasza-Klasa, though it also applies for older Tuenti users.

**Table 9: Children who display their address, phone or school by age and whether their profile is public**

SNS	Address or phone		School	
	% 9-12	% 13-16	% 9-12	% 13-16
Facebook – private	7	11	26	42
Facebook – public	20	23	28	44
Nasza-Klasa – private	10	18	62	72
Nasza-Klasa – public	20	35	64	76
schülerVZ – private	15	7	79	75
schülerVZ – public	7	15	29	61
Tuenti – private	8	10	42	51
Tuenti – public	4	30	39	43
Hyves – private	15	15	45	63
Hyve – public	14	20	43	63
Hi5 – private	10	15	12	11
Hi5 – public	12	15	24	18
All SNS – private	9	12	34	47
All SNS – public	18	23	35	47

QC318: Which of the bits of information on this card does your profile include about you? QC317: Is your profile set to ...? Public, so that everyone can see; partially private, so that friends of friends or your networks can see; private so that only your friends can see; don't know. Private and partially private settings are combined in this table.

Base: All children aged 9-16 with a profile on the named SNS.

<sup>14</sup> An exception is schülerVZ, an SNS based on school identity.

## Conclusion

- Social networking sites (SNS) are highly popular among European children – 38% of 9-12 year olds and 77% of 13-16 year olds have their own profile. Facebook is the most popular, used by one third of all 9-16 year old internet users and by 57% of social networking youngsters. To inform evidence-based policy this report has examined the social networking practices of European children, plus the restrictive practices of their parents.
- Not only is SNS use spreading fast across Europe, but its use by young children is noteworthy. In some countries, the uptake is very steep from around 10 or 11 years old, while in other countries children as young as nine are already using SNS.
- It seems that age restrictions are only partially effective. Fewer younger than older children use SNS but, nonetheless, many ‘under-age’ children are using SNS. Setting aside the question of whether it is appropriate for young children to use SNS services, it seems clear that measures to ensure that under-aged users are rejected or deleted from the service are not successful on the top SNS services used by children in Europe.
- SNS differ in whether they set age limits for young children. On sites with an age restriction, the rates of displaying an incorrect age in their profile are higher among those under than over the age limit, suggesting that ‘forbidden fruit’ is attractive. Since a child generally must declare an incorrect age (or date of birth) to create a profile on an age-restricted site, it may be that age limits encourage children to declare an incorrect age to gain access; this may matter little when interacting with people they already know and who know their real age, but may be risky when making new contacts.
- However, substantial country differences are evident. Countries where low percentages of 9-12 year olds have profiles on the most used SNS include Romania (17% use Hi5) and Portugal (17% use Facebook), Belgium (20% use Facebook) and Ireland and France (both 21% use Facebook). Higher proportions of young users can be found in the Netherlands (63% use Hyves), Poland (53% use Nasza-Klasa), Slovenia (48% use Facebook) and the Czech Republic (46% use Facebook).
- There are some particular implications for countries and/or SNS providers. For example, in the UK

Facebook dominates, and one third of 9-12 year olds use Facebook ‘underage’. On the other hand, the safety campaigns appear successful in that, although these 9-12 year olds are the most likely in Europe to display an incorrect age, they are also most likely to keep their profile private. On the other hand, this could be because Facebook protections are not equally applied in all countries.

- In most countries (15 of 25), younger children are *more likely* than older children to have their profiles public. Moreover, children whose profiles are public are *more likely* than those with private profiles to display personal information. Compared to some other providers, it is notable that among Facebook users, a larger proportion of younger children have their profiles set to ‘public’.
- Over one third of 13-16 year olds and nearly one sixth of 9-12 year old SNS users have 100+ contacts. Perhaps unsurprisingly, around a quarter of SNS users communicate online with people who have no connection to their offline lives, including one fifth of 9-12 year olds across all SNS (and one quarter of younger Facebook users).
- Around half of the children who use SNS say that they have included one or more of these three things on their SNS profile; their address, their phone number or the name of their school. By far the most common is the name of their school, but 12% of younger and 15% of older children have displayed their address or phone number.
- When it comes to digital safety skills, it seems that the features designed to protect children from other users (if necessary) are not easily understood, by many younger and some older children. Interestingly too, the main increase in skills appears to be at 13+ years, even among SNS users. Nearly half of 11-12 year olds do not know how to change their privacy settings and one in four does not know how to block another user.

## Policy recommendations

- Since identification of young (including under-age) users appears relatively ineffective, it seems that young users are neither prevented from social networking nor protected from its potential risks. Several risk indicators are examined in this report.

- It may be argued that if providers removed age restrictions altogether, they would be better able to identify their younger users and so to deliver targeted protective measures. A pragmatic way forward might then be to focus on upgrading control features, user tools and safety information to make sure that these are well understood by the youngest users. In addition, age-specific privacy settings could be activated by default and easy-to-use reporting mechanisms could be provided for the youngest users as well as the teenagers.
- But, if the age restrictions were removed, the numbers of young children using SNS might rise substantially. This would pass the regulatory responsibility on to the parents, who might find this difficult. At present, judging by their actions, about half of the parents wish to restrict their children's use of SNS, but they are only partially successful in doing so, especially for teenagers. On this view, then, we argue that if age restrictions are maintained, then providers should employ improved age verification mechanisms and increase their efforts to ensure that younger children do not have SNS profiles.
- It may be supposed that if SNS imposed no age restrictions, parents might impose restrictions themselves. The evidence suggests this could be fairly effective among most younger and some older children. However, for those children whose parents did not restrict use, restrictions by the SNS may be crucial if, indeed, it is in the youngest children's interests not to have an SNS profile or, at least, not to use an SNS widely used by adults

Given this new evidence regarding actual patterns of SNS use by European children, we recommend an increased focus on the information, services and tools that both can protect children from potential risks and that also can be easily understood and applied.

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To inform the promotion among stakeholders of a safer online environment for children, EU Kids Online conducted a face-to-face, in home survey of 25,000 9-16 year old internet users and their parents in 25 countries, using a stratified random sample and self-completion methods for sensitive questions.

For more reports and information, see [www.eukidsonline.net](http://www.eukidsonline.net).

For more *EU Kids Online* reports, see [www.eukidsonline.net](http://www.eukidsonline.net)

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## Annex

Table 10: Children's use of SNS, by SNS and country

	SNS	% 9-12 years	% 13-16 years	% 9-16 years
AT	Facebook	26	63	47
	MySpace	3	7	5
	schülerVZ	7	3	5
	Other SNS	6	6	6
	Not on SNS	59	21	38
BE	Facebook	20	66	45
	Other SNS	18	20	19
	Not on SNS	61	14	36
BG	Facebook	24	50	39
	Other SNS	12	18	15
	Not on SNS	64	32	46
CY	Facebook	53	86	71
	Other SNS	3	0	2
	Not on SNS	44	14	27
CZ	Facebook	46	84	66
	Other SNS	6	7	7
	Not on SNS	48	10	28
DE	Facebook	3	10	7
	schülerVZ	16	46	32
	Other SNS	10	26	18
	Not on SNS	74	28	49
DK	Facebook	42	82	64
	Other SNS	16	7	11
	Not on SNS	42	11	25
EE	Facebook	14	16	15
	Other SNS	40	69	56
	Not on SNS	45	15	29
EL	Facebook	31	65	51
	Other SNS	2	5	4
	Not on SNS	67	30	46
ES	Facebook	6	19	13
	Tuenti	20	61	42
	Other SNS	8	20	14
FI	Facebook	34	71	55
	Other SNS	12	13	12
	Not on SNS	54	16	33
FR	Facebook	21	73	47
	Other SNS	4	9	7
	Not on SNS	75	18	46
HU	Facebook	5	6	6
	Iwiw	28	32	30
	Myvip	16	40	29
	Other SNS	3	1	2
	Not on SNS	49	21	34

IE	Facebook	21	47	34
	Bebo	11	32	22
	Other SNS	4	2	3
	Not on SNS	65	18	41
IT	Facebook	32	70	53
	Other SNS	3	5	4
	Not on SNS	66	26	43
LT	Facebook	19	35	28
	Other SNS	45	50	48
	Not on SNS	35	15	24
NL	Facebook	2	6	4
	Hyves	63	77	71
	Other SNS	5	4	4
	Not on SNS	30	13	20
NO	Facebook	24	84	57
	Other SNS	17	8	12
	Not on SNS	59	8	31
PL	Facebook	1	2	1
	Nasza-Klasa	53	70	63
	Other SNS	4	9	7
	Not on SNS	42	19	30
PT	Facebook	17	42	30
	Hi5	14	30	23
	Other SNS	7	6	7
	Not on SNS	62	22	41
RO	Facebook	6	17	12
	Hi5	17	36	27
	Other SNS	6	10	8
	Not on SNS	71	37	54
SE	Facebook	28	65	49
	Other SNS	22	16	18
	Not on SNS	50	19	33
SI	Facebook	48	84	68
	Other SNS	5	7	6
	Not on SNS	47	9	26
TR	Facebook	33	53	42
	Other SNS	5	9	7
	Not on SNS	63	39	51
UK	Facebook	34	79	58
	Bebo	4	6	5
	Other SNS	4	3	4
	Not on SNS	57	12	33
All	Facebook	20	46	34
	Other SNS	18	32	25
	Not on SNS	62	23	41

QC315: Which social networking profile do you use? If you use more than one, please name the one you use most often.

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