

## Using the internet safely and responsibly



### How confident are teenagers in behaving safely and responsibly in an online environment?

Online safety has become a topic of increasing importance for policymakers and researchers. Within Europe, the *EU Kids Online* research has greatly improved our understanding of online risks and opportunities from the perspective of children and young people (Livingstone et al., 2011). The *Survey of Schools: ICT in Education* enables us to analyse and evaluate in further depth teenagers' ability to use the internet and mobile phones safely and responsibly.

In the *Survey*, over 140,000 students at grade 8 (13.5 years old on average) and grade 11 (16.5 years old on average) level were asked to report on their self-confidence in performing a number of tasks related to: online reputation and privacy; cyberbullying; spam and junk mail; and the critical and responsible use of online information. As illustrated in figure 1, roughly 70% of respondents are somewhat or very confident across these areas. This still leaves 30% of students with little or no confidence. While these results seem fairly positive at first sight, they do not necessarily reflect fully the actual habits of students spending time on the internet. Respondents were more positive about their online safety skills than in their ability to use online information in a critical and responsible manner.

FIG. 1: Self-confidence of grade 8 and 11 students to perform activities relating to safe and responsible internet use (2011-12)

**Briefing Papers**, published monthly, aim to present the findings of the *Survey of Schools: ICT in Education* on a specific topic and to relate them to the results of European Schoolnet projects on the topic.

*Survey of Schools: ICT in Education* provides detailed, up-to-date and reliable benchmarking on ICT in school education across Europe, painting a picture of the use of technology for learning in schools: from the provision of infrastructure to teachers' and students' use, confidence and attitudes.

Based on over 190,000 responses from students at grade 4, 8 and 11 in general and vocational education, their teachers and head teachers, in schools randomly selected in around 30 European countries, the *Survey* questionnaires were administered online and answers analysed during the school year 2011-12.

The *Survey*, commissioned by the European Commission (Directorate General Communications Networks, Content and Technology), was conducted in partnership between European Schoolnet and the University of Liège (the Service d'Approches Quantitatives des faits éducatifs, Department of Education).

The survey and all the Briefing Papers are available here: [www.eun.org/observatory/surveyofschools](http://www.eun.org/observatory/surveyofschools)

The next Briefing Paper will be published in November 2013.

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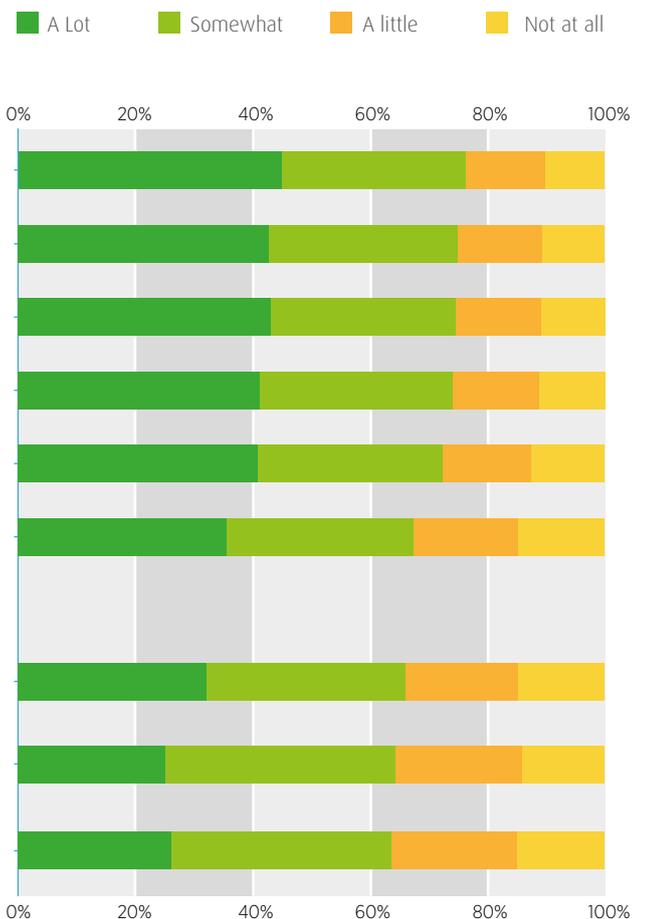
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In the *Survey* questionnaire, students were asked to rate their level of confidence in their ability to perform 24 ICT-related tasks, according to a scale ranging from 'Not at all' to 'A lot'. Based on an exploratory factor analysis, a safe and responsible internet use scale emerged, composed of elements/skills which were found to be distinct from operational and social media skills. This briefing focuses on students' ability to use the internet safely and responsibly. Further details are available at [www.eun.org/observatory/surveyofschools](http://www.eun.org/observatory/surveyofschools).

## To what extent do countries differ in levels of student confidence, and in the percentage of schools with an eSafety policy?

The previous section displayed European students' self-perceived ability to use the internet safely and responsibly. However, the situation greatly varies between countries. To show the full picture in a synthetic way, we composed a single safe and responsible use scale, ranging from 1 ('Not at all') to 4 ('A lot'). The scale averaged the nine metrics which the safe use of internet and the responsible use of online information were measured against. As can be seen in figure 2, European countries are distributed unevenly along the vertical axis, which represents the safe and responsible use scale. Moreover, the comparison between the figure on the left – showing data for grade 8 students – and the figure on the right – showing data for grade 11 students in general education – shows an upwards movement along the vertical axis: students' confidence greatly increases from grade 8 to grade 11 in general education.

This briefing also examines whether or not there is a relationship between students' self-perceived ability to use the internet safely and responsibly, and the presence of eSafety policies at school level. In the *Survey* questionnaire, school principals were asked to report if

their school had a specific policy or programme in place to prepare students for the safe and responsible use of internet. For each country, we display the percentage of students in schools with an eSafety policy on the horizontal axis (Fig. 2). This allows us to visualise the correlation between the presence of eSafety policies and students' safe and responsible internet use. As mentioned above, students' confidence greatly increases from grade 8 to grade 11 in general education. However, the percentage of students attending school that have an eSafety policy in place tends to be slightly lower in grade 11 in general education than at grade 8 level. More importantly, the red line in figure 2 reveals a slight positive correlation: countries with a higher percentage of students in a school with a specific policy or programme to prepare students for responsible internet behaviour are more likely to have a higher average self-confidence score. That being said, one should not draw too strong a conclusion from this finding, as the school policy indicator that we have used gives only a partial insight into the nature of online safety policies and how they are implemented by teachers.

FIG. 2: The country-level relationship between the percentage of students in schools with an eSafety policy and self-confidence levels amongst students (grade 8 and 11 general education, 2011-12)



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In several countries, insufficient school-level data were available. Therefore, we have focused on a subset of 18 countries in figure 2. In contrast, all other sections in this briefing are based on the 31 European countries of the *Survey*, with the exceptions of Iceland, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. For a more technical overview, see [www.eun.org/observatory/surveyofschools](http://www.eun.org/observatory/surveyofschools).

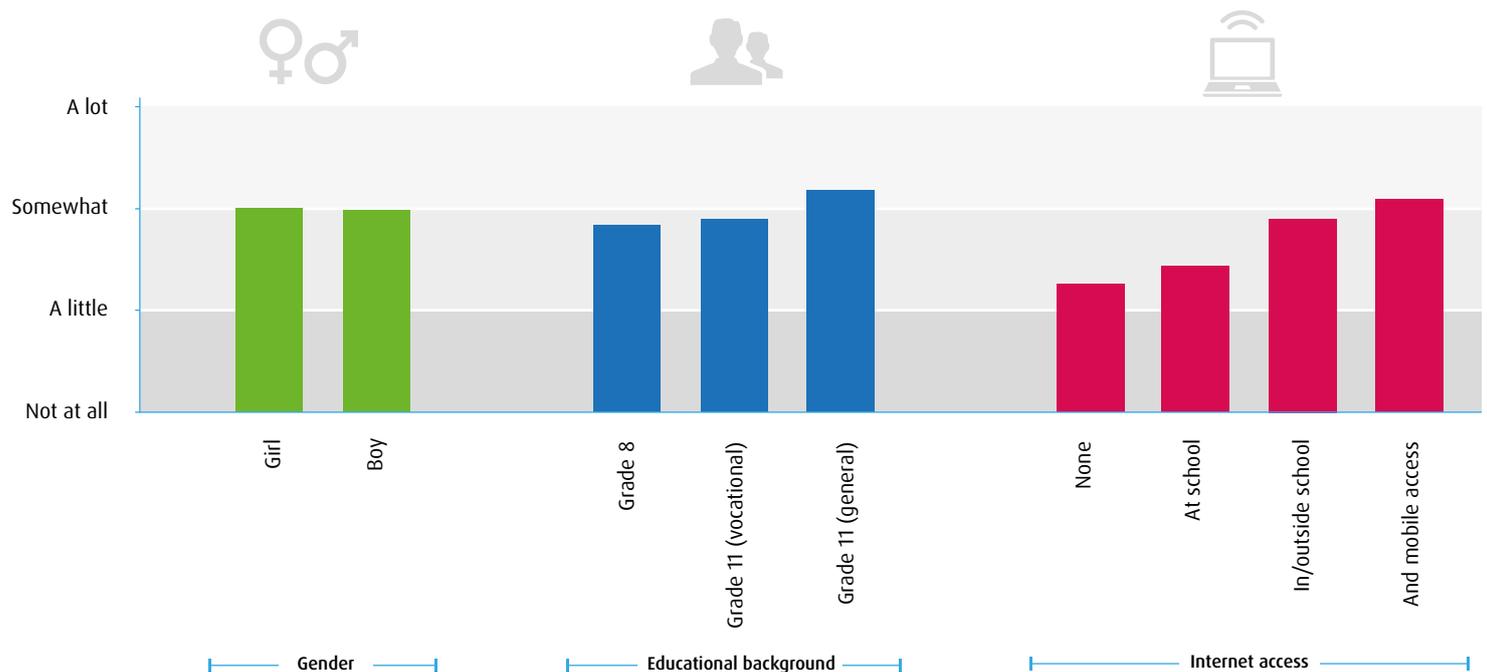
## How can we explain individual differences amongst students' confidence in their ability to use the internet?

While country characteristics are undoubtedly important, our empirical analyses show that we should also take into account differences *within* countries, both among schools and among individual students (see also Helsper et al., 2013).

This aspect is illustrated by examining how differences in gender, educational background and access to the internet affect students' self-perceived ability to use the internet safely and responsibly. In relation to gender, the green bars in figure 3 reveal that boys and girls have similar levels of self-confidence in regards to using the internet safely

and responsibly. By contrast, grade and type of education do seem to make a difference: the levels of the blue bars show that students from grade 11 in general education report substantially higher levels of confidence, with an average of 3.17, when compared with students from grade 8 and grade 11 in vocational education which, on average, score 2.88 and 2.93 respectively. Finally, the levels of the red bars suggest that confidence levels are higher when students use the internet more regularly, both inside and outside of school, and if the students additionally have easy access to the internet on their mobile phone.

FIG. 3: The effect of gender, grade and type of education, and online access in and outside the school on students' safe and responsible internet use (2011-12)



### MORE PRECISELY:

The estimates in figure 3 are the result of three separate regressions investigating the effect of three types of variables on students' self-confidence in regards to using the internet safely and responsibly: 1) gender, 2) educational background, and 3) access to the internet at school in the three months' prior to taking the survey, access to the internet outside school (i.e. at home, at friends' or a family member's home, in a public library, an internet café) in the three months' prior to the survey, and easy access to a mobile phone with an internet connection at home or outside school. All effects reported are significant at the .001 level.

## Conclusion

Based on our brief empirical overview, it is possible to point to a number of factors that should be taken into account when developing tailored strategies for a safer and more responsible internet for children and young people. First, the majority of European students feel rather confident in their ability in relation to behaving safely and responsibly online. That being said, for many students there is still room for progress, especially in regards to their ability to critically analyse online sources and information. Second, self-confidence scores clearly vary across countries, which relates in part to the fact that schools may or may not have a specific policy or programme in place to prepare students for responsible internet behaviour. Third, at student level, both educational background and (mobile) access to the internet inside and outside the school matter greatly. In other words, policymakers and practitioners may wish to combine educational support with efforts to provide online access to all.

### References:

- Helsper, E., Kalmus, V., Hasebrink, U., Sagvari, B. & de Haan, J. (2013), "Country classification. Opportunities, risks, harm and parental mediation." EU Kids Online, The London School of Economics and Political Science, London.
- Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A. & Ólafsson, K. (2011), "Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children." EU Kids Online, The London School of Economics and Political Science, London.

## Project Focus: How Insafe promotes a better internet for children and young people

The Project Focus page links the main findings from the *Survey of Schools: ICT in Education* analysed in each issue of the *Briefing Papers* with one specific project coordinated by European Schoolnet.

As this issue explores safe and responsible behaviour online, we asked Janice Richardson, *Insafe* Coordinator at European Schoolnet, to explain how the *Insafe* network ([www.saferinternet.org](http://www.saferinternet.org)) of European awareness centres, helplines and youth panels is contributing to a safer and better internet.

### *Q: What is the impact of the Insafe network on the behaviour of children and young people online?*

The *Insafe* network was set up by the European Commission in 2004 to empower children and young people to use online and mobile technologies, positively, safely and effectively. The network calls for shared responsibility for the protection of the rights and needs of citizens, in particular children and youths, by government, educators, parents, media, industry, and all other relevant actors. *Insafe* partners work together across Europe to share best practice, information, and resources. The network fosters collaboration between industry, schools

and families as it strives to bridge the digital divide between home and school, and between generations.

The *Insafe* network also organises the annual *Safer Internet Day* ([www.saferinternetday.org](http://www.saferinternetday.org)) campaign, which has taken place each February since 2004, and is celebrated in more than 100 countries across Europe and beyond.

### *Q: How is the Insafe network organised? How do you facilitate the work of the national Safer Internet Centres?*

A national Safer Internet Centre typically comprises an awareness centre, helpline, youth panel and hotline. Components within the national Centres work together to produce awareness-raising campaigns and resources, gathering evidence from the helpline, hotlines, and youth panels to ensure that their actions keep pace with the new opportunities, risks, and challenges that are continually emerging in the online world.

Helplines provide support and services to assist young people and parents with the issues they encounter online. Hotlines, which operate within the *INHOPE* network, enable members of the public to report any illegal content they encounter on the internet. Through regular communication across the network, Safer Internet Centres can learn from, and build on, each other's experiences.

### *Q: How do you reach children and youth?*

We produce a broad range of educational material and campaigns specifically for children and young people, and their teachers and parents. In addition, all Safer Internet Centres have a youth panel where young people can express their views, and exchange knowledge and experience about their use of online technologies. Youth panels

contribute to the design of awareness-raising tools and campaigns. Once a year, a representative from each of the 30 *Insafe* youth panels come together at the European Commission's Safer Internet Forum to help influence the governance of the internet of today, and of the future.

### *Q: The Survey of Schools: ICT in Education shows that pupils' confidence in using the internet safely and responsibly is linked to school policy, educational background and online access within and outside of the school. How does the Insafe network reach schools, teachers and parents?*

*Insafe* is forever creating new resources for these audiences; whilst some, such as the family *eSafety Kit* are for the whole family, others are for very young users (e.g. *Play and Learn: Being online* [www.saferinternet.org/activity-book](http://www.saferinternet.org/activity-book)) and still others are for teens (e.g. *Web We Want* [www.webwewant.eu](http://www.webwewant.eu)). Resources are designed for use at school or at home

and, in many cases, independently by young people themselves. *Insafe* Safer Internet Centres ensure that resources and campaigns are both localised and culturally adapted, and are made available in a range of formats (hard-copy, online, serious games, videos, mobile apps, etc.) to support diverse learning styles and settings.



Under the framework of the European Commission's Safer Internet Programme, *Insafe* and *INHOPE* work together to deliver a safer and better internet promoting safe, responsible use of the internet and mobile devices to children, young people and their families, and working to identify and remove illegal content online. To find out more, please go to [www.saferinternet.org](http://www.saferinternet.org).