

## Social Networking, Age and Privacy

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### 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'. 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.

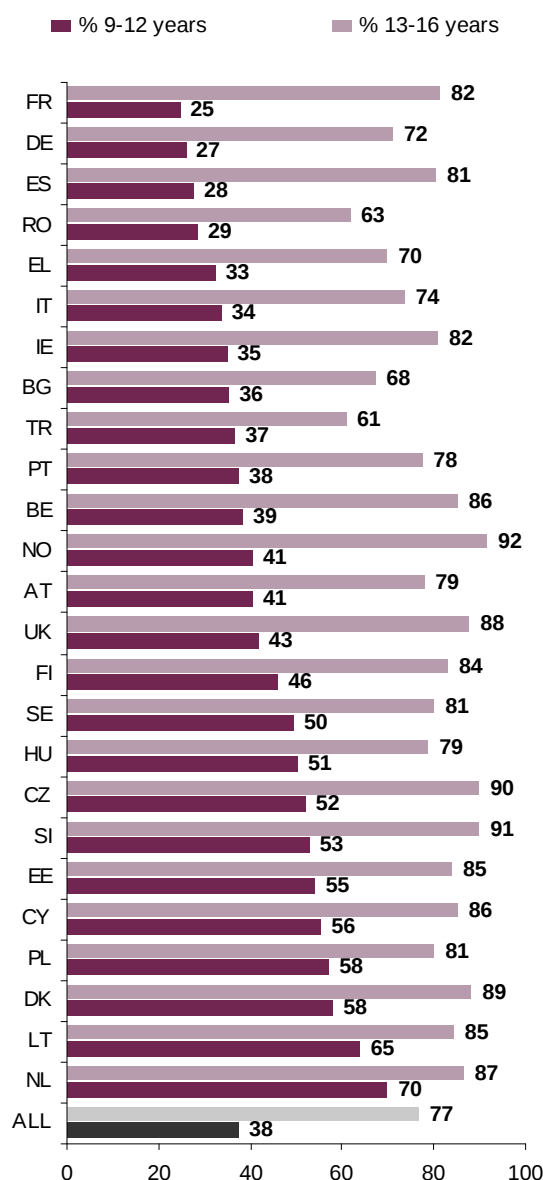
### Widespread social networking by youth

- 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.

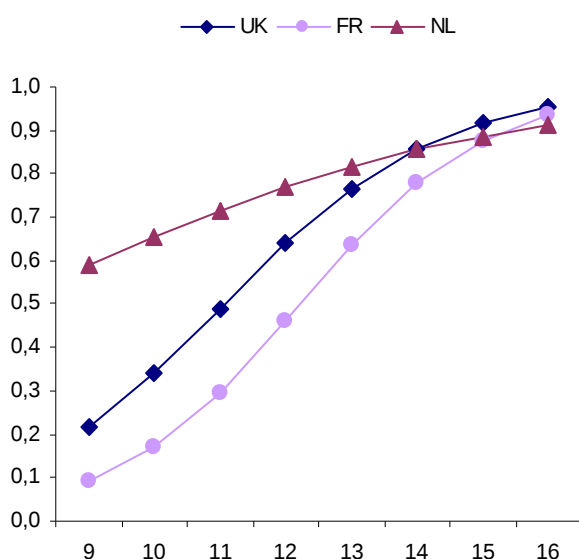
- **Gender makes little difference:** although girls are traditionally thought to communicate more than boys, there are few gender differences – 60% of girls and 58% of boys have their own SNS profile.
- **Social networking varies greatly by country:** in Nordic and some Eastern European countries, SNS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

**To inform evidence-based policy, this report examines the social networking practices of European children.** The focus is on the users' age, skills and privacy practices, together with the restrictive practices of their parents.

## 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, but we do not develop a deeper interpretation of these possible country differences, a task that awaits our 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. The resulting guidance,<sup>3</sup> for which compliance is evaluated by the EC,<sup>4</sup> 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.

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

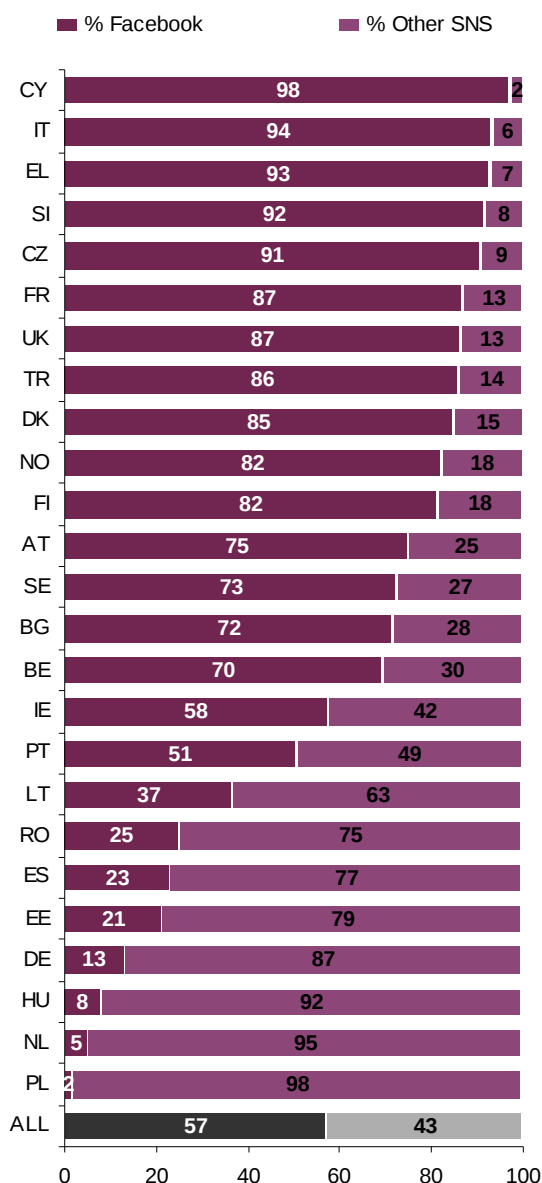
<sup>4</sup> Staksrud, E., & Lobe, B. (2010) *Evaluation of the Implementation of the Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU Part I: General Report*. Luxembourg: European Commission.

<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           |
| All SNS       | 100               |                   |

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             | %<br>9-12<br>years | %<br>13-16<br>years | %<br>9-16<br>years | Children<br>13-16, for<br>every child<br>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<br>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.

- The SNS with the oldest 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.

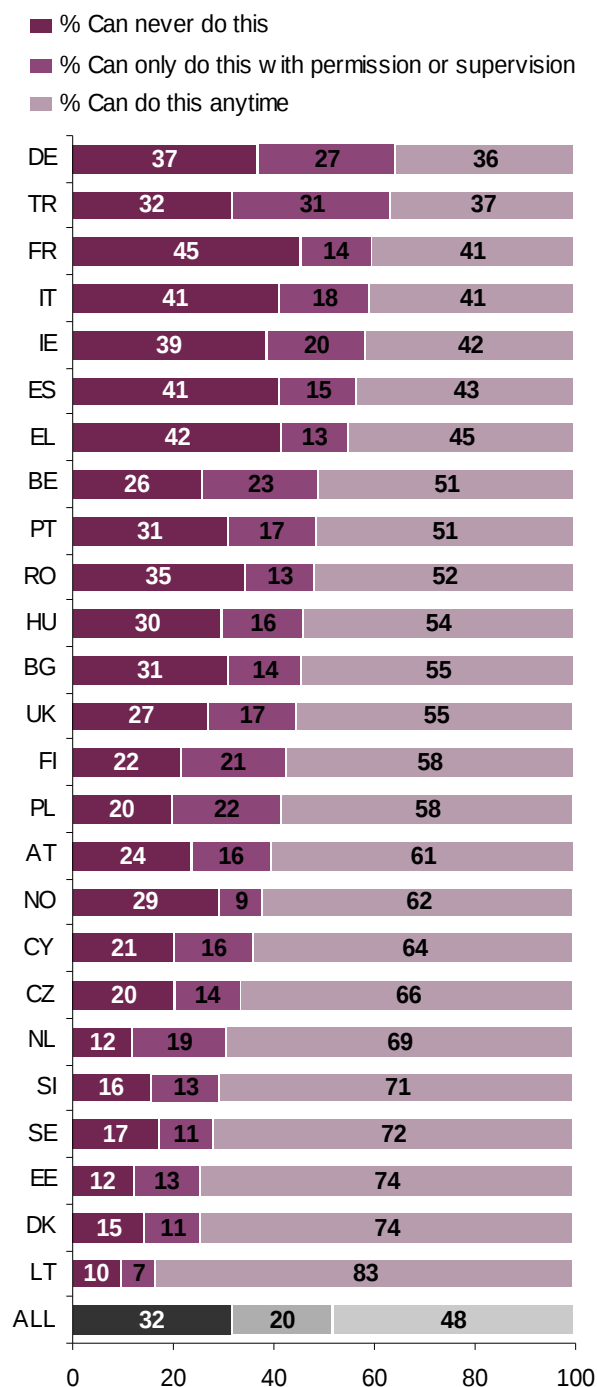
<sup>8</sup>Age restrictions are identified from the SNS site and/or from Lobe, B., & Staksrud, E. (Eds.). (2010). *Evaluation of the Implementation of the Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU Part II: Testing of 20 Providers of Social Networking Services in Europe*. Luxembourg: European Commission.

<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.

<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**



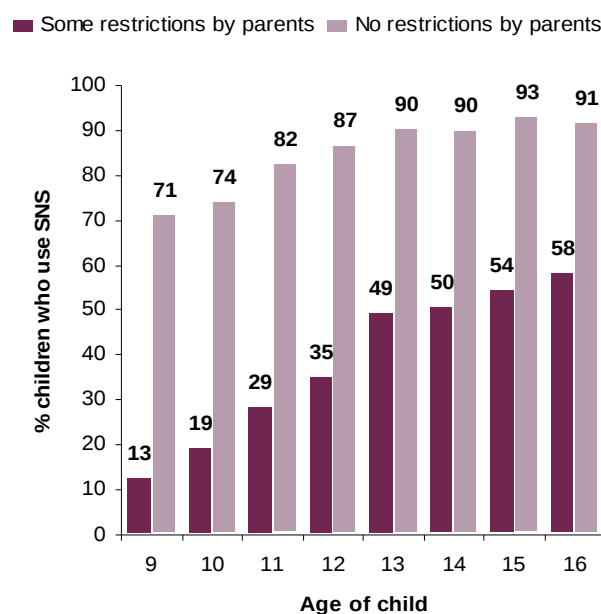
QP221d: Whether child is allowed to do this all of the time, only with permission/supervision or never allowed: Have his/her own social networking profile.

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.

- 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 no more likely to keep their profile private than older children – **in most countries (15 of 25), younger children are more likely than older children to have their profiles public.**

- Compared to schülerVZ or Hyves it is notable that among Facebook users a larger proportion of younger children have their profiles set to 'public'.
- The UK and Ireland have fewer children with public profiles on Facebook, possibly a result of effective awareness-raising campaigns in these countries.

## 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 partly dependent on the usability of the features themselves.

As previously 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.
- 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>
- 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 | lwiw         | 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.

<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.

- 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.
- While Facebook is the most popular SNS for young users across Europe, the contact patterns that can be observed varies greatly, from over half of the children in Sweden having contacts only met online, compared to only about one in ten 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 | Iwiw         | 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.**<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 is 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 and policy implications

- 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.
- 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).
- 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.
- 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 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, it may be argued that providers should employ improved age verification efforts 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.
- 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.
- Since identification of young (including under-age) users appears ineffective, it seems that young users are neither prevented from social networking nor protected from its potential risks. Several kinds of risk indicators are examined in this report.
- 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.

This report has examined the social networking practices of European children, by age, by SNS and by country. The intention was 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.

**EU Kids Online II** is funded by the EC Safer Internet Programme (contract SIP-KEP-321803) from 2009-11 to enhance knowledge of children's and parents' experiences and practices regarding risky and safer use of the internet and new online technologies.

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 findings, reports and technical survey details, see [www.eukidsonline.net](http://www.eukidsonline.net).

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

- Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., and Ólafsson, K. (2011) *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full Findings.*
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- Livingstone, S. and Tsatsou, P. (2009) Guest editors for special issue, 'European children go online: issues, findings and policy matters', *Journal of Children and Media*, 3(4).

## 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.