GLOBAL KIDS ONLINE SERBIA Balancing between Opportunities and Risks: Results from the Pilot Study

# Details

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* Access, inequalities and vulnerabilities
* Risks and harms
* Literacy and skills
* Social mediation

## Sample

In total, 35 students (19 girls and 16 boys) aged 10–17 participated in the eight focus groups (children from the general population: four
groups, Roma children: two groups and children with intellectual disabilities: two groups In total, 204 students and 204 parents were interviewed, but only data from 197 were used in the analysis (one interviewee did not use the internet and six students had already reached their 18th birthday).
Students from 16 different schools (9 primary and 7 secondary schools) and four different cities (Belgrade, Nis, Kragujevac and Novi Sad) were chosen.

## Implications For Parents About

* Parental practices / parental mediation
* Parental digital literacy
* Parenting guidance / support

## Implications For Educators About

Other

## Implications For Policy Makers About

* High-quality content online for children and young people
* Creating a safe environment for children online
* Other

## Other PolicyMaker Implication

Improving parents digital skills

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Researchers

# Abstract

The emergence and rapid development of information and communication technology (ICT) has had a dramatic impact on children around the world. Digital
media now occupy a central place in children’s social lives and the competent use of ICT is becoming a precondition for children’s inclusion in society and,
later, the workforce. There is an urgent need for all countries to develop national and international evidence-based policy frameworks and guidelines for ICT. Several recent studies serve as useful bases for European and high-income countries (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, Ólafsson, 2011; Livingstone,
Mascheroni, Ólafsson, Haddon, 2014). UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti, The London School of Economics (LSE), and EU Kids Online have launched an international research project, Global Kids Online (GKO). The goal is to develop a global research toolkit, building on the one developed by EU Kids Online, as a flexible new resource for researchers gathering evidence on children’s use of the internet and the related risks and opportunities of being online.
Serbia is one of the partner countries invited to participate in the project and UNICEF Belgrade Office invited the Institute of Psychology of the Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade, to join the research team and conduct the pilot research. Stakeholders recognise the significance of being a partner in the GKO project. Despite Serbia’s readiness to respect children’s rights and needs in this realm, and its desire to improve education and protect them from potential risks and online aggression, the country does not yet carry out systematic research in the field. By participation in GKO, Serbia has an opportunity to gain important insights, to exchange experiences and to use the results for creating effective policies. The primary aim of the research was to pilot the qualitative and quantitative research toolkit developed by Innocenti and LSE. The quality of the methodology and the sample size allow us to gain some information about children’s online practices and attitudes. Nevertheless, to produce a more reliable picture that would serve as the basis for policy recommendation, a larger, nationally representative sample would be necessary. Besides information about child identity and resources (gender, age, family composition, socioeconomic status, personal and social strengths and difficulties), the modular toolkit gathered information on children’s internet access (place of use and devices for use), practices and skills (operational, information, social creative and mobile skills, online self-efficacy), opportunities (learning, community and civic participation, creative participation, social relationships, entertainment, personal information, online communication) and risks (meeting new people, online and offline aggression, exposure to sexual
content, excessive internet use). The preparatory phase consisted of communicating collaboratively with the partners, translating and adapting the instruments and documents, training interviewers, finalising the sampling process and making contacts with schools and future respondents. The research included both qualitative and quantitative elements. The qualitative part of the study consisted of 8 focus groups, with a total of 35 students from four urban schools in Belgrade. Two focus groups were conducted with Roma children, two with children with special educational needs, two with 10-year-old
children from a high-status elementary school and two with children from a high-status private secondary school. The quantitative element consisted of face-toface interviews with 197 students (and 197 of their parents) from 16 primary and secondary schools in four cities across the country. The piloting showed that the research toolkit is comprehensive and usable for intended purposes. The qualitative research protocol demonstrated its suitability for children aged 9–17, including children from marginalised groups and children with intellectual disabilities. Some revisions of the coding scheme were proposed in order to improve the validity and reliability of results. The quantitative toolkit also proved useful and comprehensive. However, several changes were proposed in the wording of questions and in the possible alternative responses. Because the huge difference in abilities and the differences in online practices between the youngest and oldest age group, we suggest that two versions of the questionnaire (for younger and older children) may be reconsidered. The study confirmed the central role ICT has in children’s lives, even for the youngest. The age of going online is decreasing, and the majority of the youngest children went online for the first time
during the pre-school period. Children go online from various devices and from various places. Children they own (mostly cell phones) – because of accessibility and privacy. They use the internet primarily for communication and entertainment, and then to seek information.
At the earliest ages, boys use the internet more often than girls, but this difference decreases with age. In the oldest age group (aged 15–17), when internet use
is most frequent, girls use the internet more than boys. Skills and knowledge increase with age: the greatest difference is between children aged 9–11 and older
children. For almost half of the students the internet does not serve as educational tool for school purposes. Children report that schools do not generally have consistent rules regarding internet use, nor do they give appropriate safety guidance. Children generally perceive the internet as a place that includes both good and upsetting contents. These balanced or ambivalent views were especially visible during focus-group discussions. Children highly value the positive side of the internet while being aware of its ‘dark’ side. In the survey every third child reported some negative online experience during the previous
year. Finding explicit sexual content is commonplace (two-thirds of children reported it), but is generally perceived as not especially upsetting. Even among the
youngest children every third child stumbled upon explicit sexual content, which was more upsetting to younger children and girls. Similarly, every third child reported being exposed to some kind of aggression during last year, although only 14 per cent said it had happened more than once or twice. The majority of these episodes are related to online aggression. The level of face-to-face aggression stays approximately the same with age but the level of online aggression increases. Those more exposed to offline and online aggression are more prone to be aggressive offline and online. Children who spend more time online were more likely to be both aggressors and victims of aggression. Somewhat less than half of the children have communicated with unknown people on the internet,
and somewhat more than a half later met strangers. In other words, 30 per cent of children have met in person somebody first introduced online. Only nine per
cent of them (five children) reported being upset by such encounter. Focus-group material showed that children make a clear distinction between meeting an
unknown person online who is a friend-of-a-friend, their peer etc. and meeting someone older. Meeting an older person online is considered to be much more
risky and potentially harming. Many of them prefer communicating online with people they already know. Meeting new contacts online and meeting new
contacts offline are more frequent among boys and older children. Among the boys from the oldest age group, 60 per cent have met new online contacts
offline. Finally, an unrecognised risk emerged, related to piracy. More than half of the children had made pirate copies of movies at least once, while approximately
one-third of the children had downloaded a cracked video game or cracked software. Private and mobile internet use, along with the relatively modest internet skills of parents, make it difficult for parents to mediate such use. Still, according to children and parents, a significant percentage of parents try various mediation
techniques. Mediation decreases with the age of children, presumably because of greater skills of older children and parents’ wishes to respect a child’s
privacy. Generally, we found high levels of trust between children and their parents. A great majority of parents about things that upset them in general and
about what they do on the internet (77 per cent) and what upsets them online (68 per cent). Children are more reluctant to ask parents for help or advice, perhaps because they believe that their parents have less skill and experience. Some data suggest that a large proportion of parents are likely to invade
children’s privacy in order to check on their online activities. It seems that, so far, schools do not use the potential benefits of the internet for educational purposes.
Schools play only a minor role in teaching children safe online behaviour. Differences in online practices and attitudes according to age were numerous and substantial; those between the youngest group (aged 9–11) and the rest were especially large. Gender differences were also frequent but in many cases interact with age: some gender differences decrease with age and some increase. Differences related to material status, except generally insignificant.

# Outcome

"The study confirmed the central role ICT has in children’s lives, even for the youngest. The age of going online is decreasing, and the majority of the youngest children went online for the first time during the pre-school period. Children go online from various devices and from various places. Children prefer devices they can use exclusively – the devices they own (mostly cell phones) – because of accessibility and privacy. They use the internet primarily for communication and entertainment, and then to seek information." (Popadić, Pavlović, Petrović, Kuzmanović, 2016, p. )
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