# RUSSIAN KIDS ONLINE: YOUNGER, FASTER, RISKIER

*Key findings of the EU Kids Online II survey in Russia*

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**SUMMARY**

This report presents key results of the comprehensive "Russian Kids Online" research on Russian children's online risks and safety, compared with the EU Kids Online II countries as part of the EU Kids Online research network. Over 1,000 parent-child pairs from 11 regions of the Russian Federation participated in this study.

**Higher use, higher risk.** According to the results of the EU Kids Online 2010 survey on the use of the internet by children and teenagers, the Russian Federation can be compared with the countries that formed the 'high online activity and high risk' group, together with Northern and Eastern European countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Denmark, Sweden). In 2010 more than 90% of Russian schoolchildren spent 3 to 5 hours online daily, with some saying that they "lived on the internet".

**Focused social web users.** The scope of online activities demonstrated by Russian children was notably wide. However, most of them can be placed in the group of 'focused social web users' unlike their European peers who prioritised study and online entertainment. More than 75% of Russian children have a profile on a social networking site, and more children in Russia than in the EU Kids Online II countries keep their profiles open, add online strangers to their friends and keep their personal information public.

**Independent users.** Unlike their peers in the EU Kids Online II countries, Russian children more often go online from their personal devices (PCs, mobile phones, tablets etc.), and that makes them feel and behave more freely and independently while being online. Due to the digital divide that in 2010 was still more present in Russia than in the EU Kids Online II countries, Russian parents barely mediated online activities of their children due to the lack of context and understanding.

**Resilient users.** In 2010 Russian teenagers encountered more of various online threats than their European peers, on average. The most common types of risks were: seeing sexual or potentially harmful content (96%), bullying (28%), sexting (28%), 'stranger danger' (50%). Nevertheless, it is important to mention that Russian children seemed to be more resilient users if compared with children from the EU Kids Online II countries. The latter would get significantly more upset and remained upset for a longer period of time when facing online risks.

These findings highlight the importance of digital literacy improvements for Russian schoolchildren. Competent and responsible internet use allows children to avoid many online threats and protects them against potential harm. As one of the results of this project, the Foundation for Internet Development has developed educational programs on digital literacy for schoolchildren. These programs have been widely adopted by the education system throughout the country.

Due to space limitations, several topics were excluded from this report, such as parental mediation, age and gender differences, and regional differences. These results can be found in the Russian Kids Online Report full version:

http://detionline.com/assets/files/helpline/Russian_KidsOnline_Final_Report_2013.pdf
http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/ParticipatingCountries/PDFs/RU-RussianReport.pdf

## INTRODUCTION

The active development of the Russian Internet segment began in the second half of the 1990s, about 5-6 years later than in many European countries. Massive increase in the number of Internet users occurred almost 10 years later. Only at the beginning of the new millennium the Internet in Russia became widely available. The number of Internet users in Europe at that time was already over 100 million. In 2003-04 almost in all European countries, the number of Internet users exceeded 30% of the population. Russia reached that point 5 years later.

The digitization of Russian educational institutions began in 2006-2007: more than 52 thousand Russian schools (75%) were connected to the Internet as part of the national project called 'Education'. From that moment on children rushed to the alluring World Wide Web. In 2009, the Foundation for Internet Development conducted socio-psychological research called 'My Safe Net' among adolescents in 18 Russian regions (4,336 children aged 14-17). About 90% of the adolescents identified themselves as Internet users (Soldatova, Zotova, Chekalina, Gostimskaya, 2011). At that time only one third of the adult population were 'monthly' Internet users. In 2009 the 'Year of Safe Internet in Russia' was launched by the Ministry of Communications and Mass Media. By way of comparison, the 'Safer Internet' program, initiated by the European Commission and intending to create safe online space for children, was launched in 1999.

If we aspire to have an effectively functioning information society in the future, we should clearly understand who is going to build it. Today more and more people in Russia address these questions. International comparative reports allow for better insights into the emerging Russian information society, making it possible to foresee its prospects and possible challenges. However, by early 2010 there was no such research that would make such a comparison possible.

In an effort to carry out a comparative international analysis, the Foundation for Internet Development together with the Department of Psychology at the Lomonosov Moscow State University joined the EU Kids Online II project, a survey carried out in 2010 in 25 European countries (hereafter referred to as "EU Kids Online II" or "EUKOL II" countries) and Australia. In each participating country, 9-16 year olds who use the Internet and their parents have been surveyed in order to obtain cross-nationally valid and comparable data about internet use. The project's aim was to learn more about children's and parents' experiences and practices of risky and safer use of the Internet and new online technologies in Russia and other countries.

## USAGE OF THE INTERNET

### Where children use the Internet

Due to the skyrocketing technological development in recent years, children have received more opportunities to go online through various devices, leaving parents with less and less opportunities to control their online activities. However, they continuously fail to handle the problems they experience online, which makes the issue of parental control even more urgent.

As shown in Table 1, Russian kids more often than their peers in EU Kids Online II countries go online without any adult supervision, in their bedroom or while being "out and about". They access the web significantly less from a home or school computer, where an adult could see them. As a result, they surf the web almost fully autonomously, preventing their parents and teachers from keeping a regular check on them (Soldatova, Zotova, Nestik, Rasskazova, 2013).

Table 1: Where children use the Internet, %

| % of children who say they use the internet at the following locations | Russia | EUKOL II |
|---|---|---|
| Own bedroom (or other private room) at home | 73 | 49 |
| At a friend's home | 53 | 53 |
| Living room (or other public room) at home | 39 | 62 |
| At a relative's home | 37 | 42 |
| At school | 31 | 63 |
| When 'out and about' | 30 | 9 |
| In an Internet café | 12 | 12 |
| In a public library or at another public place | 9 | 12 |
| Average number of locations of use | 3 | 3 |

Note: Multiple responses allowed.
Base: All children who use the Internet.

## How children access the Internet

As seen in Table 2, Russian schoolchildren access the Internet most frequently through their own PCs (57%) or smartphones (45%), getting ahead of their peers in the EU Kids Online II countries with 35% and 21% respectively. At the same time, much less than in the EU Kids Online II countries, younger people in Russia access the internet through such specialized devices as digital TV sets (Russia - 15%, EUKOL II - 32%) and games consoles (Russia - 8%, EUKOL II - 26%). Having a personal PC or smartphone gives teenagers the privilege to go online whenever and wherever they feel like it, doing whatever they want to do without asking for any permission or supervision. On one hand, it allows them to develop a more independent and competent user identity. On the other hand, the same practice increases their chances of facing online risks and makes them more susceptible to those risks.

## How much children use the Internet

### Internet acceleration: the age at which children first use the Internet is dropping

The age at which a child first uses the Internet defines the beginning of active socialization in the information society. Specialists in the area have been debating about what age is appropriate for children to start using the Internet. While adults debate, children start exploring the surrounding environment, where computers occupy an important place in the modern household. When does online socialization begin in Russia?

The average age of first Internet use in Russia is 10. In Moscow and Saint Petersburg, where the Internet penetration is higher than in other regions, it usually is 9 years. Some of our respondent children said to have started using the Internet at the age of 5, 4 or even 3. On average, children in the EU Kids Online II countries first go online one year earlier than children in Russia (at age 9, and in some countries even at age 8 or 7). However, 11-12 year olds both in the EU Kids Online II countries and in Russia reported to have started using the Internet at the age of 9.

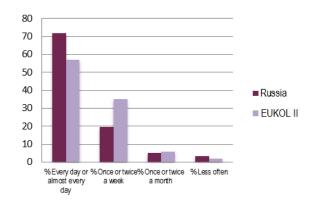**Table 2: Devices through which children access the Internet**

|  | Russia | EUKOL II |
|---|---|---|
| Own PC | 57 | 35 |
| Shared PC | 48 | 58 |
| Mobile phone | 45 | 31 |
| Own laptop | 21 | 24 |
| Television set | 15 | 32 |
| Shared laptop | 15 | 23 |
| Other handheld or portable device (e.g. iPod Touch, iPhone or Blackberry) – *hereafter 'Handheld device'* | 9 | 12 |
| Games console | 8 | 26 |
| Average number of devices of use these days? | 2 | 2.5 |

Note: Multiple responses allowed.
Base: All children who use the Internet.

## The frequency of going online and the time spent online are increasing

Russian children start using the Internet a bit later, but do it more intensively (Figure 1). According to research, in 2010 only 10% of Russian school children did not use the Internet at all, but in 2013 this indicator dropped to almost 0% (Soldatova, Zotova, Chekalina, Gostimskaya, 2011; Soldatova, Zotova, Nestik, Rasskazova, 2013). The number of children using the Internet daily is almost 1.5 times higher in Russia than in the EU Kids Online II countries. This may be one of the reasons why they also encounter more internet-related risks.
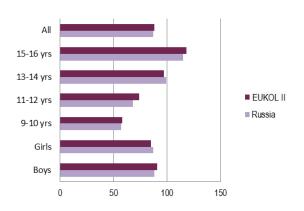
**Figure 1: How often children use the Internet**



Base: All children who use the Internet.

Children were also asked how much time they spend online during the week and over the

weekend (Figure 2). On average, children aged 9-16 spend about an hour and a half online a day. However, we noticed some significant age differences: 15-16 year olds spend about two hours online a day, which is twice as much as younger children do. During school days 60% of children spend from half an hour to two hours online. And while 13% of the children use the internet for over 3 hours on weekdays, the number goes up to 30% over the weekend. This increase in time spent online puts at risk children's psychological and physical develop-ment and makes them more vulnerable to various Internet addictions.

**Figure 2: How long children use the Internet on an average day (in minutes)**



Base: All children who use the Internet.

## Digital literacy

Children exposed to limitless opportunities due to modern technologies often fail to identify online risks and threats, and, as a result, become the most vulnerable group among all Internet users. To help them avoid possible unpleasant outcomes, it is important to teach children to use the Internet safely.

Children aged 11 and over were asked about their digital and safety skills, such as comparing different sites to decide whether information is true, changing privacy settings on a social networking profile, blocking messages from someone, deleting the record of sites they have visited, blocking unwanted ads or spam, changing filter preferences and finding information on how to use the internet safely. On average, kids in Russia report having slightly

more digital skills than children in EU Kids Online II countries (4.7 and 4.2 respectively). The general level of digital literacy among Russian children can be evaluated as medium. A lot of children (mostly 13-16 year olds) manage most digital safety and literacy skills. Given that each year more and younger children use the Internet, and that computers have become an important learning tool starting from elementary school onwards, more educational work is needed in the field of digital literacy and safety skills formation, both among younger children and teenagers.

## ACTIVITIES

## Range of children's online activities

Online activities become more and more diverse, with children being able to find something in their interest. Participation in many online activities is a building block of successful online socialization. This is why it is not only important to assess time spent online, but to keep track of what exactly children do while online.
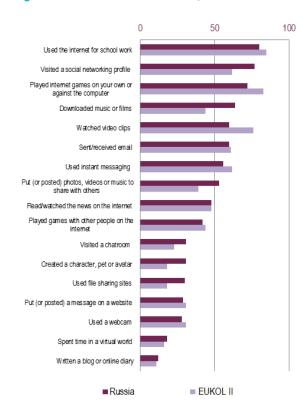
According to our research, Russian school children embrace almost all available types of online activities and prioritize those that assume communication. Most of these online activities increase the chance of eventually having to deal with an online risk of some sort.

Russian children and their peers in EU Kids Online II countries differ in the kinds of online activities they give priority to (Figure 3). Russian children tend to more often use social networking sites, download music and films, upload photos, music, videos, use chatrooms, create virtual pets or avatars and use file sharing sites. More often than their Russian peers, children in EU Kids Online II countries use the Internet for schoolwork, play Internet games on their own or against the computer, watch videos or use chatrooms. Children in Russia and the EU Kids Online II countries equally often will send/receive emails, read news online, play games with others, put a message on a website, use a webcam, spend time in a virtual world and write a blog.

School children engage in almost every activity available on the Internet and start to actively explore the Internet space from very early on. The quality of the content they come across online becomes then especially important.

**Figure 3: Children's activities online, %**



Note: Multiple responses allowed.
Base: All children who use the Internet.

## Children's use of SNSs

Social networks are what children and teenagers find the most attractive on the Internet. SNSs allow them to stay in touch with their friends, and see what is new in the lives of their peers. They are also great tools of self-expression. Almost 80% of Russian children have admitted to have profiles on SNSs. Every third child uses more than one SNS. Moreover, Russian school children make their SNS profiles visible to everyone more often than children in EU Kids Online II countries (79% and 59% respectively).

SNSs contribute to expanding a child's circle of contacts, but at the same time tend to transform the very notion of friendship. Overall, a Russian school child aged 9-16 has 50 friends on social networking sites. Almost every fifth child (16%) has over 100 friends. Russian children and their peers in EU Kids Online II countries have on average about the same amount of online friends. But while Russian children have 11 to 100 friends, a little more of their peers in EU Kids Online II countries have 101-300 and over 300 friends. The amount of contacts increases with age.

As children move from childhood to adolescence, their interests change, so teenagers start seeing communication with peers as their ultimate need. Today online communication is an important part of peer relations. Internet allows them not only to stay in touch with their close friends, but also to extend their circle of communication, which can include more and more new people. Active communication online can be threatened by various online risks. To avoid these, a teenager should know how to set up SNS settings for a safer use.

## Use of SNS privacy settings

A social networking profile and online contacts are not the only factors that put a child at risk online. Other factors include the ability to use safer profile settings, personal information that children share with others, and keeping their profiles public or private.

Many Russian children (40%) keep their profile private so that only their friends can see it. However, one third of children have their profiles open to anybody. The older children grow, the less often they set their profiles public. The highest percentage of children with open profiles is among 9-12 year olds who signed up for a social networking site despite age restrictions. Things look differently across EU Kids Online II countries where children go for setting options regardless their age. Depending on the country, parents monitor their children's online activities more closely and ask them to keep their SNS profiles private (EU Kids Online, 2014).

A profile on a social networking site allows displaying all kinds of information. Those children, who use SNSs, were asked what kind of information they show on their social

networking profiles. Russian children happened to provide more personal information than their peers in EU Kids Online II countries; they also seem to more often leave their address and phone number visible on their profiles (35% and 14% respectively). Significantly less Russian children, compared to their peers in EU Kids Online II countries, post an incorrect age on a SNS profile (9% and 16% respectively). This does not come as a surprise, as age limitations were introduced to Russian social networking sites in 2010, and before that children did not have to worry about faking their real age.

## Children's approaches to online communication

Email services, chats, instant messengers, blogs, social networking sites and other online services allow users to communicate both real time and whenever convenient. Online communication is most popular with school kids. It is important to understand that this communication is different from communication

in real time. As part of our research, we wanted to see how children perceive their online behavior. Overall, Russian children prefer communicating with their friends and acquaintances on SNSs, via email services or messengers. About half of the children communicate online with people they do not keep in touch with offline. As children grow older, they tend to communicate online with more and more people who have never met offline. Two thirds of children search for new friends online and befriend people they have never met in real life. About 1/3 would share personal information with their online friends.

Both Russian kids and their peers in EU Kids Online II countries communicate with people they don't know in person, in virtual worlds or when playing games. However, it should be noted that children in EU Kids Online II countries seem to be more careful when it comes to online communication, regardless of the means they use to connect (Table 3).

Table 3: Children's actions in relation to online contacts, %

| | More often than monthly | | Less than monthly | | Never | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Russia | EUKOL II | Russia | EUKOL II | Russia | EUKOL II |
| Added people to my friends list or address book whom I have never met face-to-face | 46 | 16 | 22 | 18 | 32 | 66 |
| Looked for new friends on the Internet | 45 | 21 | 23 | 19 | 32 | 60 |
| Sent personal information to someone that I have never met face-to-face | 24 | 6 | 20 | 9 | 56 | 85 |
| Sent a photo or video of myself to someone that I have never met face-to-face | 17 | 5 | 15 | 9 | 68 | 86 |
| Pretended to be a different kind of person on the internet from what I really am | 15 | 6 | 14 | 10 | 71 | 84 |

Base: All children who use the Internet

## RISK AND HARM

A risky situation online is triggered by one or more risk factors that pose a threat to Internet users. The risk factors can be subjectively and objectively conditioned and result in a risky situation. Objective indicators include gender, age, family's social status, area of living; Internet access, terms of Internet use, etc. Subjective indicators, among others, include psychological parameters such as user activity, relations with parents and peers, as well as the user's
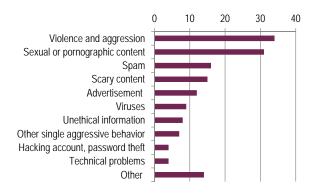
character, psychological state, coping skills, etc. The very notion of risk is subjective and is related to a situation that might lead to an unfavorable result. Whether the result will be unfavorable or not, heavily depends on choices one makes and patterns of behavior one exercises in a situation of risk.

One of the main goals of the current research was not only to identify most serious risks that children and teenagers face while using the Internet, but to understand whether those risks

can become real threats to the younger users and if so, whether we can define their scope. One of the tasks of our research was to look at coping strategies used by those children who have lived through some unpleasant experiences online.

**Figure 4: Online experiences that have bothered children, %**



Note: Multiple responses allowed.
Base: All children who use the Internet.

Both Russian and their peers in EU Kids Online II countries admit that the Internet might bother children about their age. However, when it comes to estimating personal experiences, twice as many Russian children, when compared with their peers in EU Kids Online II countries, say that they have been bothered by something on the Internet. It seems that children in Russia become upset from seeing something negative on the Internet more often than children in EU Kids Online II countries. Perhaps, parents in EU Kids Online II countries instruct their children more thoroughly before letting them explore the Web on their own, while a lot of Russian children are left with the Internet 'face to face' and discover its opportunities using 'rules of thumb'. Thus, they are less prepared to deal with negative experiences.

The most bothering things for Russian children are violence and aggression on the Internet, as well as sexual or pornographic content (34% and 31% of children named these risks, respectively). One in six children referred to spam (16%) and scary content (15%), one in eight to advertisement (12%). Other five risks in the Top-10 were viruses (9% of children),
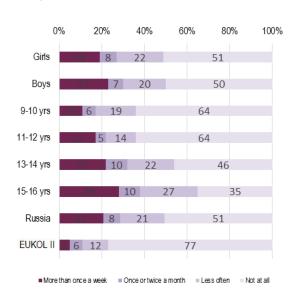
unethical information, such as obscene language or abusive content (8%), aggressive behavior from other users (7%), account hacking or password theft and technical problems (4%) (Figure 4).

**SEEING SEXUAL IMAGES**

**Where children have seen sexual images online**

According to the American Psychological Association, both in the USA and in the world "every year about 40% of teenagers and younger children visit websites with sexual content, both intentionally and by accident…" (DeAngelis, 2007). Software aimed at preventing children from visiting such websites does exist, but in Russia its use is not as widespread. In fact, it can only minimize risks, but not eliminate them completely. In other words, such programs would not protect a child from sexually abusive messages sent by people they had met online.

**Figure 5: Child has seen sexual images online or offline in the past 12 months**



Base: All children who use the Internet.

Every second school child in Russia has seen sexual images, and every third child has come across sexual images on the Internet. The Web is obviously a leading source of sexual 'education' for modern children, leaving well behind all other media. Russian numbers here are three times higher than the averages seen across the EU Kids Online II countries, although

not too far from the numbers collected by researchers in other Eastern European countries (Figure 5).

## How children have seen sexual images online

One can come across sexual images both sporadically or while intentionally looking for them. According to the American Psychological Association, "38% of 16-17 year old boys and 8% of girls go to 'adult sites'…" (DeAngelis, 2007). The greatest online source of sexual images are pop-up windows: children in Russia see such images in the pop-up format 6 times more often than their peers in EU Kids Online II countries (42% in Russia vs. 7% in EUKOL II) and significantly more often on SNSs (17% in Russia vs. 3% in EUKOL II). Somewhat less often Russian children come across sexual content on video-hosting websites (10% in Russia vs. 5% in EUKOL II) and other sites (10% in Russia vs. 3% in EUKOL II), and even less on peer-to-peer file-sharing sites (6% in Russia vs. 2% in EUKOL II) and adult sites (5% in Russia vs. 4% in EUKOL II) (EU Kids Online, 2014).

Russian children see all types of sexual images more often than their peer in EU Kids Online II countries. The most common types of sexual images that they report are images of naked people (38%), private parts (29%) or people having sex (28%). Thus, every third Russian child has seen sexual images of some sort online. Almost every tenth child aged 11-16 has seen the most extreme images showing violent sexual content (9%), and children aged 13-14 have seen such content more often (13%) than children of other age groups. Here again Russian results exceed EUKOL II figures, with 9% and 2% respectively.

## Perceived harm from sexual images online

When does risk translate into harm that can cause negative outcomes? In our survey we asked those children who said having seen sexual images online, whether they were upset or bothered by the exposure to sexual content. On average 41% of Russian school children aged 9-15 had been exposed to sexual images online, and every sixth child was bothered by this experience (16%). It is noteworthy that Russian children see sexual images on the Internet more often than their peers in EU Kids Online II countries do, and more children in Russia feel upset afterwards. Every fourth child among those who have been bothered by seeing sexual images online, was fairly or very upset, although in most cases (80%) children fairly quickly get over their negative feelings and very rarely remain upset for longer than several days (2%). In EU Kids Online II countries more children get very upset (16%) and more children remain upset for a longer time (9%).

## Coping with sexual images on the Internet

The next important question we asked was how children react to upsetting sexual images. We were wondering what strategies they normally use so as to cope with negative consequences, and wanted to know when it is considered appropriate for adults to intervene and help.

Every fifth child hoped the problem would go away by itself, only 10% preferred to do something to get it solved. It is not too typical of Russian children to feel self-accusatory about what happened (5%). They are also less likely to choose a proactive behavior strategy and try fixing the problem (10% in Russia vs. 22% in EUKOL II) (Table 4).

**Table 4: How the child coped after being bothered by seeing sexual images online (age 11+)**

|  | Russia | EUKOL II |
|---|---|---|
| Hope the problem would go away by itself | 20 | 26 |
| Try to fix the problem | 10 | 22 |
| Feel a bit guilty about what went wrong | 5 | 9 |
| None of these things | 38 | 44 |

Note: Multiple responses allowed.
Base: Children aged 11-16 who use the internet and have been bothered by seeing sexual images online.

Where do children seek social support when upset by seeing sexual images? 43% of children who had been bothered by sexual images, spoke about it with someone they knew. In many cases that person was a friend (32%), every seventh child told a parent (14%), one in 17 (6%) preferred to talk to a sibling. It is unlikely for Russian children to talk to other relatives (2%). Finally, none of our survey respondents

talked to a teacher or an adult whose job it is to help children. Such results are hardly surprising, as teachers usually do not have enough skills and knowledge when it comes to Internet use. Besides, in Russia there is a lack of special services and social workers trained to assist children, and the information about those sources available, is poorly disseminated.

What do children do after seeing sexual images that bothered them on the Internet? Overall, Russian children who were upset about seeing sexual images on the internet, changed their filter or contact settings (19%) or stopped using the internet for a while (18%), making these two strategies popular with almost every fifth child. A bit less often children blocked the person who had sent them a sexual image (15%).

If compared with the EU Kids Online II countries, children in Russia less often deleted messages from a person who had sent sexual content (9% in Russia vs. 26% in EUKOL II). Interestingly, Russian children use all reported coping strategies less frequently than their peers in EU Kids Online II countries overall, although most of the differences are insignificant. This lagging behind can be caused by a lack of instruction Russian children receive – they might simply not know what exactly they should do when seeing bothering sexual content on the internet. 45% of the surveyed kids in Russia chose "none of these" when selecting used coping strategies – this number should be considered as quite remarkable. We can interpret this common answer as twofold. Some children replied "none of these" because they did nothing to cope with the situation, whereas others did something not mentioned on the list, which can be some other culture-appropriate strategy. For the latter, more qualitative research is needed to identify all possible strategies Russian children use, including those not presented in our current survey.

## BULLYING

### Bullying: a major problem of online communication in Russia
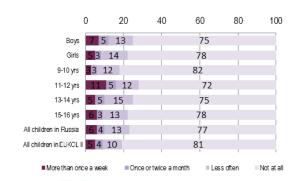
### How often children are bullied

Bullying is a real problem for teenagers. The first studies on bullying carried out in various countries go back to the 1970s. This type of behavior is common in the school environment. Bullying is usually defined as frightening, humiliating, mobbing, physical or psychological terror towards someone, and is aimed at causing fear and through this, controlling a bullied person (Kon, 2006). According to most researchers, bullying entails four main components: aggressive and negative behavior, regular demonstration of such behavior, power misbalance among peers, and intention.

On average, 23% of the Internet users in Russia among minors have been bullied online or offline over the past 12 months. The results are similar across the 25 EU Kids Online II countries (19%). One in ten children in Russia is bullied more frequently than once a month, with 6% of children being treated in a hurtful and humiliating way either every day or 1-2 times a week; 4% of children experience bullying 1-2 times a month (Figure 6).

The most common forms of bullying are face to face and online: one in ten children reports having been bullied in either way, compared with 5% who said that this happened to them through mobile phone calls or messages. In the EU Kids Online II countries bullying online is less common: 6% of children reported to have been bullied on the Internet, which is half as often as experiencing face-to-face bullying.

**Figure 6: Child has been bullied online or offline in past 12 months**



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

### In what ways children are bullied online

Online bullying can occur in a number of ways: through humiliating messages in chats, on

forums, blogs and in blog comments, fake pages and videos showing someone being insulted or even beaten up – all of those have become quite common in RuNet (the Russian segment of the internet). We asked those children who have been bullied about how it happened: on a social networking site, in ICQ/Messenger, in chats, via email, in gaming sites or elsewhere.

Russian children are most bullied online on SNSs. However, it is fair to say that in Russia bullying on a social networking site is twice as common as in the EU Kids Online II countries. Being bullied through instant messaging, a gaming site or otherwise on the Internet becomes slightly more frequent among older children.

### When/how children bully others

Recent research is starting to suggest that virtual spaces where online bullying occurs allow aggressors to feel less vulnerable and less responsible for their behavior. Thus it is possible that the surveyed children had not only been bullied but had also bullied others (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2011).

In Russia one in four children (28%) reports that (s)he has acted in a nasty or hurtful way to someone else in the past year, online or offline. It should be highlighted that the percentage of such bullies in Russia turns out to be twice as high as in the EU Kids Online II countries.
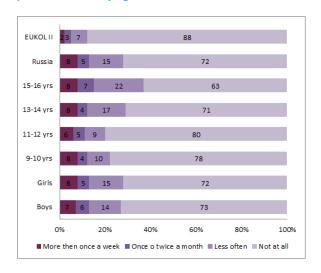
Russian children admit to have bullied others face-to-face more often than their peers in EU Kids Online II countries (21% in Russia vs. 10% in EUKOL II). Less frequently than offline both in Russia and in the EU Kids Online II countries children reported to have aggressively behaved towards someone online (8% in Russia and 3% in EUKOL II) (Figure 7).

### Perceived harm from being bullied online

Whether and when certain factors increase the likelihood of harm to the child was one of the topics we wanted to explore further. Children had to answer certain questions to reveal their stress level caused by online experiences. Subjective evaluations of an unpleasant experience served as indicators of stress

caused by online risks. These were measured by answers about the severity of the experience (i.e. how upset the child was) and its duration (i.e. for how long the child felt like this).

**Figure 7: Child has bullied others online or offline in past 12 months, by age**



Base: All children who use the internet.

Over two thirds of the children (72%) who have been bullied online, found this experience stressful: 34% were very or fairly upset; 38% were a bit upset. 28% of children replied not to be upset at all. These numbers gathered across Russia are lower than in the EU Kids Online II countries: 85% of children in the EU Kids Online II countries were upset after being bullied online, with over half of them very or fairly upset.

Over half of the children who have been bullied online say that they "got over it straight away" (64%); however, almost every third child, regardless the age, was affected for several days and longer. About one in four children felt the same several days later (24%), and one in ten several weeks later. The ratio of those children who "got over it straight away" is similar in Russia and the EU Kids Online II countries, but more Russian children stay affected by the situation for a longer period of time than their peers in the EU Kids Online II countries.

### Coping with being bullied online

The most common response to being bullied online was proactive: 33% tried to fix the problem themselves (33%) and tried to make the

bully leave them alone (29%). The first strategy was also popular with children in the EU Kids Online II countries (36%). One in five would try to confront the bully and "tried to retaliate" (23%). The passive approach "hoped that the problem will go away by itself" is less popular with Russian children than in the EU Kids Online II countries (13% vs. 24% respectively). One in ten children in Russia and in the EU Kids Online II countries felt a bit guilty about what went wrong (11% and 12% respectively).

Another way of coping is that of seeking social support; 65% of Russian children who have been bullied online, talked to someone about it. Children in the EU Kids Online II countries tend to seek social support slightly more often (77%). A common source of social support both in Russia and in the EU Kids Online II countries is the child's friend – 49% and 52% respectively. Telling a parent is less common for children in Russia: one in four talked to his/her parent (25% vs. 42% in EUKOL II). One in ten Russian children talked about the problem to a sibling, and only 4% talked about it to a teacher; 3% told another adult they trust.

**Table 5: What the child did after being bullied online**

| % | Russia | | EUKOL II | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Did this | Did this and it helped | Did this | Did this and it helped |
| I stopped using the internet for a while | 17 | 8 | 20 | 13 |
| I deleted any messages from the person who sent it to me | 26 | 16 | 41 | 23 |
| I changed my filter/ contact settings | 19 | 10 | 18 | 12 |
| I blocked the person who had sent it to me | 34 | 33 | 46 | 35 |
| I reported the problem (e.g. clicked on a 'report abuse' button, contact an internet advisor or 'internet service provider (ISP)') | 8 | 8 | 9 | 5 |
| None of these | 33 | 27 | 13 | 16 |
| Don't know | 5 | 11 | 16 | 16 |

Note: Multiple responses allowed.
Base: Children who use the internet and have been sent nasty or hurtful messages online.

The most common actions taken by both Russian children and their peers in the EU Kids Online II countries when being bullied online are to block the person who sent the nasty or hurtful messages or to delete the nasty or hurtful messages (Table 5). Thus, about one in two children in the EU Kids Online II countries "blocked the person who sent the nasty or hurtful messages" (46% vs. 34% in Russia), and 41% "deleted any messages from the person who sent them to me" (compared to 25% in Russia). Almost all Russian children who blocked the person, found this strategy fairly effective. Almost one in five children reported about changing filter and contact settings (19%), one in six decided to avoid dealing with the problem and "stopped using the Internet for a while" (17%), and half of the children found these strategies effective. In the EU Kids Online II countries slightly more children "stop using the Internet for a while – one in five children did this (20%). Only 8% of children in Russia and 9% in the EU Kids Online II countries reported the problem to someone who provides online support (internet service provider, advisor, or similar), out of those all children in Russia (100%) and slightly over half (55%) in the EU Kids Online II countries said that it helped. It should be said that children in the EU Kids Online II countries use most of the below mentioned strategies more often overall.

## SENDING/RECEIVING SEXUAL MESSAGES

### Exchanging sexual messages: victims or perpetrators?

On the Internet children may come across images of sexual nature, but also sexual messages and even more so harassing behavior. Even if we assume that the majority of chat room users (web chat rooms or IRC) have good intentions, quite a few people still use the mentioned technologies with intentions of a different kind. Sometimes their ultimate goal is to establish an exchange of sexual messages with a child. In some cases online chatting is just a tool to achieve further-reaching goals. That is why grooming – deliberate befriending of a child for further sexual exploitation – is especially dangerous. An abuser might pose as a child's peer and make attempts to establish an

emotional connection with them via a chat, forum or SNS. Via private messaging, the abuser then tries to win over the child's trust and arrange a face-to-face meeting. This problem is usually given insufficient attention and yet, grooming remains one of the major risks for children and teenagers on the Internet.

The word 'sexting' refers to the exchange of sexual messages via mobile devices and the Internet. Emerging mobile technologies with webcams have boosted the exchange of self-made sexual images. This practice has also become popular among teenagers. Children do not see anything inappropriate in such practices, but they rarely think about how easily their messages and images can be viewed by someone other than the initial addressee. When children are involved, such practices can lead to negative psychological outcomes.

About one third of Russian children (28%) have received or sent sexual messages on the internet, with over 15% having done so every month or more often; 4% have sent or received sexual messages themselves. Compared with their peers in the EU Kids Online II countries, Russian children engage in such practices significantly more often (28% in Russia and 15% in EUKOL II). The difference between Russia and the EU Kids Online II countries is especially noticeable in relation to children who send or receive sexual messages more often than weekly: 11% in Russia and 3% in the EU Kids Online II countries (Figure 8).
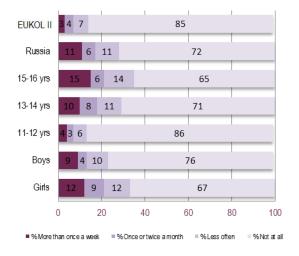
## Perceived harm from sexual messaging online

How much and for how long do children remain upset after seeing sexual messages on the Internet? All children aged 11-16 were asked whether they have been bothered by seeing sexual messages online. Every fourth child who has seen or been sent sexual messages on the Internet, has been bothered by it. The data resemble the results of the EU Kids Online II Countries survey (25%).

To what extent and for how long do children feel upset after seeing or receiving sexual messages? One third of those children, who felt upset after seeing or receiving sexual

messages, felt fairly upset (30%), and only 13% remained upset longer than several days in a row. For the majority of Russian children the reaction to sexting is short-lived, while their peers in the EU Kids Online II countries tend to remain upset about it for a little bit longer and a bit more than children in Russia.

**Figure 8: Child has seen or received sexual messages online in the past 12 months, %**



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

## Coping with online sexting

How do children get over their experience of online sexting? The most common strategy for teenagers seems to be waiting for the problem to go away by itself (27%). Less common is trying to fix the problem (15%) or get the other person to leave them along (14%). It is very uncommon for Russian children to feel a bit guilty about what went wrong. In the EU Kids Online II countries, children more often than in Russia, respond in a proactive manner and try to fix the problem. The most common answer both in Russia and in the EU Kids Online II countries was "nothing of these things". It is possible that some children use their own strategies of coping, not presented on our list (Figure 9).
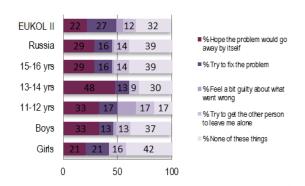
Children were asked if they talked to anybody after seeing or receiving sexual messages online. Every third child talked about sexting to someone they are close with (33%) or someone whose job it is to help children. It is notable that in the EU Kids Online II countries children more often share with other people their negative experiences related to online sexting than in

Russia, that is in 60% of all cases. In terms of who these "other people" are, the EU Kids Online II countries and Russia show comparable results: most common for children is to consult with their friends (27% of cases in Russia ad 38% in EUKOL II), followed by talking to parents. In Russia less than half as many children do so than in the EU Kids Online II countries (12% vs. 30% respectively). Even less children are prone to sharing their worries with other specialists, adults or teachers (less than 5%).

What coping strategies do children use after seeing sexual messages that upset them? In Russia the most common strategy for children to prevent receiving sexual messages in the future is to block the person who sent them, change their privacy settings or contact details, and delete the unwanted messages. In the EU Kids Online II countries the same strategies are proven to be most common. Apart from that, children in the EU Kids Online II countries reach out to other responsible adults, those whose job it is to help children. For Russia this coping strategy in children is yet quite rare.

**Figure 9: How the child coped after being bothered by seeing or receiving sexual messages online**



Base: All children aged 11-16 who use the Internet and have been bothered by seeing or receiving sexual messages online in the past 12 months.
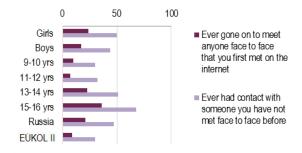
## MEETING NEW PEOPLE

### Frequency of meeting online contacts offline

Russian children actively use all opportunities they have online to extend their social circle and find new friends. Every second child in Russia (47%) has met new people online; every fifth one has gone to a meeting with a new online friend. The older children grow, the more likely they are to follow this pattern. In the EU Kids Online II countries, less children (30%) have done the same in the past. One third of all children (21%) who have met a 'stranger' online, are quite active in their search for new friends on the internet: over the past year they have met five or more people this way, twice as many as in the EU Kids Online II countries (9%) (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Child has communicated online with, or gone to an offline meeting with, someone not met face-to-face before**



Base: All children who use the Internet.

Over a third of Russian children who have had face-to-face meetings with their online friends, have met 5 and more people online in the past 12 months (39%). These are substantially more children than in the EU Kids Online II countries, where every fifth child has met as many people online (23%). Every third child in Russia who met their online friends offline, has made 1-2 new friends online (39%), and every fifth child has met 3-4 friends this way (23%). In the EU Kids Online countries over half of all children (55%) who met their online friends face-to-face, have had 1-2 new online contacts over the past 12 months.

The most common way in which children make first contact with someone whom they later meet offline, is on a social networking site (61%). Every third child has met their new contact via instant messaging (33%), and every sixth child did so in a chat room (17%). Gaming sites, email services and other ways are less common with Russian children. Children in the EU Kids Online II countries are not much different and acquire new friends in similar ways.

## Perceived harm from meeting online contacts

In order to understand the scope of risks coming from meeting new people online, children were asked about subjective harm they might have experienced when communicating with strangers online and offline. 6% of Russian children who use the internet, have met an online contact offline and were bothered by it, which makes it nearly every third child out of 29% of the children who have gone to such meetings.

Most Russian children and their peers in the EU Kids Online II countries who met an online contact offline, told someone about going to the meeting (70%). Almost every second child told about this to someone their age (48%). Children in the EU Kids Online II countries also preferred to share the information with their peers (42%). Every tenth child in Russia told a trusted adult (10%), and 8% told an older teenager. In the EU Kids Online II countries the corresponding rates are slightly higher and come at 14% and 11% respectively.

Do children invite anyone to go with them to a meeting with an online stranger? Over half of Russian school children who have been bothered by meeting someone they met on the internet, in real life, took someone with them to the meeting (62%). This is slightly higher than what has been seen in the EU Kids Online II countries (53%). Every second child (52%) took someone their own age. In the EU Kids Online II countries it was 46% of children. Some children took with them an older teenager (7%), and only a handful went to the meeting with a trusted adult (2%).

Negative experiences that children acquired during their meeting with online strangers could result from the meeting itself or from subsequent relations. Of those children who had been bothered by an offline meeting, 19% said that the other person said hurtful things to them (almost every fifth child), 7% said the other person hurt them physically, 7% said that the other person did something sexual to them and 7% said another bad thing happened. In the EU Kids Online II countries every fifth child said that

the other person said hurtful things to them (22%), every tenth said that the other person did something sexual to them or another bad thing happened. The physical abuse rate is slightly lower in the EU Kids Online II countries, with 3%. Almost every Russian child chose "I don't know" or "I prefer not to say" (24% for either).

## Coping with meeting online contacts offline

Only 6% of the surveyed children said that a face-to-face meeting with an online stranger bothered them. The sample is rather small, but it can still give us an idea about coping strategies children use in order to deal with this particular risk. Every sixth Russian child aged 11-16 who has been bothered by meeting an online contact offline, hoped the problem would go away (18%). In the EU Kids Online II countries this strategy was more popular and was chosen by 30% of children. Slightly less children tried to do something to fix things (14%). In the EU Kids Online II countries the corresponding rate accounted for 18%. Some children felt a bit guilty about what went wrong or tried to get back at the other person (each 7%), and only a few tried "to get the other person to leave them alone" (2%). Every third child answered with "none of these things" (32%).

All children who have met an online stranger offline and were bothered by the meeting were asked if they talked to anyone about what had happened. Every second child in our survey talked about what had happened to someone (55%). In the EU Kids Online II countries the number of children who did so was slightly higher (62%). Children see their friends as the main source of social support – 45% of those children who had been bothered by an offline meeting, shared their experience with their peers. Almost every sixth child talked to their parents, and as many children talked to their siblings (each 15%). Compared with Russia, children in the EU Kids Online II countries are a bit less likely (35%) to talk to their friends about the situation, but for them too friends are the main source of support. Slightly more often than children in Russia, their peers in the EU Kids Online II countries talked about the situation to their parents – it was almost 28% (almost every

third child) according to the EU Kids Online II survey vs. 15% in Russia.

## OTHER RISK FACTORS

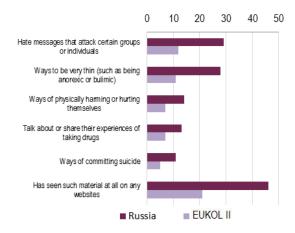### Dangerous websites: content, consumers and technical risks

The Internet made available certain types of information that children used so as to be able to only access under the influence of 'bad company' or when intentionally looking for it. We refer to websites with pro-anorexic, self-harm and drug-taking content, as well as sites with suicidal or hate information. Children and teenagers are most vulnerable to information of this kind due to their sensitivity, lack of life experience, low self-esteem and susceptibility to the negative influence of other people. Advice and recommendations given on such sites increase the risk for children to be physically hurt. Sometimes these sources can put their lives at risk.

### Sites with hate messages or sites that can potentially harm children's physical wellbeing

A chance to randomly encounter such websites online is relatively small, especially if compared with porno sites, which are highly visible and can unexpectedly pop up on a user's screen. However, it is enough to simply browse Yandex, Google or any other search engine for information on how to prepare drugs at home, commit suicide or lose weight, as any desirable information is just a click away. Additionally, this content can be easily found on social networking sites. Do Russian school children visit such websites? 46% of children aged 11-16 have encountered websites potentially harmful for their physical health and wellbeing, as well as sites with violent and racial hatred messages. About one third of children aged 11-12 and every second child aged 13-16 has encountered such websites; 29% of children have come across websites that contain hate messages that attack other people, among them people of another ethnic group, websites with content that victimizes animals or those who are weak. 28% of children visit websites about losing weight, which can become a cause of such dangerous

disorders like anorexia and bulimia. 14% of children are exposed to websites that contain information about doing physical harm or hurting themselves or other people, 13% have gone to drug-related websites, 11% of children have gone to sources that discuss committing suicide. In Russia the percentage of children who have seen such sites is twice as high as in the EU Kids Online II countries: 46% vs. 21% (Figure 11).

**Figure 11: Child has seen potentially harmful user generated content on websites in the past 12 months, % (age 11+)**



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

### Have you been cheated on the Internet?

Personal data misuse has become one of the major online threats as the Internet keeps developing rapidly. Every fourth surveyed child (26%) has experienced personal data misuse. In most cases, the child's password was being misused (18%), or personal information (12), followed by money loss after being cheated (6%). In Russia and in the EU Kids Online II countries the most common types of personal information misuse are when somebody uses the child's password and personal information. Losing money by being cheated on the Internet is less common. However, children in Russia experience this type of privacy abuse three times more often than their peers in the EU Kids Online II countries.

## CONCLUSIONS

Russian children start using the Internet a bit later than their peers in the EU Kids Online II countries, but more intensively, and the older they get, the more time they spend online. The data indicate a clear tendency towards a younger age when children become Internet users.

Modern technologies allow kids to go online anywhere anytime. Mobile devices connect to the Internet from multiple places (cafes, shops, schools, in the metro), thanks to mobile and free wireless Internet access. This facilitates the use of Internet services that help 'broadcast' themselves online, live and without interruptions. Teenagers are very keen on using these platforms: they share their photos 'here and now', check in at various spots, communicate with tens of real and online friends on SNSs. According to our data, children spend on average up to one hour and a half online a day, but some Russian teenagers practically 'live on the internet' all day long. This increase in time spent online, along with younger age, puts children's psychological and physical development at risk and makes them more vulnerable to various Internet addictions.

### Diversity of online activities

Internet activity is becoming more and more diverse, and every child can find something to her/his taste. Participation in many online activities is a building block of successful online socialization. According to our research, Russian school children try to embrace almost all available types of online activities and prioritize those activities that allow them to be part of the communication process. Social networking sites attract children and teenagers by far the most. Over 75% of children reported to have a profile on one of SNSs, and one third of the surveyed children have profiles on more than one SNS. One third of children who have SNS profiles keep them public, that is, seen to everyone online. 60% to 80% of children indicate their family name, real age and school number. Social networks help children expand their circle of communication, but at the same time devalue the very notion of friendship and

friends. Almost every fifth (19%) child in Russia has over 100 SNS friends.

### Risk and harm

Over half of Russian school children agree that the Internet can contain something negative and inappropriate for children their age. Every fourth child reports to have experienced something online that made them feel uncomfortable, upset and something they should not have seen. Most frequent are content risks: over one third of 9-16 year olds have encountered sexual content on the internet, and almost every second 11-16 year old has visited websites that can be potentially harmful for their physical health and wellbeing, as well as websites promoting racial hatred and violence. Equally dangerous is the risk to get attacked by online viruses. About half of those who use the Internet have experienced online viruses. Less common are communication risks. However, every tenth child has been bullied online, and almost one third of Russian school children have seen or received personal messages of sexual nature on the internet, with over 15% having seen/received them monthly or more often. In addition, almost every second child reported to have communicated with someone online who they never knew in real life, face-to-face. Of those, every fifth child has gone to a meeting with such online acquaintance.

The duration of being under stress caused by an online risk differs depending on the risk type. Content risks bother children and teenagers the least. Almost every sixth child has seen sexual images online that bothered her/him. In most cases children managed to get over their negative emotions caused by the images rather quickly. In rare cases they remained upset for several days. Children can be bothered by sexting, and offline meetings with online friends – every sixth child has been affected by one or the other.

According to our findings, the most stressful for children is cyberbullying. More than two thirds of the surveyed children who have been bullied online, were very upset about it, and almost every third child, regardless the age, remained upset for several days and longer.

## Russia and the EU Kids Online II Countries Compared

Our comparative analysis shows that when it comes to children and teenagers using the web, Russia, unlike the EU Kids Online II countries, can be placed in the higher risk group, characterized by acute online safety issues. Higher risks are 'aggravated' by high user activities of children in Russia, the younger age they first go online, the diversification of information and communication types of online activities, insufficient control over those activities, and the increase in the amount of content and communication risks along with insufficient awareness.

Overall, in terms of internet use, Russia has a lot in common with Eastern European countries, such as the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, as well as with Northern Europe (Denmark and Sweden), all of which are characterized by high online activity rates among children and youth. When it comes to risk factors, Russia stands most distant from South European countries such as Italy, Portugal and Turkey. The latter are defined by low and medium usage rates and low and medium risk.

Additionally, our comparison allows us to conclude that in many EU Kids Online II countries there has been a large amount of activities to render the information and communication technologies safer, both through research and practical solutions. The Russian findings allowed us to see the real and unique situation in present-day Russia. Based on these findings and by using, enriching and developing the positive experiences of the EU Kids Online II countries, we should try to find our own solutions and make the Internet a much safer place for our children and teenagers.

## NOTE ON THE METHODOLOGY

In our research we used the survey designed by the EU Kids Online II team. The questions have covered various topics such as children's and parents' Internet activity and digital competence, their awareness about online risks and their coping strategies, as well as their personal experience in using the internet safely.

EU Kids Online developed the questionnaires with guidance and input from Ipsos. After conducting the first phase of cognitive testing the questionnaire was translated into all languages relevant to 25 countries participating in the study.

The Foundation for Internet Development helped the Estonian colleagues to translate the questionnaire into Russian. In an effort to refine the translation, four interviews were conducted with children of different ages and with their parents. After the translation was completed and the final version of the questionnaires was received, a dress rehearsal pilot survey was conducted to test key aspects of the survey. A total of 30 pilot interviews were carried out in 3 regions: Moscow, the Moscow region, and the Saratov region.

We used multistage stratified random sampling. The strata were formed within the federal districts of Russia. In each strata we selected one administrative region, which represents a sample of all the areas in the strata. Due to various circumstances, the Kaliningrad region has been excluded from the sample. The total size of the sample (1000 'parent-child' pairs) is divided among all strata in proportion to child population of each strata (using data of Goscomstat of Russia from 2009).

Fieldwork started in July and was completed between July and November 2010.

The current survey covered 11 regions of the Russian Federation located in 7 federal districts: Amur Region, Kemerovo Region, Kirov Region, Moscow, Moscow Region, Dagestan Republic, Komi Republic, Rostov Region, St. Petersburg, Saratov Region, Chelyabinsk Region.

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*is bullying and how to deal with it?*) // Семья и школа. 2006. № 11. С. 15–18.

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