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# Net Children Go Mobile

Risks and opportunities  
on Internet and the use  
of mobile devices in  
Spain.

Maialen Garmendia Larrañaga, Miguel Ángel Casado del Río,  
Estefanía Jiménez Iglesias, Carmelo Garitaonandia Garnacho  
& Giovanna Mascheroni



2017









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## Net Children Go Mobile: Risks and opportunities on Internet and the use of mobile devices in Spain. Executive Report

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## Introduction

Children are growing up in a system of **media convergence** (Ito et al., 2009) that provides them with opportunities for socialization, self-expression, learning, creativity and participation through online media and, increasingly, mobile media (Hjorth & Goggin, 2009; Goggin, 2010; Goggin & Hjorth, 2014). Nonetheless, in addition to the opportunities offered by Internet, children can also experience risks, indicating that both are interdependent (Livingstone et al., 2011): the more that children use Internet, the greater the range of opportunities they have and the greater their exposure to experiences of risk.

Mobile devices (smartphones and tablets) enable children to have more flexible and personalized habits, and to create new opportunities for private use at home, at school and in the public space.

The mediation of teachers, peers and especially parents is becoming increasingly important in the online safety of children. As regulation of the media and communicative environment becomes increasingly complicated, greater parental responsibility is required in regulating the

behaviour of children in the domestic space (Oswell, 2008). With growing frequency, activities that were previously private are forming part of the public political agenda, especially actions aimed at protecting children from content that might be hurtful to them (European Commission, 2008).

## Net Children Go Mobile

Denmark, Italy, the United Kingdom and Romania initially took part in the project *Net Children Go Mobile*, which was funded through the Safer Internet Program. The field work was conducted in these countries between May and June 2013. Subsequently Belgium, Ireland, Portugal and Spain joined the project with their own funding. In November and December 2013 a survey was conducted in Ireland and in February and March 2014 in Belgium and Portugal<sup>1</sup>. Quantitative field work was carried out in Spain between April and June 2015 and was funded through Project CSO2013-47304-R of the MINECO (Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness).

This executive summary presents the most significant data from a survey conducted with 500 Spanish children aged between 9 and 16 who use Internet and with their father or mother<sup>2</sup>. Parents were asked about their children’s use of Internet and mobile devices and their mediation strategies, as well as about socio-demographic questions and their educational level.

In some cases the results of the Net Children Go Mobile survey were compared with those of the EU Children Online survey of 2010, which gives a picture of the evolution of Internet user habits and the perceptions of risk of children and parents. However, this report only presents the data for Spain, on the assumption that the time lapse involved in relation to the majority of the surveys conducted in European countries (2 years) does not permit a direct comparison of the results to be made.

<sup>1</sup> All of the information related to this research can be found at [www.netchildrengomobile.eu](http://www.netchildrengomobile.eu)

<sup>2</sup> In each case the parent most involved in the minor’s online activity was interviewed.

## Access, Use and Activities

The ways in which children go online and the places from which they do so are diversifying, although the home is still the place from which they most frequently use Internet. Nearly two-thirds of the children interviewed (64%) access Internet every day from their home from a room that is not their own, and 26% do so several times a day.

Forty-three percent of children access Internet weekly from school and 15% do so daily.

Internet access while on the way to school or in the street is still limited, although it is increasing. The great majority (76%) say that they never use Internet in these situations.

Teenagers, with few differences between genders, profit from a better online experience in terms of flexibility, ubiquity and privacy, and they have a higher frequency of access from all places.

**Table 1. Devices used to go online daily in different places**

	Gender		Age			
	Boys	Girls	09-10	11-12	13-14	15-16
Own bedroom	44	46	20	31	56	75
At home but not in own room	67	61	43	60	73	83
At school	14	16	5	11	18	28
Other places (home of friends/ relatives, libraries, cafés)	13	15	5	6	18	28
When out and about or on the way to school or other places	16	17	2	9	21	32

Base: All children who use the internet.

For all age groups, the devices most used to connect with Internet are smartphones (59%), laptops (32%) and tablets (26%). **The use of each device – with the exception of tablets – increases with age**, and in particular the use of smartphones rises from 35% of boys and 43% of girls aged between 9 and 12 to 83% of boys and 80% of girls aged between 13 and 16.

Smartphones are the devices that are most frequently owned by children of all age groups (63%), followed by tablets (36%), laptop computers (26%), games consoles (28%) and other portable devices (16%). Gender and age mark the most important differences. While boys in all groups have more games consoles, girls have more laptops and amongst children aged between 9 and 12 they have more tablets.

**Table 2. Ownership of devices, by age and gender**

% Ownership	9-12 years		13-16 years		Total
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Desktop computer (PC)	7	7	9	9	8
Laptop computer	14	20	28	42	26
Mobile phone that is not a smartphone	10	6	2	6	6
Smartphone	35	43	91	88	63
A tablet	37	45	31	30	36
E-book reader	1	2	3	5	3
Other handheld devices	18	15	22	10	16
Home games consoles	33	20	43	19	28

Base: All children who use the internet.

There are relatively more children who access Internet from a desktop computer and from a laptop computer than children who say that they own one or have one available for private use, which shows that **these are shared devices**, which they also use with their brothers and sisters, classmates, etc.

Children are using Internet, mobile phones and smartphones at an increasingly early age. The average age for starting Internet access is now around 7 years. Children who are now 9 or 10 started to use Internet when they were 7, and had their first mobile phone the following year. Teenagers between 15 and 16 started at the age of 10 and also had their first mobile phone the following year, that is, at the age of 11.



Online activities developed by children vary by age following a progression from basic activities like games and searches related to school work to more creative and participatory uses, like having a blog, creating and sharing content, etc. (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007; Livingstone et al., 2011).

Starting from the fact that all activities increase with age, the most frequent are instant messaging, watching video-clips and listening to music. **Other activities like** searching for information, school tasks and visiting a social media profile **form part of the media diet for about one in three minors. Games are more frequent amongst boys of all ages, while teenage girls share more photos, videos or music and visit more social media profiles.**

Smartphones favour the intensity and quality of children’s online experiences. Thus, smartphone users of both genders on a daily basis develop more communication activities (instant messaging, visiting a social media profile), entertainment (listening to music or watching video-clips) and more school tasks.

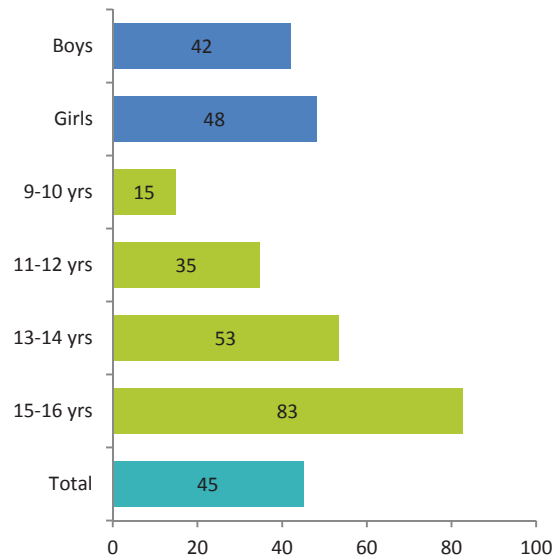
### Social media and content platforms

Forty-five percent of children have at least one social media profile and their presence on social media increases with age, reaching 83% amongst older teenagers. Even 35% of children aged 11-12 have their own social media profile, failing to comply with the legal limit of 14 years for having one. Facebook was the most-used social network in 2015. The popularity of Twitter increases with age and is greater amongst boys and teenagers (figure 1).

The habit of sharing photos, videos and other content has been growing since the year 2010, which has given rise to an increase of children’s accounts on Youtube, Instagram and Flickr. Although there is practically no difference between boys and girls, the likelihood of **having an account on a content sharing platform increases with age, and reaches three in four teenagers aged 15 to 16. Instagram is the dominant platform, since on average it is the most used by 85% of those surveyed and predominates in all age groups and social strata. The information collected through the**

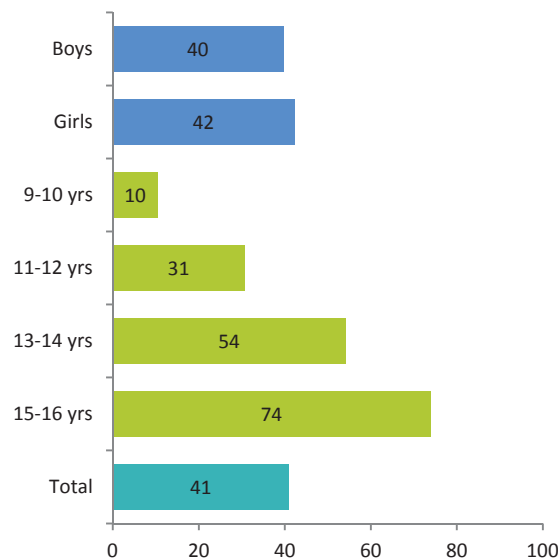
qualitative research confirms that smaller children are also using Instagram (figure 2).

**Figure 1. Children (%) with a SNS profile, by age and gender**



Base: All children who use the internet.

**Figure 2. Children (%) with a profile on a media sharing platform, by age and gender**



Base: All children who use the internet.

Online communication through social media and, above all, instant messaging (especially through WhatsApp) is growing amongst teenagers. Contact with the peer group is the main motive for adopting

mobile communication, at least amongst teenagers (Lenhart et al., 2010; Ling & Bertel, 2013).

Although Facebook, as we said, is the most-used social network, children simultaneously use several services for diverse activities in order to contact different audiences. Rather than replacing one social network with another, they combine and integrate them in their communicative practices.

The proportion of children who have small circles of friends on Internet varies according to age and gender, and is greater amongst girls and younger children.

A little over one in four children are in contact with up to 10 people on their most-used social network and two in three (64%) have as many as 50 contacts. Approximately one in five children have more than 100 contacts. This number rises slightly amongst boys (22%), teenagers aged 15-16 (21%) and, above all, amongst those aged 13-14 (25%). Similarly, it is also more numerous amongst children whose parents have a higher level of education (22%). The proportion of children with over 300 contacts is low (6%).

**Table 3. Number of contacts on SNS, by name of profile that is used the most**

%	Facebook	Twitter	Others
Up to 10	34	23	26
11-50	38	36	26
51-100	17	21	4
101-300	6	16	30
More than 300	6	5	13

Base: All children who use SNS.

Seven in ten children accept new contacts only if they know them (52%) or know them very well (17%), while 9% say that they accept all requests, more frequently in the case of girls and children whose parents have a lower level of education.

Forty-four percent of social media users have a private profile, 30% have a partly private profile (it can be accessed by friends of their friends), and a little

over one in four children say they have a public profile.

The majority of children include a photo showing their face and give their surname in the profiles. Girls more often include their photo and boys their surname. Forty-four percent of children give an age that is not theirs. This practice is more habitual amongst boys and varies little with age. On average, nine in ten share a telephone number and one in every hundred their postal address.

Children develop complex communicative repertoires, into which they incorporate diverse channels and platforms to communicate with their parents and peers. Instant messaging has become the preferred medium for keeping in contact with parents: 35% say they use it daily or almost daily and 20% use it several times a day. In any case, 30% of children still use the telephone daily (or almost daily) and 16% several times a day.

**Table 4. Ways of being in contact with parents**

% of children in contact with parents by...	Several times each day	Daily or almost daily	At least every week	Never or almost never
Talking on a mobile or smartphone	16	30	30	24
Sending texts	20	35	30	15
Sending emails	0	0	6	94
Contact on SNS	3	12	23	62

Base: All children who use each means of communication.

Likewise, instant messaging is the most frequent form of contacting friends: 46% of children use it several times a day. Nonetheless, mobile phone calls continue to have a significant weight; practically half of the children speak by telephone with their friends at least nearly every day.

Girls make more telephone calls to their parents and their friends. Calls to friends increase with age, rising from one in four children aged 9-10 to 61% amongst those aged 15-16. Conversely, calls to parents tend to fall in number although the number rises again amongst older teenagers.

**Table 5. Ways of being in contact with friends**

% of children in contact with friends by...	Several times each day	Daily or almost daily	At least every week	Never or almost never
Talking on a mobile or smartphone	22	28	24	26
Sending texts	46	32	16	7
Sending emails	1	2	13	84
Contact on SNS	22	33	31	14

Base: All children who use each means of communication.

Sending messages to friends increases with age (from 50% amongst those aged 9-10 to 89% amongst those who are older) and grows more than sending messages to parents (46% amongst younger children to 58% amongst older children).

More than half of children communicate with their peers through social media, while only 16% use social media to keep in contact with their parents. In both cases usage amongst girls is more frequent.

Smaller children use them with the same frequency to contact their parents and their peers. From 11 years the two types of contact increase, but more noticeably for contact with peers.

## Digital skills

Digital skills have a positive relation with the diversity and frequency of online activities (Sonck et al, 2012; Livingstone & Helsper, 2007): the more activities that children develop, **the more skilful and self-confident they become, and vice versa**. Similarly, children who have experienced harm tend to have a lower level of digital skills (Sonck & de Haan, 2013).

The majority of children say that it is 'very true' (31%) or 'fairly true' (51%) that they know a lot about Internet. One in three say that the sentence 'I know more than my father and mother about Internet' is 'very true', 31% say it is 'fairly true' and 37% admit that 'it isn't true'. There are marked variations according to age: while 62% of smaller children do not think they have more skills than

their parents, on the contrary, 53% of teenagers aged 15 and 16 say that in their case it is 'very true' that they know more than their parents about Internet. Smaller children whose parents have a lower level of education are more confident in their own skills than in those of their parents. This surely indicates that their parents have a lower level of digital skills.

**Table 6. Self-assessment of various skills**

% of children who say...	Not true	A bit true	Very true
I know more about the internet than my parents	37	31	33
I know lots of things about using the internet	18	51	31
I know how to use 'report abuse' buttons	47	21	32
I know more about using smartphones than my parents	21	29	50
I know lots of things about using smartphones	11	38	51

Base: All children who use the internet.

The lowest results are found in the safe use of Internet. While a little over half of the children say that the statement 'I know how to use the 'report abuse' buttons' is 'very true' (32%) or 'fairly true' (21%), 47% say that 'it isn't true'.

They are more self-confident about the use of smartphones. Fifty percent of the children say that the phrase that they know more about smartphones than their parents is very true, and only 21% believe that it isn't true. While 48% of children aged 9 to 10 say that it is 'not true' that they know more than their parents about the use of smartphones, this option falls to 12% amongst children aged 15 to 16. In the year 2015 there was a fall in the number of children who said that they knew more than their parents (from 47% in 2010, to 33%).

While more than three in four children aged between 9 and 16 are satisfied with the content available online, a minority (8%), above all smaller children, express dissatisfaction.

Basic skills in handling a computer and critical ability are distributed in an irregular way. While 70% know how to bookmark a page, and nearly half can compare information from different pages (48%), less than one in four (23%) say they know how to change filter preferences. In nearly all age groups the boys say they have more skills than the girls. There are notable variations according to age. Boys have fewer skills than teenagers, especially in relation to critical ability and changing filters. Smartphone users say they have more skills.

Although safety initiatives have been intensely distributed in Europe, only three in six proposed skills can be put into practice by a little over half the children: blocking unwanted contact messages (59%), finding information about safe navigation (52%) and clearing the history of pages visited (50%). Conversely, blocking advertising/spam (47%), changing privacy settings (46%) and blocking pop-ups (40%) are skills that are fairly or much less frequent.

Girls say they have more safety skills than boys and teenagers double the percentage of younger children in several skills. In any case, it is a cause for concern that one in four of those under 14 are unable to configure their privacy settings on a social network, bearing in mind that at that age they cannot legally have their own profile.

**Table 7. Skills related to internet safety in general, by gender and age**

% who say they can...	9-12 years		13-16 years		Total
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Block unwanted adverts or junk mail spam	36	30	58	67	47
Delete the record of which sites they have visited	29	32	70	70	50
Change privacy settings on a social networking profile	15	24	69	77	46
Block messages from someone they don't want to hear from	36	38	81	83	59
Block pop-ups	26	27	57	51	40
Find information on how to use the internet safely	32	32	73	71	52

Base: All children who use the internet.

With respect to the year 2010, girls in general improved their skills related to safety more than boys. Above all in relation to blocking people they do not want to have anything to do with (16 points), clearing navigation history (13%), blocking advertising (6 points) and configuring their privacy settings on a social network (5 points). Conversely, boys have only improved in relation to blocking people (13 points), clearing navigation history (9 points) and configuring privacy settings (3 points).

**Table 8. Skills related to internet use and critical understanding, by gender and age**

% who say they can...	9-12 years		13-16 years		Total
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Change filter preferences	10	8	42	32	23
Bookmark a website	57	49	84	90	70
Compare different websites to decide if information is true	30	25	70	69	48

Base: All children who use the internet.

Although social media are taken for granted in everyday activities by the majority of children, only 28% know how to create a blog, half do not know how to post a comment online, and nearly 40% cannot upload content to social media. The distribution by age and gender shows the same pattern, with slight variations between boys and girls, while teenagers show many more skills than boys and girls.

## Risk and harm

Experiencing online risk does not necessarily result in harm (Livingstone et al., 2011). In fact, children who encounter a greater number of online risks are not necessarily the ones who suffer more harm. On the contrary, they are normally the ones who show more skill and develop more resilience. On the other hand, children who are less exposed, to both opportunities and risks, tend to feel more upset and worried when they have a negative online experience (ibid; also see Livingstone et al., 2012).

Eighteen percent of children (very similar in boys and girls and in the different age groups) felt upset by something that they saw on Internet in the previous year, especially children whose parents have a lower level of education. Conversely, there are no substantial differences between children who use a tablet every day (18%) and those who use a smartphone (17%).

## Bullying

**Bullying** has been described as a form of intentional, repetitive aggression, which implies an **inequality of power** between the perpetrator and the victim (Schrock & Boyd, 2008; also see Levy et al., 2012). Cyberbullying is bullying that uses any technological medium: mobile phone (messages, calls, videos); Internet (email, instant messaging, social media, chats) or through any device that is used for going online. Moreover, online and/or mobile communication strengthens the features of traditional bullying by adding new elements: **anonymity** (Levy et al., 2012, p. 11), **persistence**, **searchability**, **replicability** and **invisible audiences** (Boyd, 2008), as well as duration and the widening of audiences.

One third of the children (32%) had experienced some form of online or offline bullying. Twelve percent said they were very 'upset' and 12% 'a little' upset because of what happened. Girls (35%) are more likely to have suffered from bullying than boys (29%), moreover it is more frequent for girls (26%) to have felt upset than for boys (22%).

The incidence of bullying amongst teenagers aged 15 and 16 seems to fall, and they report rates of harm that are much more moderate than the rest (6%, as against the average, 12%).

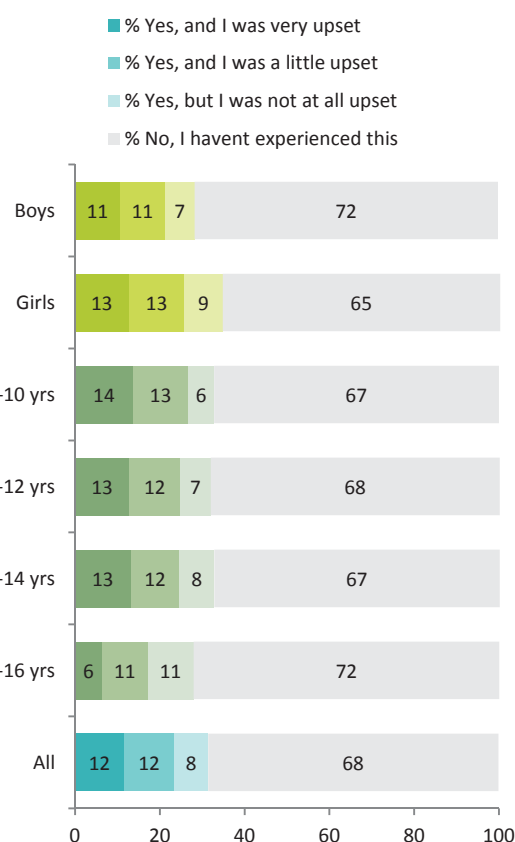
Twelve percent of children say they have been victims of cyberbullying, although, as we said, there are twice as many victims of face-to-face bullying. The most habitual channels through which cyberbullying takes place are **instant messaging** (WhatsApp, 53%), **social media** (4%) and **chats** (4%).

The youngest children indicate a greater prevalence of offline as opposed to online bullying.

Face-to-face harassment remains at 27% between the ages of 9 and 14 and falls to 20% for the 15 to 16 age bracket. Conversely, the general incidence of **cyberbullying rises progressively with age**. The 15 to 16 age bracket is where there are more cases of cyberbullying through social media, instant messaging, calls or messages received on the mobile phone. **The greatest incidence of bullying, both online and offline, appears in the 13 to 14 age bracket.**

Comparing the incidence of bullying and cyberbullying in our 2010 survey and in the 2015 survey, it emerges that the percentages of children who say they have been victims of harassment doubled in all age brackets and socio-economic strata: while in 2010, 15% of children aged 9 to 16 said they had suffered from bullying in any of its varieties, 5 years later the figure rises to 31%. With respect to the proportion of children who say they have practiced bullying against others, the figure rises in a comparable way.

**Figure 3. Child has been bullied online or offline in the past 12 months**



Base: All children who use the internet.



Even so, and without wanting to underestimate the quantitative importance of these figures, they must be understood in a context of growing social concern with respect to situations of abuse and vulnerability in childhood. **Greater public attention is being given to the phenomenon and there are more campaigns, in short more sensitivity.** And this might be related to greater facilities for identifying situations of abuse and harassment by those that suffer from them, who perhaps previously felt that harassment at school was minimized or ignored as it regarded as ‘a children’s matter’.

### Sexual messages or ‘sexting’

There is evidence that children are using Internet and mobile phones as part of their sexual interactions and explorations (Lenhart, 2009; Livingstone et al., 2011). This practice has been called ‘sexting’ (based on the words ‘sexy’ and ‘texting’). Sexual messages can have **unintended consequences** and can become problematic experiences for some children. Exchanging sexually explicit images, messages or invitations can be linked to harassment and bullying and can therefore result in a type of ‘sexual cyberbullying’ (Kofoed & Ringrose, 2012; Ringrose et al., 2012).

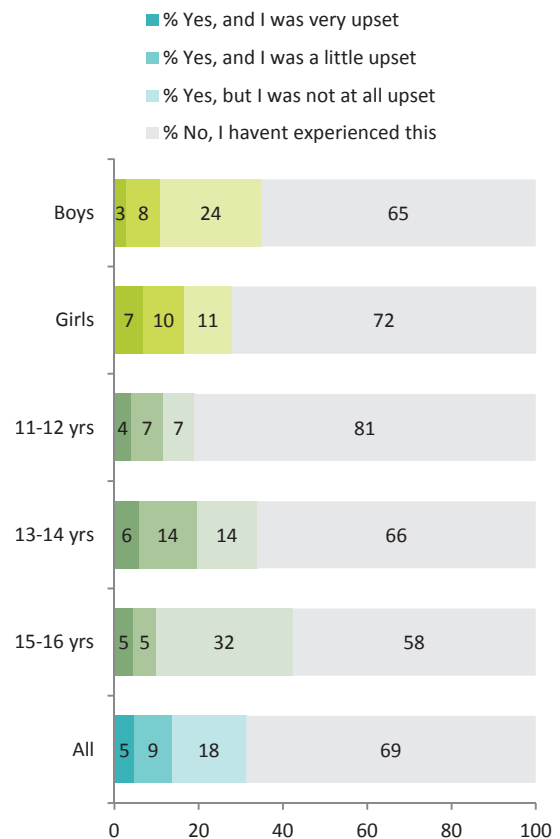
In our survey, this question was not raised with children aged 9 and 10 for ethical reasons.

**Thirty-one percent of children (35% boys and 28% girls) have received sexual messages of some type and 14% say they have felt ‘very’ (5%) or ‘a little’ (9%) upset because of that. It is more likely for girls to feel ‘very’ or ‘a little’ upset because of sexting (7% and 10%) than boys (3% and 8%, respectively). More than twice as many boys than girls say they received sexual messages without this upsetting them.**

Sexting increases with age: from the 19% amongst children aged 11 and 12 to 42% for the 15 and 16 age bracket.

The channels through which children receive sexual messages are: instant messaging (15%), social media (6%) and platforms (5%).

**Figure 4. Child has received sexual messages online in the past 12 months (age 11+)**



Base: All children who use the internet (11-16 years).

If we compare the data for 2010 and 2015 an extraordinary increase can be observed in the percentage of children who received sexual messages: while formerly it was one in ten children who said they had received messages of this type, in 2015 it was practically one in three who gave an affirmative answer to this question.

### Offline contact with people met online

By means of online sociability children tend to extend their network of contacts by activating ‘latent links’ (for example, people with whom they share friends or pastimes), rather than seeking people with whom they have no connection in the offline environment. In fact, the majority of face-to-face meetings with people contacted online are with **‘friends of friends’** and not with total strangers (Barbovschi et al., 2012).

One in five children (21%) contacted people online who they had never met face-to-face. Although this is occurs more in girls than in boys, it is in the different age brackets where the differences can really be appreciated. In moving from 11-12 years to 13-14 years, the percentage of children who contact someone online who they don't know triples. The likelihood of contacting strangers online decreases as the status of the children's families rises.

Contacting people who are met on the Internet does not have to be negative or involve risks. In fact, it can on occasion provide children with the opportunity to share interests and pastimes and widen their circle of friends (Ito et al., 2009). On the other hand, not all online contacts necessarily lead to offline meetings, and more importantly, not every face-to-face meeting with someone met on the Internet has hurtful consequences.

Eleven percent of children say they have met someone face-to-face who they had met previously on the Internet, and only 1% was 'very' or 'a little' upset by the experience. There are barely any differences between the percentages of boys and girls who participated in such meetings and about how they felt afterwards.

The probability of having an offline meeting with online contacts increases with age, from 2% in the 9 and 10 years age bracket to 25% for teenagers aged 15 and 16.

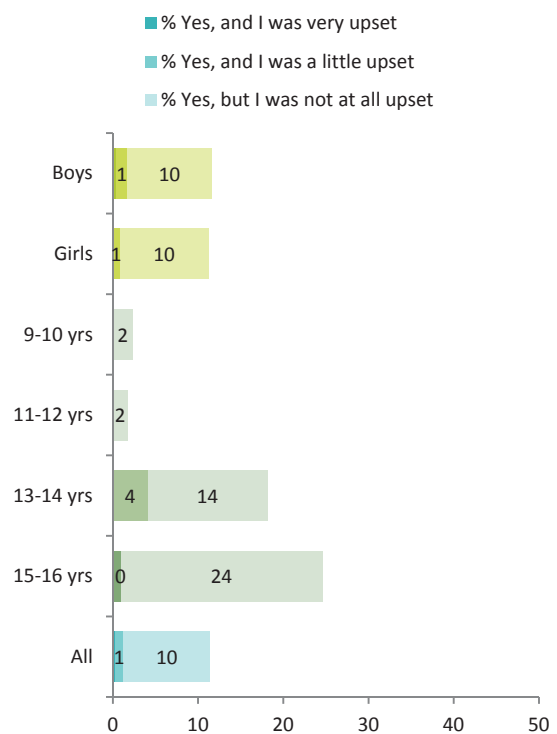
Amongst children whose parents have a higher level of education there is a lower probability (7%) of personally meeting online contacts than amongst children whose parents have a medium level of education (14%) or a low level (13%).

Children came into contact with people that they finally met face-to-face basically through social media (6%) and instant messaging (6%). Platforms like Youtube, Instagram and Flickr and chats account for a lower proportion (3% in these cases). There are notable differences related to age: teenagers aged 15 and 16 years are more prone to contacting people online, and they tend to do so through social media (16%), instant messaging (MSN; WhatsApp, Skype) (13%), platforms (9%) and

to a much lesser extent through messages received in a chat (4%) or telephone calls (3%).

In the five years separating the two reports there was a slight increase in the percentage of children's contacts with a person with whom there had only been previous online contact: from 9% in 2010 to 11% in 2015.

**Gráfico 5. Child has gone to an offline meeting with, someone not met face to face before**



Base: All children who use the internet.

## Sexual images

Exposure to sexual images continues to be a fairly common experience for children, whether offline or online. While elder boys tend to be more resilient in this respect, girls and younger boys feel more vulnerable to the negative consequences of sexual content.

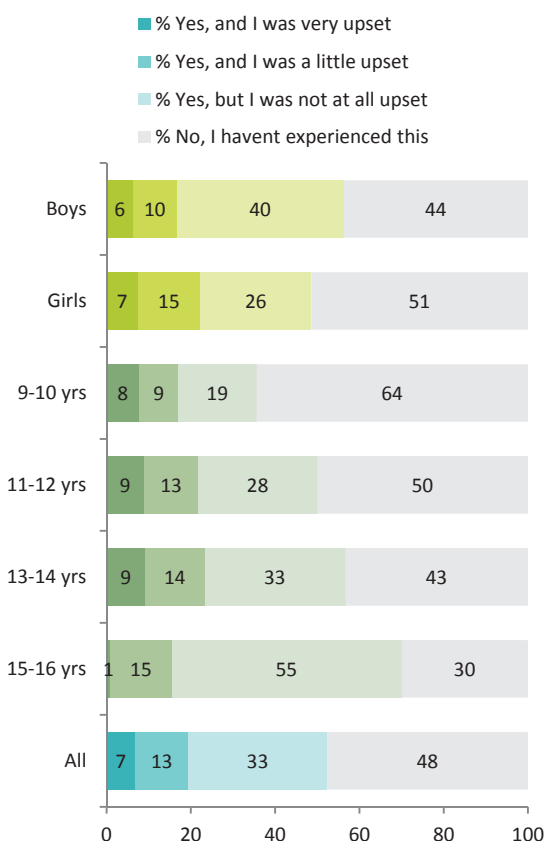
Over half of the children (53%) say that they had seen sexual images during the previous year, in online or offline format. Forty-eight percent of girls as opposed to 56% of boys. This percentage increases with age: 71% of older teenagers had seen sexual images, compared with 36% of younger children aged 9 and 10.

Even though over half of the children have experience of online or offline sexual content, only 20% of them (less than half) felt upset with this experience, and only 7% said they felt very upset, with very similar percentages of children (6% and 7% respectively).

The relation between risk and harm varies with age. While over half the children aged 9 and 10 who saw sexual content felt ‘very’ or ‘a little’ upset with it; less than one in every four teenagers aged 15 and 16 felt the same way.

Television and films (31%) continue to be the most usual channel for seeing sexual images, followed by videos and magazines (16%), pop-ups on Internet (13%) and videos on platforms, such as Youtube (12%). As the children grow older, it becomes more likely that they will sexual images on the media.

**Figure 6. Child has seen sexual images online or offline in the past 12 months by age and gender**



Base: All children who use the internet.

The proportion of children who have seen sexual images has increased exponentially in recent years. In 2015 half of the children aged 9 to 16 said they

had been in contact with such content, when in 2010 only 11% of the interviewees answered that question in the affirmative.

Access to sexual images over the mobile phone increased tenfold in the five years between the two reports, and access through websites more than doubled.

On the other hand, there were also many more children who had accessed such content through magazines, books, television, films or DVDs, and their number was far from falling.

### Other unsuitable content

There is other problematic and unsuitable content, such as content that encourages eating disorders, self-harm, drug consumption, or discrimination and violence.

Thirty-two percent of children say they have seen unsuitable or potentially hurtful content online. Exposure to such content has increased in recent years, since it was 19% in 2010.

Although there are some differences amongst different age groups, children more frequently encounter messages that encourage hate, attacks on people according to their ethnic group, religion or other questions (18%), messages that show how to harm others or cause self-harm (17%) and content that is pro-anorexia or pro-bulimia (14%), rather than websites related to the experience of drug consumption and suicide. Nonetheless, and although it is a relatively small percentage, 10% of Spanish children have encountered websites that spoke of ways of committing suicide. Exposure to unsuitable content increases with age (from 23% of children aged 11 and 12 to 42% of teenagers aged 15 and 16)

### Reaction to online problems

The majority of online experiences are not necessarily hurtful, and in fact there is no reason why children should perceive them as dangerous or problematic (Livingstone et al., 2012; Vandoninck, d’Haenens & Roe, 2013). The most usual strategy for confronting online risks is for children to seek support in their social environment (Livingstone et



al., 2011). Children who receive more support from their peers are more resistant to negative experiences on Internet.

Eighty-two percent of children are likely to talk to at least one person after having a negative online experience: with their mothers (84%), fathers (76%) and/or friends (58%). These are the support to which they are 'very' or 'quite' likely to turn following upsetting experiences on Internet. Conversely, it would be 'very' or 'quite' unlikely for the majority of children to turn to teachers (60%) or people specifically dedicated to this task (59%).

**Table 9. How likely it is for children to talk about things that bothered them on the internet**

%...	Very likely	Rather likely	Rather unlikely	Very unlikely	Does not apply
Father	48	28	8	8	8
Mother	61	23	6	5	6
Brother or sister	19	15	14	24	28
Other relatives	13	20	20	31	16
Friends	28	30	14	18	10
Teachers	4	14	19	41	21
Someone whose job is to help children	8	11	16	44	20
Another trusted adult	12	20	18	34	16

Base: All children who use the internet.

Smaller children are more likely to talk with their father or mother than with any other interlocutor, and both boys and girls are more likely to talk with their mother. The importance of parents decreases with age, particularly in the case of boys. In parallel, teenagers are more prone than younger children to turn to their peer group in search of support. For their part, teenage girls tend to speak with their friends and even more so with their mothers.

While younger children consider their teachers to be possible interlocutors for seeking support, the latter are barely taken into consideration by older teenagers.

On the other hand, there are still 18% of children who say they will not turn to anyone in the event of encountering unpleasant experiences on Internet.

## Dependence and excessive use

Concern that children will lose control over their activity on the new media is a key aspect of the most widespread fears (moral panics) about Internet and mobile phones.

'Permanent contact' (Katz & Aakhus, 2002) is neither positive nor problematic per se, but it can lead to excessive use and a feeling of 'entrapment' (Hall & Baym, 2012). Equally, we do not exclude excessive and compensatory uses of mobile devices as a way of escaping from psychological vulnerabilities. We prefer to speak of dependence and excessive use to suggest that the frontier between intensive and pathological use is negotiable and must be contextualized, considering the experiences and vulnerabilities of each individual.

The great majority of children who possess a smartphone consider that it is 'fairly true' (35%) or 'very true' (51%) that they feel less bored thanks to their smartphone. Moreover, the majority of children think that it is 'fairly true' (28.3%) or 'very true' (55%) that they feel more connected to their friends thanks to smartphones. The percentage of older teenagers nearly doubles that for children aged 9 to 12 who consider that smartphones are tools that facilitate a more solid connection with their peer group. For children this contact with their peers is the main motivation for using mobile communication.

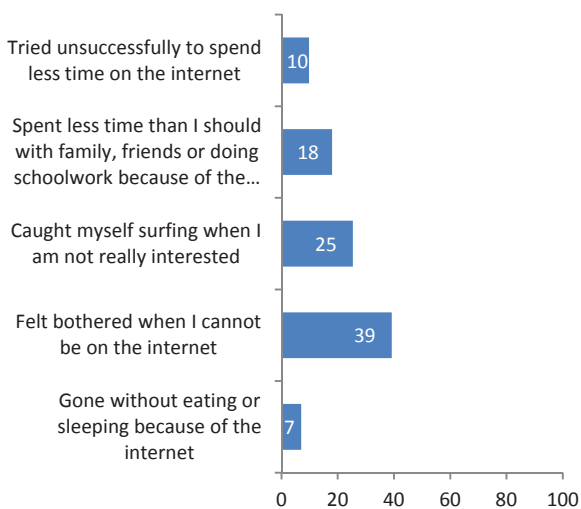
**Nearly two-thirds of children consider that it is 'fairly' (34%) or 'very' (25%) true that they feel more connected to their families. And a very similar percentage** thinks that since acquiring their smartphone they feel that they are always available for their family and friends.

Half of the children **who have a smartphone agree that these devices also** strengthen their feeling of security and help them organize their everyday activities.

Nearly two in three children think that smartphones help them to carry out their school work and tasks.

Excessive Internet use by children is shown in different ways: feeling very or fairly bored if they cannot go online (39%); a feeling of spending time online without really being interested (25%); a feeling that they are spending a less than appropriate amount of time with their family and friends or doing school tasks (18%); and a perceived inability to reduce the amount of time spent online (10%).

**Figure 7. Excessive use of the internet among Children (very or fairly often)**



Base: All children who use the internet.

If the results of the 2010 survey are compared with those of the 2015 survey, we find that the percentage of children who spend less time than they feel that they should with their family and friends because they are on Internet more than doubles (from 8% to 18%). The percentages of children who felt bored when they couldn't go online almost triples (from 15% to 39%). The percentage of users who say they have stopped eating or sleeping to navigate on Internet also increases (from 4% to 7%).

One in four children experienced at least two behaviours or feelings associated with excessive Internet use, with few differences according to gender. Nonetheless, the differences according to age are more pronounced, oscillating from 16% amongst children aged 9 and 10 to 42% amongst those aged 15 and 16. Children whose parents have a high or medium level of education are more likely to experience two or more forms of excessive

Internet consumption than those who come from homes where the parents have less education.

One in two children agree with the statement that 'I have felt a strong impulse to check my telephone to see if something new has happened very or fairly often'. About one in three children say that they 'very' or 'fairly often' feel irritated when they are unable to use their telephone because they are in an area without coverage, and nearly one in four say they use their mobile phone in places or on occasions that are inappropriate.

The feeling of neglecting the family, friends and school activities was experienced 'very' or 'fairly often' by one in four children, as well as that of using the mobile phone without really being interested in doing so. There is a small percentage of children that agrees with the statement 'I have tried to spend less time on the telephone but I haven't managed to do so'.

These results suggest that boys and teenagers are more prone to excessively using their smartphones precisely due to the characteristics of these devices: boys and teenagers consider them to be 'extensions' of their own body, easily transportable in a pocket throughout the day (Vincent & Fortunati, 2009) and they enable a new form of communication called 'connected presence' (Licoppe, 2004), associated with the feeling of continuous contact with friends and family.

Forty-eight percent of children describe two or more experiences associated with dependence and excessive use of their smartphones, with small differences according to gender.

**Excessive use increases with age.** Twenty-five percent of children in the lowest age bracket experience two or more of the items considered, compared with 65% of teenagers aged 15-16.

## Mediation

### Parents

Amongst the different mediation strategies, only active mediation and restriction are associated with lower levels of risk and harm (Dürager &

Livingstone, 2012; Mascheroni et al., 2013). Nonetheless, it is likely that restrictive measures undermine children's digital skills and that, in fact, 'restrictions on use and opportunities are the most effective but destructive (in terms of building resilience) means of reducing online risks' (Livingstone et al., 2012, p. 331). With respect to parental mediation, we distinguish four different styles of mediation: Active Mediation of Internet use, Active Mediation of Internet safety, Restrictive Mediation, and Technical Restriction.

**1) Active Mediation of Internet use**, which involves parents' carrying out activities like speaking about Internet content with their children while the latter are navigating, and sharing the online experiences of children by being close to them while they are navigating.

**Three in four parents speak with their children about what the latter do on Internet (77%).** Another form of active mediation that is also widespread is staying close to children while they are online (75%). Over half of the parents sit with the child while he/she navigates, share activities or encourage him/her to explore and learn things on Internet.

Certain differences can be observed according to age groups: if we consider the most popular form of mediation – speaking about online activities with the child – we find that in both the 9-12 age bracket and the 13-16 age bracket, girls receive more mediation than boys. This difference becomes more evident when parents sit with their children while they navigate: for the two age brackets, 56% and 35% of boys' parents sit with them, as against 72% and 49% when girls are concerned.

**The great majority of fathers and mothers (84%) involve themselves in at least two forms of active mediation of Internet use, according to their children.** The differences with respect to boys and girls are minimal. Parental mediation decreases as the children's ages increase. Parents with a medium and high education are more involved in active mediation.

**Table 10. Parent's active mediation of the child's internet use, by age and gender**

%	9-12 years		13-16 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Talk to child about what they do on the internet	75	81	73	78	77
Sit with child while they use the internet	56	72	35	49	53
Stay nearby when child uses the internet	79	91	64	65	75
Encourage child to explore and learn things on the internet on their own	50	57	47	50	51
Do shared activities together with child on the internet	58	59	59	58	58

Base: All children who use the internet.

**2) Active Mediation of Internet safety**, in which parents encourage the safe and responsible use of Internet.

**Seventy-eight percent of parents help their children when something proves difficult to do or find on Internet, and a similar percentage explain to them why some websites are good and others are not so good.** Two-thirds have spoken to their children about what they should do if something upsets them on Internet, and 68% have suggested to them how they should behave with other people on Internet.

Strategies for helping when something has upset children on Internet and the strategy of suggesting how to improve safety are adopted by 54% and 58% of parents, respectively.

In general, younger children and teenage girls receive more mediation than older boys.

**The great majority of parents (84%) are involved in two or more forms of active mediation of Internet safety.** Parents more actively mediate the activity of daughters than that of sons.

**Table 11. Parent’s active mediation (%) of the child’s internet safety, by gender and age**

%	9-12 years		13-16 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Helped child when something was difficult to do or find on the internet	84	92	71	65	78
Explained why some websites were good or bad	77	84	72	83	79
Suggested ways to use the internet safely	48	65	56	63	58
Suggested ways to behave towards other people online	59	70	70	75	68
Helped child in the past when something bothered them on the internet	51	59	47	59	54
In general, talked to child about what to do if something on the internet ever bothered them	58	74	67	76	69

Base: All children who use the internet.

3) **Restrictive Mediation**, which involves setting rules that limit and regulate the time spent online, the sites from which to navigate and the activities developed on Internet.

Restrictions are applied to younger children especially. **Two in three parents do not allow their children aged 9-12 to have a profile on social media.** The differences by gender are small, but teenage girls are more likely to suffer restrictions when it comes to sharing personal information, uploading photos, videos or music, or using services to register geographic localization.

**Eighty-three percent of parents adopt two or more forms of restrictive mediation, although there are very notable differences according to the age of their children.** Nearly all younger children (98%) have some type of restrictive measure applied to them, and this percentage is almost double that for older teenagers (59%).

The restrictive measure most frequently adopted by parents, according to their children, refers to the prohibition on buying applications (86%) and on revealing personal information (77%). The differences according to the parents’ level of education are small and by gender, insignificant.

**Table 12. Parents restrict child’s internet use, by age and gender**

%	9-12 years		13-16 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Download music or films from the internet	36	24	4	5	18
Watch video clips on the internet	11	8		1	5
Have own social networking profile	70	66	19	14	44
Give out personal information to others on the internet	92	90	57	65	77
Upload photos, videos or music to share with others	66	58	13	17	40
Download free apps	22	22	5	3	14
Purchase apps	95	92	77	80	86
Register geographical location	92	91	51	58	74
Use instant messaging	46	35	8	9	25

Base: All children who use the internet.

4) **Technical restrictions**, that is, the use of software and technical tools to filter, restrict and monitor children’s activities on Internet.

The most usual form of technical mediation consists in employing **software to prevent viruses and spam (50%)**, that is, it is not related to safety, but to the correct functioning of the computer equipment.

Parental control applications are used by one in four parents and only 14% of parents adopt software that limits the time their children spend on Internet. It is the parents of younger children who most frequently use software to regulate the Internet use of their children. In general, **girls receive more technical mediation than boys; but it is boys aged 11-12 who receive the most parental technical mediation.** Parents with a higher level of education are more prone to adopting tools of parental control and other forms of technical mediation.

**Table 13. Parent's technical mediation of the child's internet use, by age and gender**

%	9-12 years		13-16 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Parental controls or other means of blocking or filtering some types of website	30	36	18	17	25
Parental controls or other means of keeping track of the websites visited	30	30	17	26	25
A service or contract that limits the time child spends on the internet	18	14	13	11	14
Software to prevent spam, junk mail, viruses	48	50	51	49	50

Base: All children who use the internet.

None of the four mediation strategies that the survey asked about is practiced by even one in four parents in relation to their children's use of smartphones. Only one in ten parents (10%) adopt two technical tools to restrict their children's smartphone use. In general, restrictions on navigation through software installed in their smartphones are more likely amongst younger children and amongst children whose parents have a higher level of studies.

Two in three children consider that their parents know 'a lot' (29%) or 'enough' (38%) about what they do on Internet, the girls to a much greater extent than the boys. There are pronounced variations by age group in the knowledge that children say their parents have: they oscillate between 97% of children aged 9-10, to 50% of those aged 15-16. In homes with a lower status the percentage of awareness falls to 61%.

With respect to evolution, from 2010 to 2015, in the penetration of the different forms of active mediation described, it can be said that there are more parents who, in the words of their children, are able to put into practice forms of active mediation of Internet use, speak about what is done on Internet, who are close-by while children navigate, share activities with them... The percentage of families in which these measures are present rises from 71% to 84%. Although in these five years there is a clear increase in parental

mediation, there continue to be differences of age and gender, with more attention given to girls and younger children of both sexes. It is worth underscoring the fact that there is an increase in the number of families capable of giving advice on Internet safety. On the other hand, the number of homes in which children encounter restrictions is more or less the same as five years earlier.

With respect to the development and use of technical tools for parental control – filters for websites or concrete content, services that limit navigation time or contact, etc. – it is interesting to confirm that these resources doubled in five years. From having a character that was little more than residual in 2010, in 2015 they are present in three in ten homes and the growth is above all provided by families with younger children.

## Peers

The help offered by peers has a practical character, providing assistance to do or find something (65%), and is more likely amongst teenagers than amongst smaller children. Conversely, peers are unlikely to offer advice related to safety on Internet, or to help in getting over negative online experiences.

**Table 14. Friends' active mediation of child's internet safety, by age and gender**

%	9-12 years		13-16 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Helped when something was difficult to do or find on the internet	52	54	79	77	65
Explained why some websites were good or bad	28	28	39	50	36
Suggested ways to use the internet safely	17	22	38	46	30
Suggested ways to behave towards other people online	19	24	37	42	30
Helped in the past when something bothered child on the internet	21	24	41	49	33
In general, talked about what to do if something on the internet ever bothered them	21	27	44	57	37

Base: All children who use the internet.



As age increases, so too does the proportion of children who find a source of advice in their classmates and friends.

### Schools, smartphone use and mediation

According to what the children say, **three in four schools have wifi networks (74%)**. These networks are more usual in Secondary Education (85% of the children aged 15-16 say there is a network in their school) than in Primary Education (availability falls to 60% in the 9-10 age bracket).

Fifty-five percent access their school’s wifi network with some restrictions, and only 4% can use it without any limitations. One in three children are not allowed to access the school’s wifi and 6%, although not allowed, have hacked the password (twice as many boys as girls).

**Table 15. Teachers’ active mediation of child’s internet use, by age and gender**

%...	9-12 years		13-16 years		Total
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Talked about what to do on the internet	56	61	57	67	60
Helped when something was difficult to do or find on the internet	73	75	68	78	73
Explained why some websites were good or bad	65	71	72	82	72
Suggested ways to use the internet safely	38	53	61	71	56
Suggested ways to behave towards other people online	50	46	54	66	54
Establish rules about the use of the Internet at school	74	79	79	87	80
Helped in the past when something bothered child on the internet	40	30	42	48	45
In general, talked about what to do if something on the internet ever bothered them	47	52	53	67	55

Base: All children who use the internet.

Eighty-four percent of children are not allowed to use their smartphone at school, **15% say they can use it with restrictions and only 1% say they can use their device without any limitations**. Smartphone use at school increases with age.

Eighty percent of teachers have rules with respect to what the pupils can do at school in relation to Internet. More than half of the teachers are involved in mediating safe Internet use, **explaining why some websites are good or bad (72%), suggesting ways of navigating more safely on Internet (56%) or how to behave with other people on Internet (54%)**. According to the children, their teachers talk to them about what they do on Internet (60%) and also about what they should do if someone upsets them online (55%). It is less likely that teachers will speak to them to help them manage an upsetting or negative online experience (45%), although, as we have said, the children themselves do not usually talk to their teachers when they have had experiences of this type

In the five years between the two reports it is possible to observe that mediation improved appreciably. Asked in 2010 about active mediation activities carried out, only 16% of the children said they had been spoken to about what they should do if something upset them on Internet and 34% referred to the existence of norms on Internet use at their school. Five years later these percentages had risen to 55% and 80% respectively.

One in two children say that their teachers ask them to use Internet to search for information needed for their school work at least every week, and 20% say this happens daily. **One in five schoolchildren are encouraged to collaborate with classmates on the Internet at least each week**. It is much less usual for them to be told to use smartphones for the work they are doing in class.

Integration of Internet and the smartphone into the learning process increases substantially with age: 14% of children aged 9-10 say they use Internet to find information for their school work, and this percentage rises gradually to reach 38% in the 15-16 age bracket.

## Conclusions

There is a growing awareness of online risks amongst parents and children which is expressed in a greater participation by parents in mediating the safety of children online, and in the development of safety skills or the adoption of preventive measures amongst children.

Exposure to online risks increased with respect to 2010, and especially amongst children who use mobile phones and tablets to navigate. The maxim **'more opportunities, more risks'** is a valid framework for understanding the changes related to smartphones and tablets, changes that lead to an Internet that is more ubiquitous and omnipresent in the daily activities of children.

Given that the number of children who use Internet is increasing, and from an earlier age, and that they do so from more varied devices and contexts, it is not surprising that exposure to online risks should also be increasing. **It is necessary to highlight that the increase in the number of those who suffered harm as a result of risky experiences did not increase in the same proportion.**

Bullying continues to be the risk that causes the most harm to those who suffer from it. But in spite of a certain social and media discourse and the possibilities provided by social media to extend situations of abuse, there are still many more cases of cyberbullying that are a prolongation of face-to-face bullying, in the words of the children affected, than cases that occur in the online space.

In any case, in spite of the children being more aware of the dangers associated with cyberbullying or other potentially unsettling situations, **it continues to be necessary to promote safer and**

**more responsible habits of mobile communication.** This could involve increasing awareness of questions related to privacy, applications designed for reporting or blocking abuse, functions linked to control and geolocalization, or risks associated with the increase of exchanges that at times occur in cases of online conflicts (Marwick & Boyd, 2014).

Schools in particular should play as an active a role as possible, given that the greater part of interaction through social media takes place amongst peers and classmates.

**Certain inequalities persist in the use of Internet amongst children according to their socioeconomic status,** particularly in questions of parental intermediation. Children from families whose parents have a lower level of education receive less mediation from their parents and less technical mediation tools are usually employed at home, on both computers and mobile devices. Therefore, initiatives that promote the digital inclusion of children should continue to be a priority.

**The increasingly private conditions of Internet use** can hinder normal parental mediation strategies. It is of vital importance that the industry, governments, NGOs, researchers and other actors cooperate in constructing a better Internet for children. Priority must be given to goals like: content classification, services suitable for the user's age and privacy settings, as well as simple and efficient systems for reporting abuse on mobile devices and services. These tools can complement parental mediation and protect children.

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## Net Children Go Mobile network

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