

Brussels, 18 April 2011

Digital Agenda: children using social networks at a younger age; many unaware of basic privacy risks, says survey

77% of 13-16 year olds and 38% of 9-12 year olds in the EU have a profile on a social networking site, according to a pan-European survey carried out for the European Commission. Yet, a quarter of children who use social networking sites like Facebook, Hyves, Tuenti, Nasza-Klasa SchuelerVZ, Hi5, Iwiw or Myvip say their profile is set to "public" meaning that everyone can see it, and many of these display their address and/or phone number. The figures highlight the importance of the European Commission's upcoming review of the implementation of the Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU. This agreement was brokered by the Commission in 2009 ([IP/09/232](#)) when major social networking companies agreed to implement measures to ensure the online safety of their under 18s users. Children's safety online is an important part of the Digital Agenda for Europe (see [IP/10/581](#), [MEMO/10/199](#) and [MEMO/10/200](#)).

Neelie Kroes, Vice President of the European Commission for the Digital Agenda said: "Growing numbers of children are on social networking sites but many are not taking all necessary steps to protect themselves online. These children are placing themselves in harm's way, vulnerable to stalkers and groomers. All social networking companies should therefore immediately make minors' profiles accessible by default only to their approved list of contacts and out of search engines' reach. And those companies that have not yet signed up to the EU's Safer Networking Principles should do so without delay so as to ensure our children's safety."

Children are active users of social networking sites

The survey of 25,000 young people in 25 European countries, published today by the EUKidsOnline network, shows that 38% of 9-12 year olds say they have a profile on social networking sites, ranging from 70% in The Netherlands to 25% in France. Social networks are even more popular among teenagers with 77% of 13-16 year olds saying they have a profile.

15% of 9-12 year olds say they have more than 100 contacts on their profile, with a high of 47% in Hungary. Among 13-16 year olds, Belgian, Danish, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Dutch, Norwegian, Polish, Swedish and UK children are more likely to have more than 100 contacts than children from other countries.

Many children have public profiles open for everyone to see

A quarter of children on social networking sites say they have their profile open to public. One fifth of children whose profile is public say this profile displays their address and/or phone number. In 15 out of 25 countries, 9-12 year olds are more likely than 13-16 year olds to have public profiles.

Only 56% of 11-12 year olds say they know how to change privacy settings on their social network profile. Older youngsters have better skills with 78% of 15-16 year olds saying they know how to change their privacy settings.

What is the Commission doing?

The Commission is monitoring the implementation of the Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU, the self-regulatory agreement signed by social networking companies in which they commit to implement a series of measures on their services in order to ensure the safety of minors.

The Commission will shortly publish the first batch of the results of the assessment of the implementation of the Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU by the following signatories: Arto, Bebo, Facebook, Giovanni, Hyves, IRC Galleria, MySpace, Nasza-Klasa, Netlog, One.It, Rate, SchuelerVZ, Tuenti and Zap (see [IP/09/232](#), [IP/10/144](#)).

The report published today also shows that some of the social networking sites that are popular among youngsters in Europe are not signatories to the Safer Social Networking Principles.

Given the decreasing age of children using the internet and social networking services and the fact that more children are accessing the internet via mobile devices, the Commission has launched a review of the current industry self-regulatory agreements in the field. Social networking companies, manufacturers of mobile devices and game consoles, internet service providers, mobile applications and content providers, consumer organisations, researchers and childrens' organisations will be invited to join the collaborative platform. This dialogue will build on the achievements of the *Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU* (see annex and [IP/09/232](#), [IP/10/144](#)) and the *European Framework for the Safer Mobile Use by Younger Teenagers and Children* (see [IP/07/139](#), [IP/09/596](#), [IP/10/704](#)).

For more information:

Safer Internet Programme:

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/index_en.htm

Concrete tips for parents on how to keep your child safe online

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/projects/centres/practices/index_en.htm

Digital Agenda website:

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/digital-agenda/index_en.htm

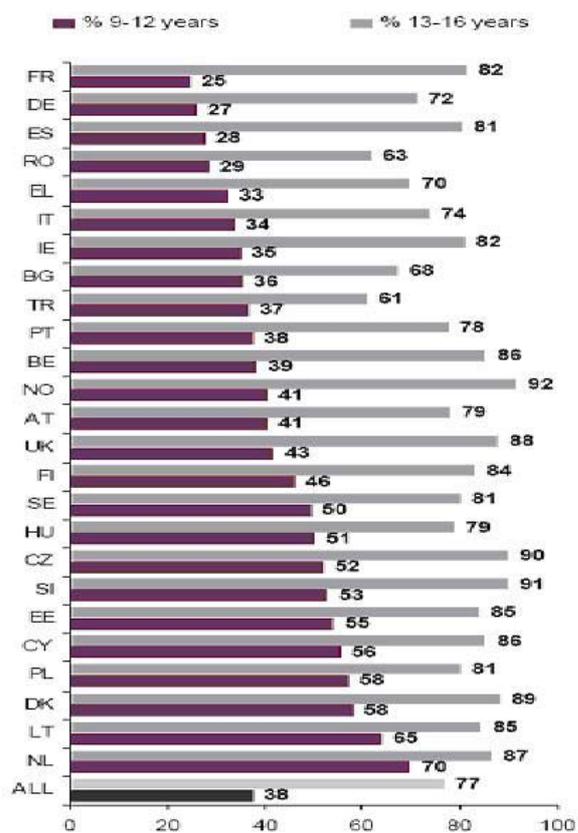
Neelie Kroes' website:

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/kroes/

Follow Neelie Kroes on Twitter:

<http://twitter.com/neeliekroeseu>

Figure 1: Children's use of SNS by country and age



QC313: Do you have your OWN profile on a social networking site that you currently use, or not?

Base: All children who use the internet.