



Young People's Social Rights and Media Banning Policies

Research Symposium 2026

Young People's Access to Social Rights

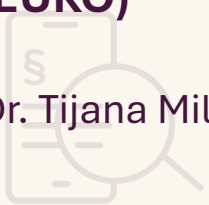
September 16, 2026

EYCS, Strasbourg

Youth Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe

Authors of the EU Kids Online's report on social media bans (EU Kids Online 2, 2026): Prof. Elisabeth Staksrud, Prof. Sonia Livingstone, Kjartan Ólafsson;
With Prof. Niamh Ní Bhroin and members of the **EU Kids Online Network (EUKO)**

Dr. Tijana Milošević (presenting)





What do adolescents in Europe think about social media bans?

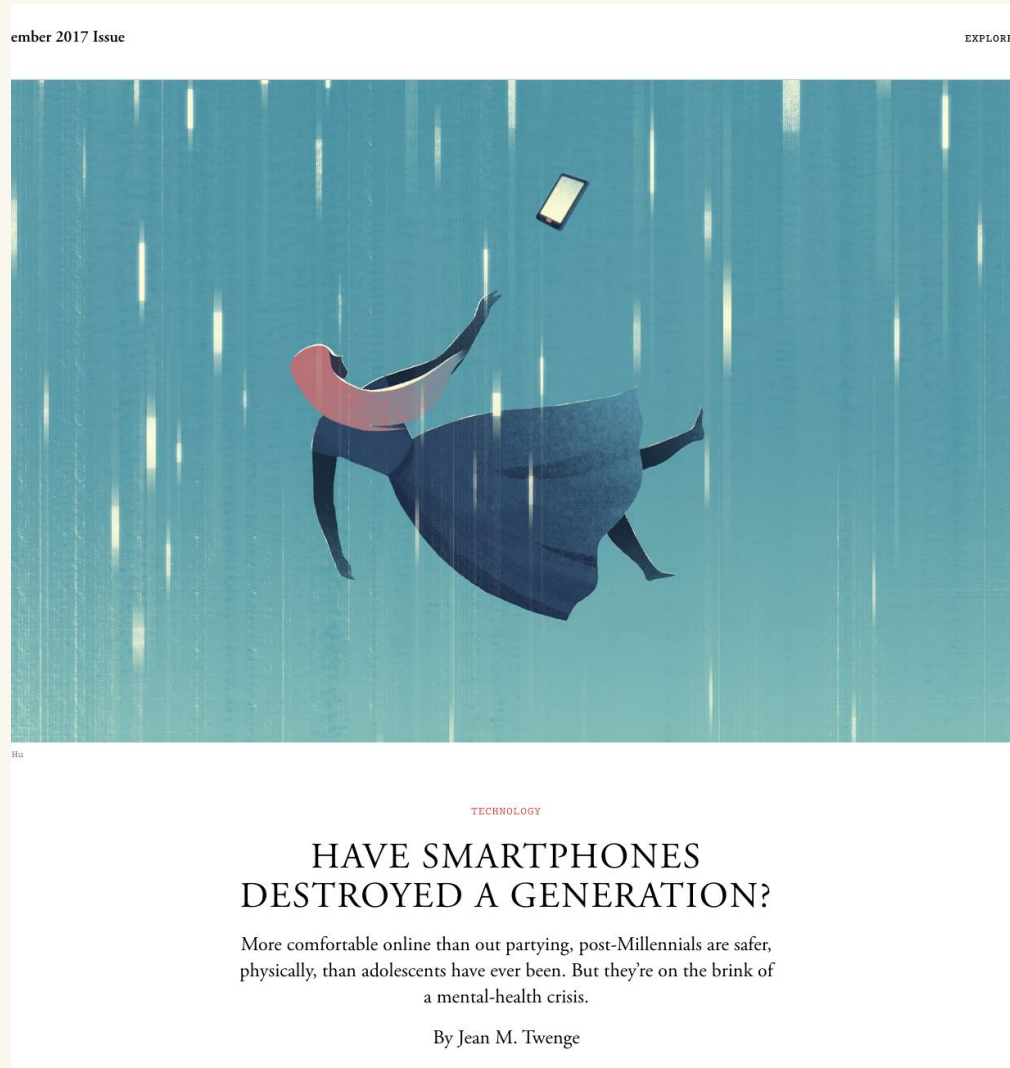
What risks do they experience online?

How much are they concerned about screen time and social media risks?

How do they think bans will affect their rights?

Why blanket bans are not the best way to protect young people online





Young people and digital media

Concerns:

- Social media and phones more broadly
 - Time spent online
 - Algorithmic design
 - Attention spans, learning, communication
 - Online risks & harm (e.g. harmful online content, grooming, cyberbullying, sexting etc.)
 - Mental health and wellbeing concerns
- Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI)



Scientific evidence and recent policy developments

Mixed evidence from research

- Disagreements on interpretation of findings, acceptable methodologies
- Mental health, wellbeing: *causal* relationship difficult to establish
- No denying that social media are harming some young people

(e.g. Coyne et al., 2020; World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe, 2025; Przybylski et al., 2021; Orben et al., 2022; Sigaud et al., 2026; Stefan et al., 2025; Teague et al., 2026)



Source: The Wall Street Journal

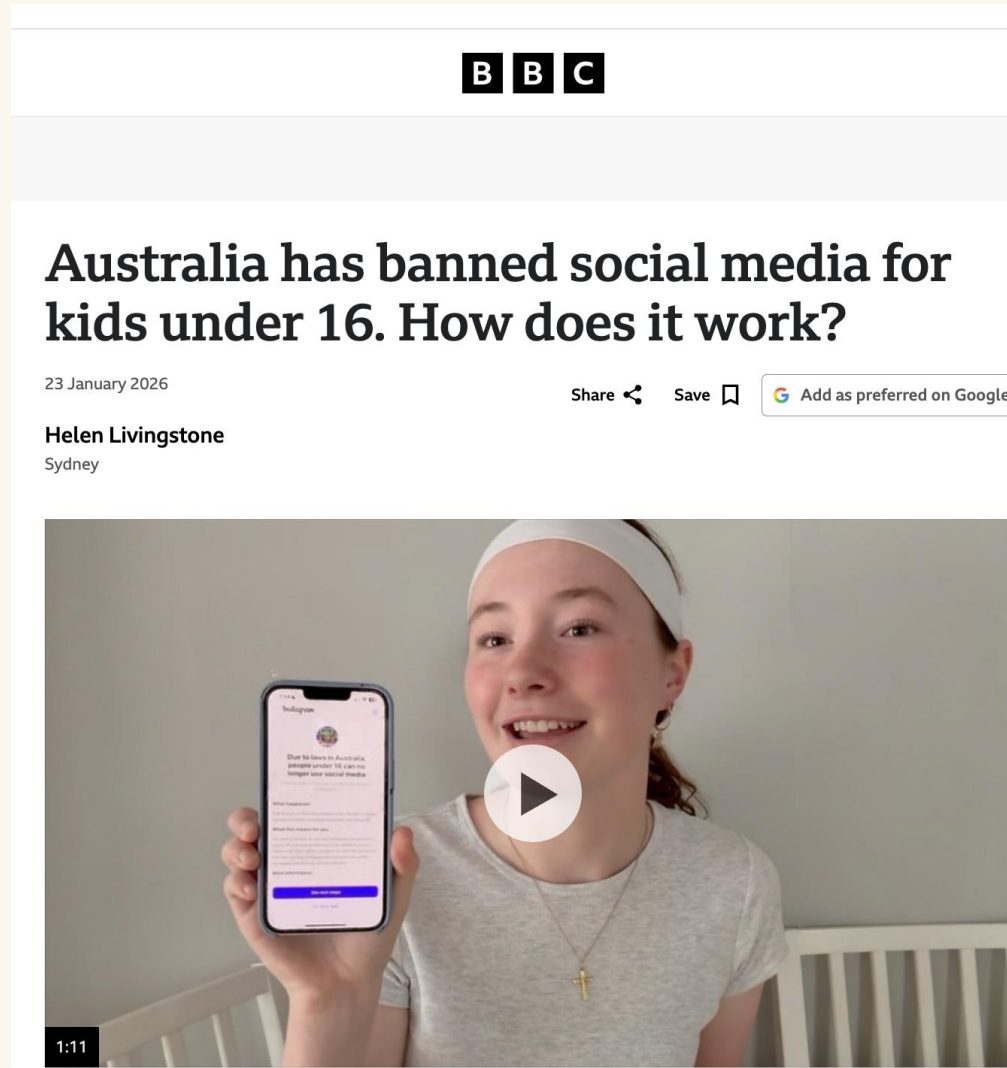


Social media bans

(Restricting access to social media to teens under certain age, typically 13 to 16)

- As of June 2026:
- 24 countries in the EU are considering or have proposed a minimum age for creating a social media account
- Belgium [Flanders], Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia [rejected], Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Austria, Finland, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Sweden, Romania, Serbia [non-EU]

(EU Parliament Brief, 2026)



<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwyp9d3ddqyo>

Social media bans, infringement on adolescent social and civil rights

- Social media can facilitate access to:
- Leisure and culture, social connection
- Education and training
- Information and counseling
- Ability for youth to participate in decisions that affect their lives
- Freedom of expression
- Privacy (relational context)

Recommendation CM/REC 2015 (3), UNCRC

France's top court blocks social media ban for under-15s

By Elizabeth Pineau and Sudip Kar-Gupta

August 14, 2026 3:20 PM GMT+2 · Updated August 14, 2026



Teenagers look at their mobile phone screens during an interview with Reuters about the bill aimed at banning the use of social networks for those under 15 and mobile phones in high schools from the start of the 2026 school year, in Paris, France, February 20, 2026. REUTERS/Manuel Ausloos/File Photo [Purchase Licensing Rights](#)

Summary Companies

- Court says draft legislation infringed on freedoms
- Ruling also criticises proof-of-age requirement
- Macron asks government to rework bill

Source: Reuters

EU Kids Online network and our research

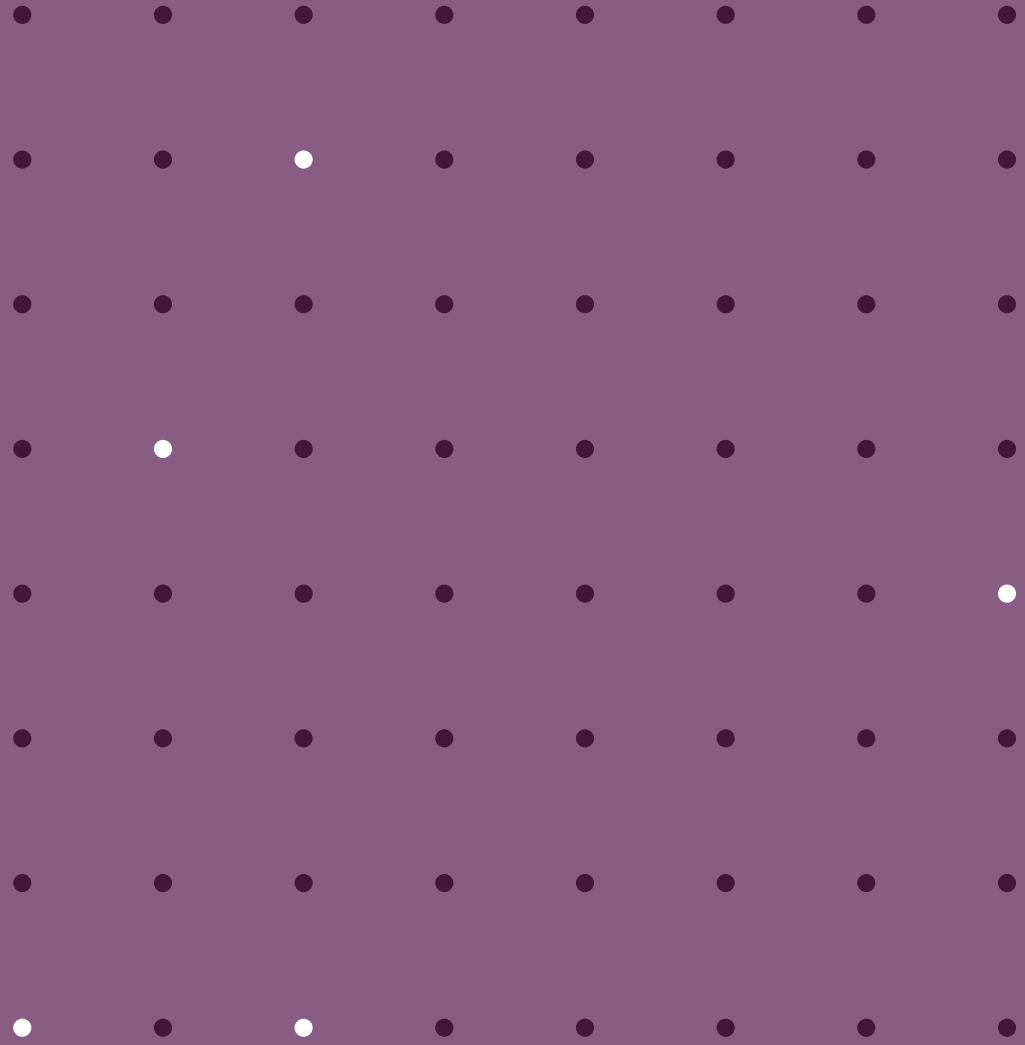
The screenshot shows the homepage of the EU Kids Online website. At the top is the LSE logo (The London School of Economics and Political Science) and a navigation menu with links: Department of Media and Communications, Contacts - Department and School Support, About, People, Study, Current Students, Alumni, News, Events, Research, and Blogs. Below this is a sub-menu with links: Digital Futures for Children, Media@LSE, and Polis. The main header area features the text "EU Kids Online" and a description: "EU Kids Online is a multinational research network. It seeks to enhance knowledge of European children's online opportunities, risks and safety. It uses multiple methods to map children's and parents' experiences of the internet, in dialogue with national and European policy stakeholders." Below the header is a navigation bar with links: News, Reports and findings, Participating countries, Hear from the researchers, Data and toolkit, and About. The main content area displays three featured items: 1. A photo of two children sitting on a bench, one looking at a smartphone. Below it, text reads: "NEWS: new findings from 28,465 children aged 10–16 across 19 European countries". 2. A report cover titled "The EU Kids Online 2026 comparative study: Children's views, experiences, opportunities and risks in a digital world". It mentions "Full findings from the EU Kids Online representative survey of 10- to 16-year-olds across 19 countries" and lists authors: Elisabeth Staksrud, Ellen Helsper, Sonia Livingstone, Bojana Lobe, Giovanna Mascheroni, Mariya Stokova and Kjartan Olafsson, with members of the EU Kids Online network. 3. A blue graphic with the EU Kids Online logo and the text "About EU Kids Online Investigating the way children use new media".

- Periodic large scale surveys in multiple European countries
- 19 countries in 2025 and 2018; and 25 countries in 2011;
- Digital media use, risks, opportunities, rights
- Nationally representative samples, children age 9 to 17 (specific age targets vary by cycle) and parents (in available countries); research with other stakeholders
- Qualitative research (report on GenAI and other thematic reports)
- Quality empirical evidence for policy makers



Methodology

- This report presents selected findings from the EUKO 2025 survey, a cross-national dataset from 29,169 children aged 9 to 16 in 19 European countries: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, and Switzerland.
- Timeline: April 2025—April 2026



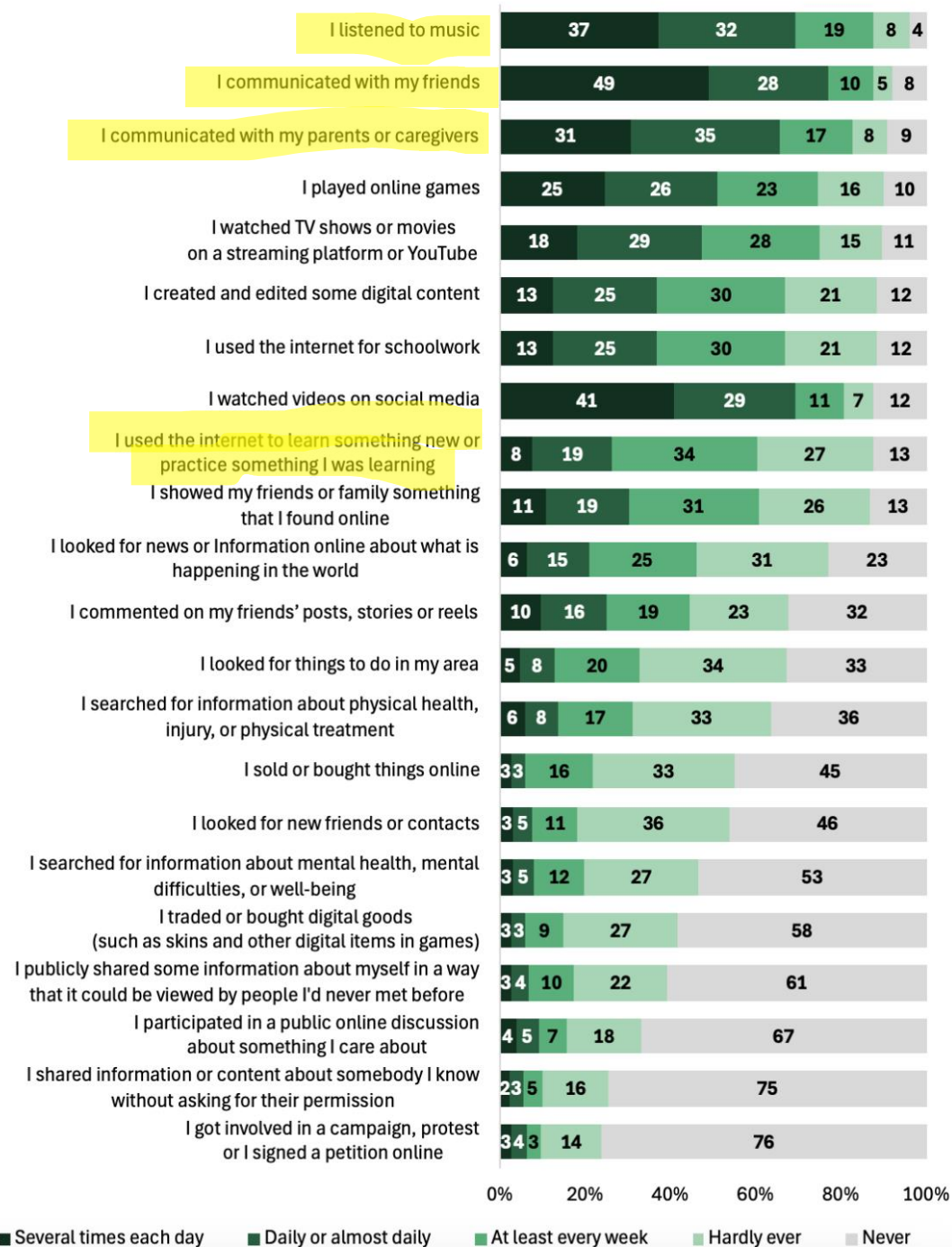
Results

Online lives not separate from offline



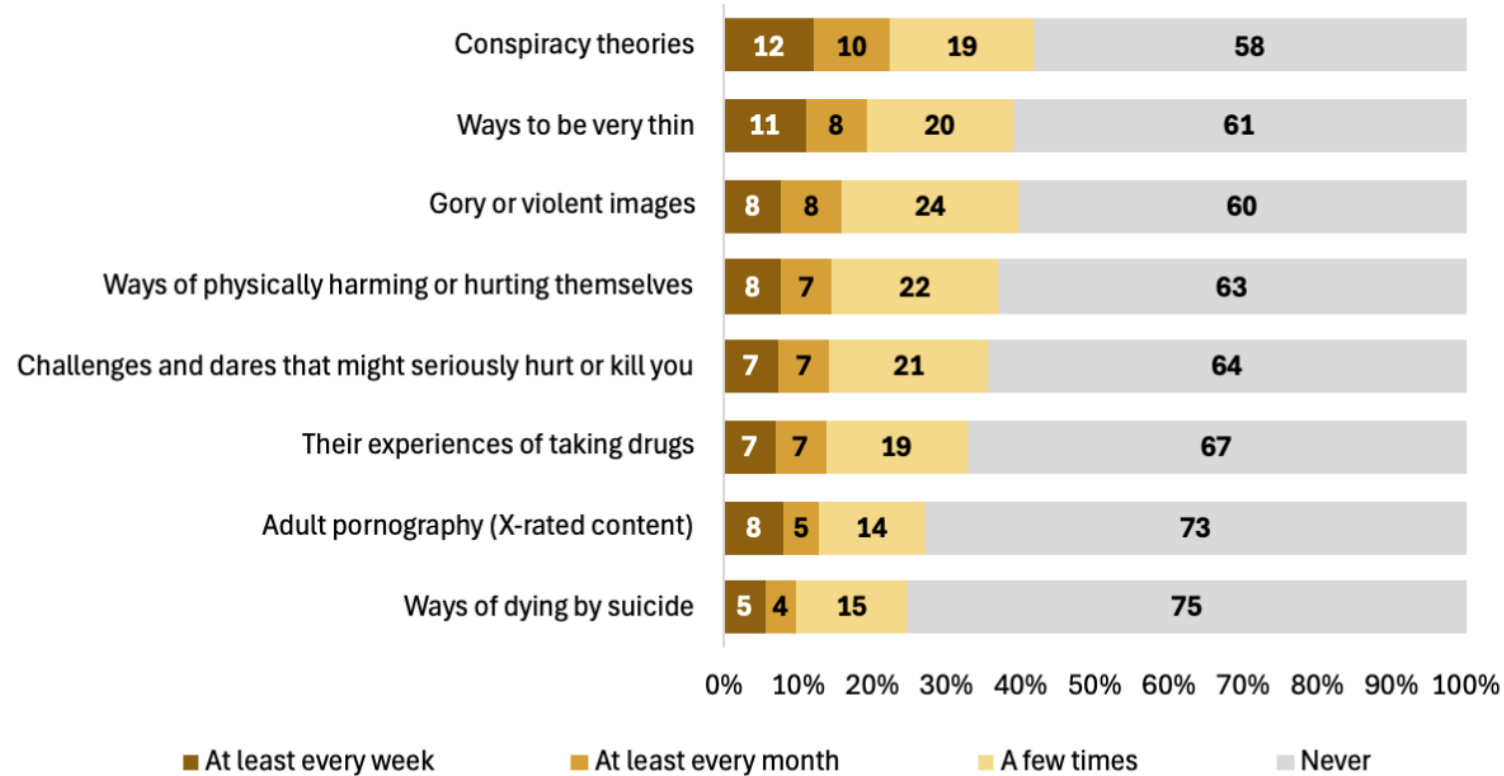
- “Children’s online lives are deeply embedded in their everyday social, educational and leisure activities.
- The internet seems less a separate space from offline life and more continuous with everyday social interaction.
- Digital device use peaks after school, followed by use in the evening before bedtime: It appears that children’s digital media use is concentrated during leisure time, **not during class or at night.”**
- Children’s most frequent online activity is communication with friends. This is a daily activity for the vast majority, with half (49%) saying they do this several times a day.
- **Some, if not most, of these online activities are likely linked to social media use and would therefore be particularly restricted if Europe were to decide on age-based social media restrictions.”**

Young people's online activities



Source, p. 3
 Staksrud, E., Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K. (2026).
 Use, Views and Worries on Age Bans on Social Media: Responses from 29,169 children in 19 European countries. EU Kids Online V. University of Oslo. Available at www.eukidsonline.net

Figure 6. Harmful user-generated content.



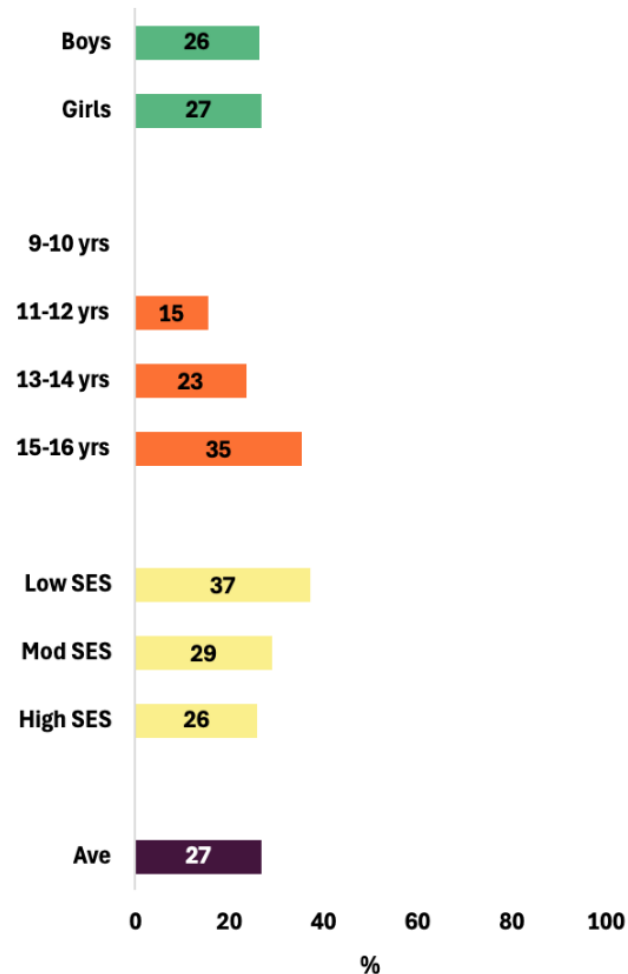
Harmful content (risks young people experience online)

Source, p. 12 Staksrud, E., Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K. (2026). Use, Views and Worries on Age Bans on Social Media: Responses from 29,169 children in 19 European countries. EU Kids Online V. University of Oslo. Available at www.eukidsonline.net

QC24 In the PAST YEAR, how often have you seen online content or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things? Base: All children aged 12-16 (number of respondents from 17,743 to 18,697).

Which young people are more at risk?

Figure 7. Exposure to harmful user-generated content by gender, age and SES.



QC24 In the PAST YEAR, how often have you seen online content or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things? Those who have experienced one or more type of negative user-generated content weekly or daily. Base: All children aged 12-16 (number of respondents from 17,743 to 18,697).

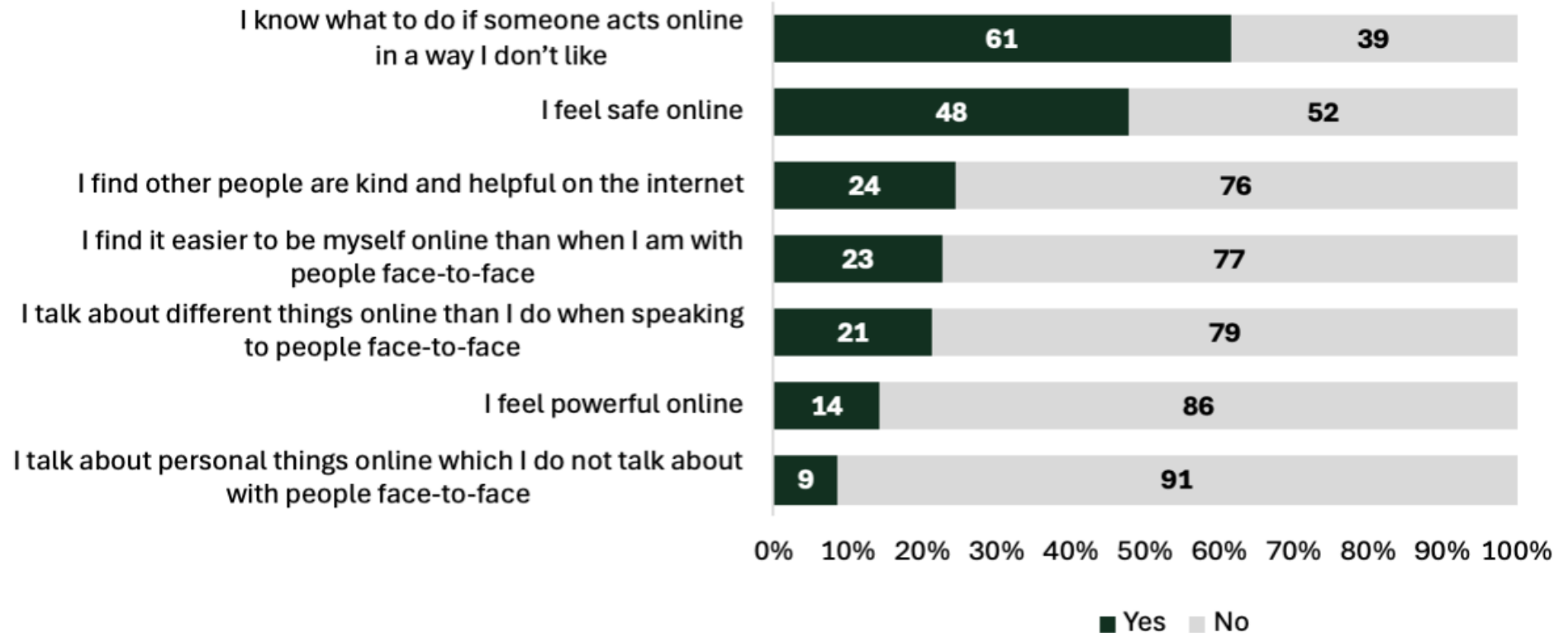
Comparisons over time:

- Ways of hurting/harming themselves – 2011: 7% (in the past year), 2018: 10% (at least monthly), 2025: 15% (at least monthly)
- Ways to be very thin – 2011: 10% (in the past year), 2018: 12% (at least monthly), 2025: 19% (at least monthly)
- Methods of suicide – 2011: 5% (in the past year), 2018: 8% (at least monthly), 2025: 9% (at least monthly)
- Taking drugs – 2011: 7% (in the past year), 2018: 11% (at least monthly), 2025: 14% (at least monthly)

Source, p. 13: Staksrud, E., Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K. (2026). Use, Views and Worries on Age Bans on Social Media: Responses from 29,169 children in 19 European countries. EU Kids Online V. University of Oslo. Available at www.eukidsonline.net

Do young people feel safe online?

Figure 5. Safety and communication online.



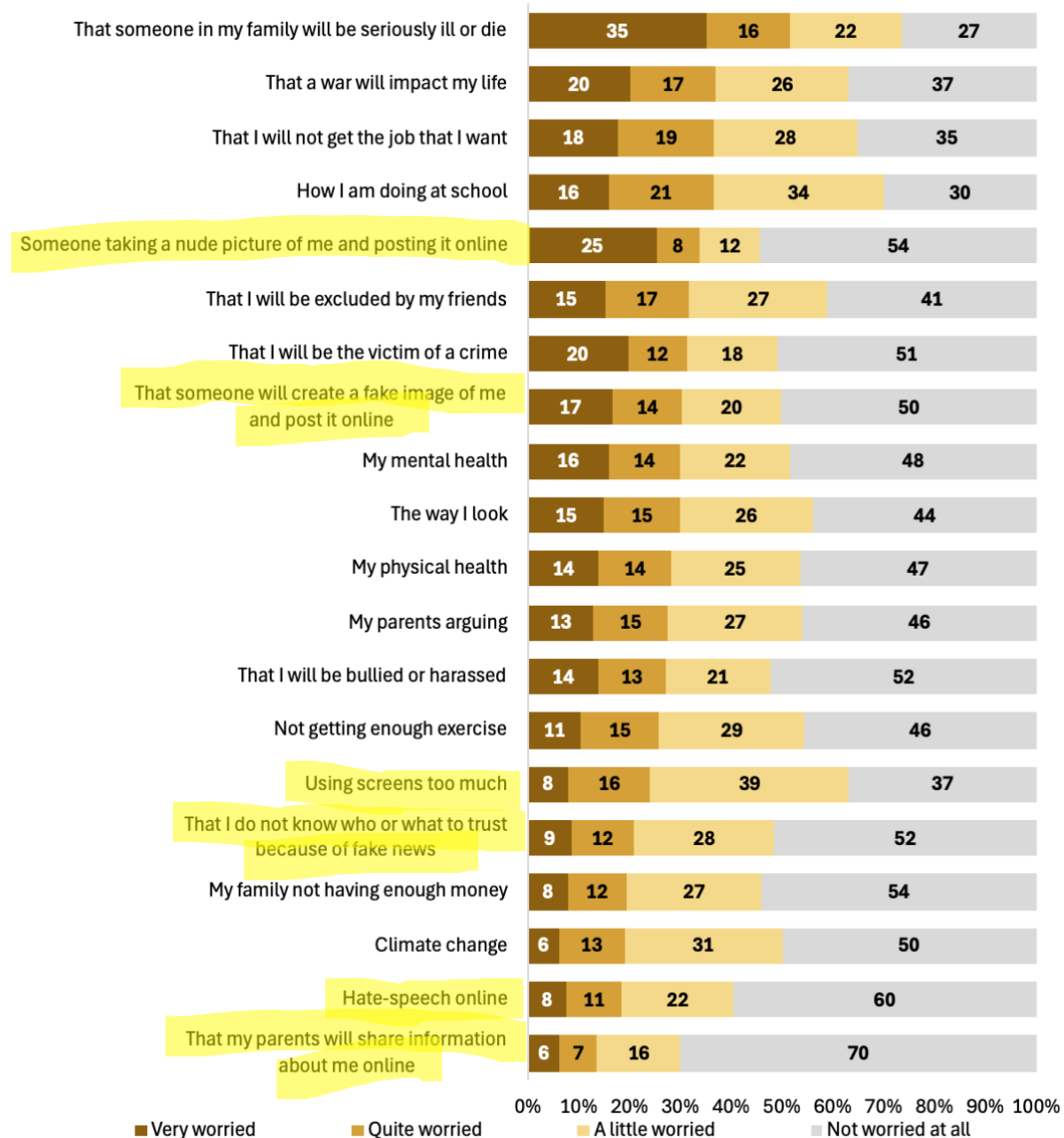
Source: (p. 11)

QC15 Which of the following applies to you? Response options are shown in the Figure. Base: All children aged 9-16 (number of respondents from 25,490 to 25,495).

Staksrud, E., Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K. (2026). Use, Views and Worries on Age Bans on Social Media: Responses from 29,169 children in 19 European countries. EU Kids Online V. University of Oslo. Available at www.eukidsonline.net

Offline vs. online worries

Figure 8. Children's worries.



Source (p. 15)

Staksrud, E., Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K. (2026). Use, Views and Worries on Age Bans on Social Media: Responses from 29,169 children in 19 European countries. EU Kids Online V. University of Oslo. Available at www.eukidsonline.net

QC30 Sometimes, and over a period of time, people might worry about different things in their lives, while other times they do not worry so much. Are you worried about any of the following things? Base: All children aged 11-16 (number of respondents from 19,973 to 21,597).

Young people's views on social media bans, based on data from four countries:



Ireland,
Norway,
Poland,
Romania.

Source (p. 17):

Staksrud, E., Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K. (2026). Use, Views and Worries on Age Bans on Social Media: Responses from 29,169 children in 19 European countries. EU Kids Online V. University of Oslo. Available at www.eukidsonline.net

Figure 9. Children's views on restrictions on social media.



Children are highly ambivalent about age-based restrictions:



- 33% say they would feel safer online, 45% disagree.
- 45% say this would limit their freedom and rights and 39% disagree
- Their concerns relate to freedom, responsibility, social connection, education, and democratic participation.

Bans as protective measures vs. loss of agency?



- “A majority either somewhat (19%) or strongly agree (26%) that an age ban would limit their freedom and rights, and many also feel it would take away their own responsibility to decide (47%).
- This is important in the wider age bans debate because restrictions are often framed as **protective measures**, but young people may experience them as a **loss of agency** rather than as support.” (p. 16)

Bans do not automatically increase safety



- "The findings complicate the idea that age bans would automatically increase safety.
- Safety cannot be understood solely as reducing exposure to harmful content; it also encompasses:
- control over personal information, independence, and trusted relationships.
- Many believe bans could make it harder to protect their privacy or could increase parental visibility over their app use in ways that feel uncomfortable, while an almost equal amount do not agree, pointing to a diversity among children."

Other empirical evidence: How effective are social media bans?



- Evaluation report from Australia:
- Limited effectiveness in terms of cutting off access to social media to targeted age groups (wide-spread circumvention)
- Limited effectiveness in terms of reducing time on social media (Barnes et al., 2026);
 - Limited evidence of effectiveness of bans in general (mental health, wellbeing, risk reduction)

(Orben et al., 2026)



Better ways to support young people?

- Digital Services Act in the EU (DSA)
 - Article 28
- Safety by design
- Regulating platforms' business models and ensuring effective compliance with regulation



Conclusions

- Urgent need for policy makers to find ways to better support children's safety and rights online
- Cutting access to social media via blanket bans infringes on young people's social and other rights
- Empirical evidence of effectiveness of age bans remains limited
 - Promoting bans is not evidence-based policy (at least until there is good empirical evidence to support such policies)



EUKO Report: European Children's Use, Views and Worries on Age Bans and Social Media

Staksrud, E., Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K. (2026). Use, Views and Worries on Age Bans on Social Media: Responses from 29,169 children in 19 European countries. EU Kids Online V. University of Oslo. Available at www.eukidsonline.net



Our latest report (published just last week!)

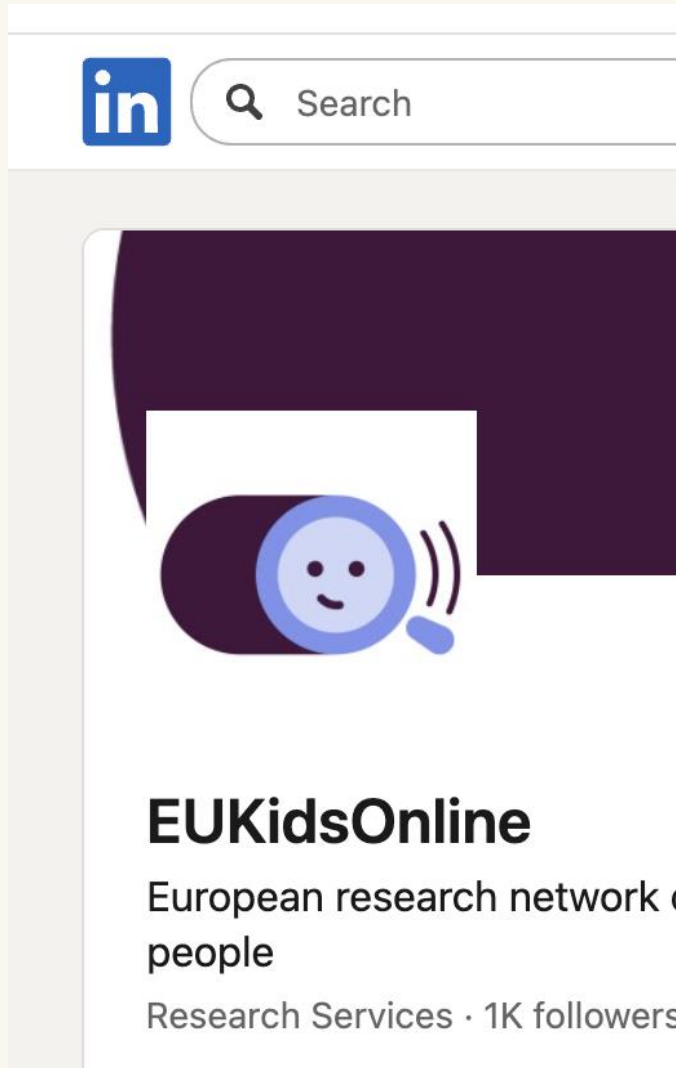
The EU Kids Online 2026 comparative study: Children's views, experiences, opportunities and risks in a digital world

Full findings from the EU Kids Online representative survey of 10- to 16-year-olds across 19 countries

By Elisabeth Staksrud, Ellen Helsper, Sonia Livingstone, Bojana Lobe, Giovanna Mascheroni, Mariya Stoilova and Kjartan Ólafsson - with members of the EU Kids Online network



EUKO statement
on bans



Thank you!
Questions?
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Follow EUKO @LinkedIn

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