VOICE project

Speaking up for change

Accessible Report
Children's and caregivers' voices for safer online experiences

Contents

⌄ **What is VOICE?**

⌄ **How did we do our research?**

⌄ **What did we find?**

⌄ **Things we want to change**

⌄ **Final words and Thank Yous**

Hello! Welcome to the VOICE Accessible Report. My name is Fred, of Fun Facts with Fred, and together with Sam, we are here to talk to you about the VOICE research and online safety.

Hey there! My name is Sam the summarizer. During the VOICE research we learned so much from children and caregivers about the online space. Because all that we have learned cannot all fit into the 12 pages of this report, I am here to help summarise things for us.

So... what is VOICE?

So, Fred, what is this thing 'VOICE'?

The VOICE project was created to listen to and understand children and caregivers about their experiences online. This is why we talked to 483 children in 15 countries in Europe, Asia, and South America and asked them what they think has to change for them to be safer online.

Great idea! And why did we do this research?

Well, we all know by now that digital environments are great opportunities for connecting, learning, and having fun. The internet is very important for children to hear and talk about what is important to them, but also to express themselves and to create a sense of belonging. At the same time, online spaces bring risks and dangers with them.

But Fred, let me ask you, why did you call this the 'Accessible Report'? What does that mean??

We realized that the original report, while detailed, was too difficult for some readers. We wanted to create a version that everyone, especially children, but also adults who struggle with long or technical documents, and people whose first language isn't English, could easily read and understand.

That is so true! Sometimes you need to change how you present something so more people, of different ages, capacities, backgrounds and from all over the world can read it!

Fred, tell me more things about VOICE! I am super curious to hear what the caregivers and the children had to say about their experiences online!

Well, Sam... let me show you instead...

Methodology - How did we do our research?

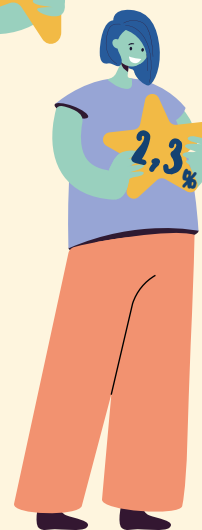**Total number of children we talked to: 483**

Average age of children participating: 14.5

53%

44,7%

2,3%

Girls

Boys

Non Binary

Literature review

While talking to children and caregivers we also read what experts wrote about this topic.

Children and caregivers come from:

The Netherlands
Austria
Estonia
Romania
Bulgaria
Bangladesh
The Philippines
Croatia
Malta
Italy
Bolivia
Spain
Portugal
Thailand
Brazil

Caregivers

Are you the person responsible for taking care of a child under the age of 18?

☑ Yes ☐ No

Total = 6.618
Average age = 42.2 years old

Making Sure Everyone was Safe & Comfortable

The **VOICE** team worked hard to keep children safe during our research. We followed a document with Do's and Don'ts, called a Safeguarding policy, to make sure all children who participated were safe and comfortable during the research.

Some of the challenges we had while doing this research:

- We talked with children and caregivers in different ways, so we could not really compare their answers. Also children talked about general online safety and caregivers were asked about child sexual abuse online.

- Because we talked a lot about how to stay safe from online dangers, it can make the Internet seem more negative for some children we talked to.

- Talking in groups made some children feel less comfortable discussing sensitive topics, also some of the younger children found some of the more 'technical' topics hard to understand.

- There were more participants from Europe compared to Latin America and Asia, who have very different cultures.

- Translating questions and answers back and forth (English to native language & back probably caused some mistakes).

Do you want to experience what the VOICE research is about?

Do you want to know more details about how our discussions with the children happened? This is how the discussion began:

"We want to hear from you, what you think about and need for your online safety. Based on what you will tell us today, we will make messages for people making the rules online. We will do a couple of fun activities together to learn from each other."

On this page, you can experience some of the activities we did with the children during our discussions!

Digital scavenger hunt

5 min

- ✓ Find an app or website that can help track screen time
- ✓ Find a tip for creating a strong password
- ✓ Find an influencer that promotes online safety
- ✓ Find a video about online privacy settings
- ✓ Find a safe way to report online abuse
- ✓ Name a social media platform that offers privacy features
- ✓ Find a website that provides information on fake news

How many were you able to find in 5 minutes?

We asked children to answer yes, no or maybe to the following sentences and, if they felt comfortable, explain why.

What do you think?

I feel safe to share pictures or videos online to make friends

I feel safe to share pictures or videos online to make friends

Children told us that they fear the effects of online experiences on their mental health and they are worried about strangers contacting them with bad intentions and how others can use their pictures and videos to hurt them.

It is okay for a platform to ask my age and verify it

More than half of the children supported having their age checked to use these services.

When someone tries to bother me online, I don't know what to do

3 in 4 children also said to know what to do online when they are bothered - especially reporting and changing their behaviour.

The last activity was about safety measures, privacy online, and online safety support. Do you know what these words mean? What comes up when you google them? What are your opinions about them?

Let's see what the children and the caregivers think...

Did you know that even though children mentioned many forms of online risk, only a small percentage of children said that they felt unsafe online?

Children said that they were used to online risks, accepting them as part of being online. This can also be called "desensitisation", when you get so used to online risk and harm that you end up seeing it as something normal.

How do you feel, when you're browsing online?

I feel neutral
43,2 %

I feel safe
46,7 %

I feel unsafe
10,1 %
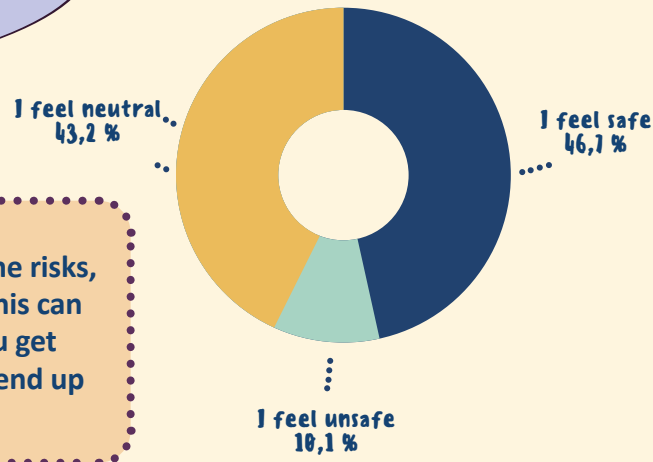
To summarise things for us:
Children believe that the online world has many benefits but also many risks. Some of the risks include mental health issues (such as addiction) and harmful content, cyberbullying, 'fake profiles' and strangers with bad intentions, and the harmful use of their data or pictures and videos, also for sexual harm.

The interesting facts are not over yet, did you know that children think of their online safety also as making sure their personal information is safe and not used to harm children? They also see privacy in a similar way: protecting their information from being shared without permission. They told us online safety is as important as privacy!

And before I forget, another important thing to know is that children think that the level and quality of online safety education they get at school isn't enough for their needs!

Do you think the same?

"If we are not aware of how to protect ourselves... this can increase the risk."
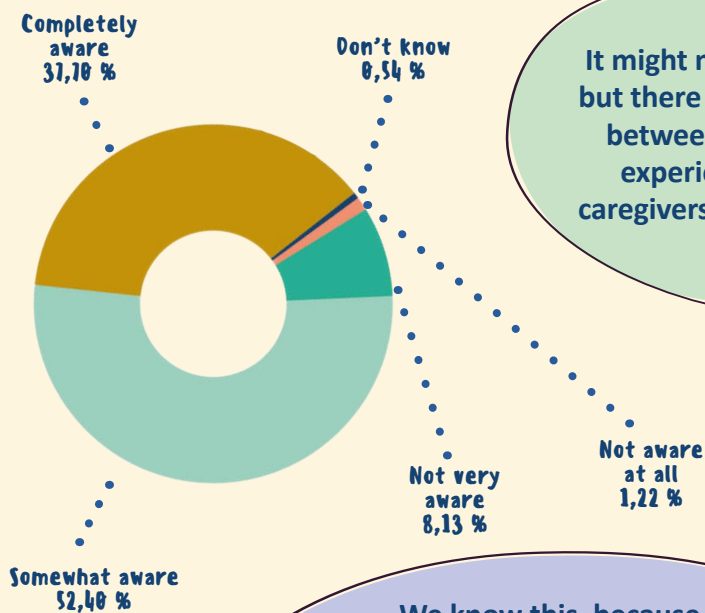(Child from Bulgaria)

Children in the discussions shared a lot of tips for other children and how to stay safe online.

- Creating strong passwords and using two-step verification to prevent hacking, accounts being stolen, and identity theft.

- Using facial and fingerprint recognition for logging in, avoiding public Wi-Fi, and using antivirus software.

- Being careful about how you act online: using apps that you know and can check, being careful with online games, paying attention to what you watch and share online, and avoiding clicking on links that could be scams.

- "Being cautious about sharing" content and information about yourself online. This can be being careful when sharing confidential or personal information or photos with "anyone" or simply avoiding sharing with "anyone you do not know".

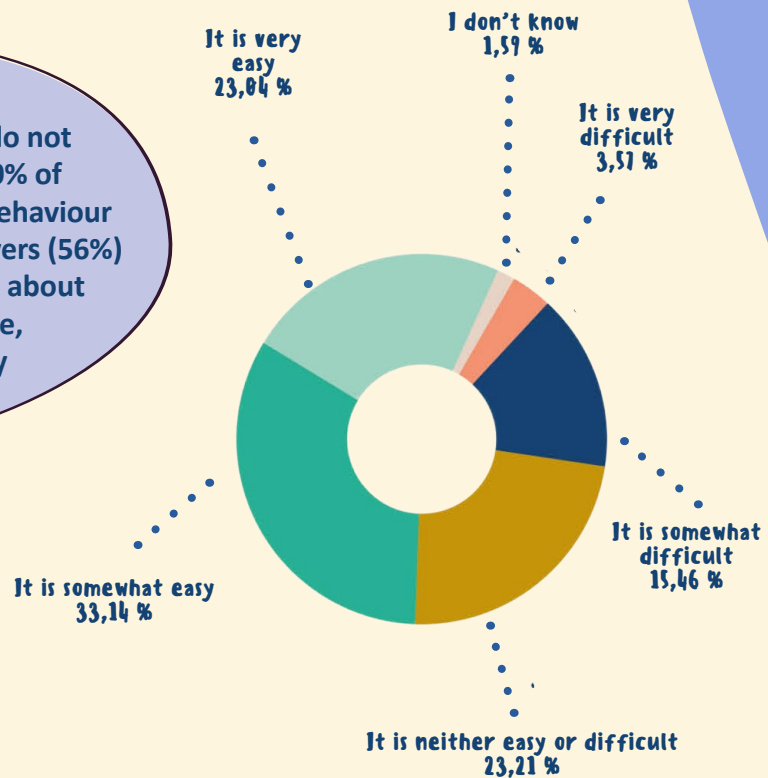# How much do you know about what children do online?

How much do adults think they know about what kids do online?

Completely aware
37,18 %

Don't know
0,54 %

Not aware at all
1,22 %

Not very aware
8,13 %

Somewhat aware
52,40 %

> It might not surprise you... but there is a big difference between what children experience and what caregivers think they know.

> We know this, because children say that their caregivers do not know what they do online, but 90% of caregivers say they know children's behaviour online! Also, more than half of caregivers (56%) think their child finds it easy to talk about safety from online sexual abuse, while many children said they find this difficult.

How easy do adults think it is for children to talk about online abuse?

It is very easy
23,04 %

I don't know
1,59 %

It is very difficult
3,57 %

It is somewhat difficult
15,46 %

It is somewhat easy
33,14 %

It is neither easy or difficult
23,21 %

> Children often want their own space and don't always want to share everything with adults. Many children told us that talking about things like child sexual abuse can feel awkward or uncomfortable. And on the other side sometimes, adults also don't know how to talk about these topics without upsetting children.

When we talked to the children about protection from online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA)*, they mostly said to be concerned about:
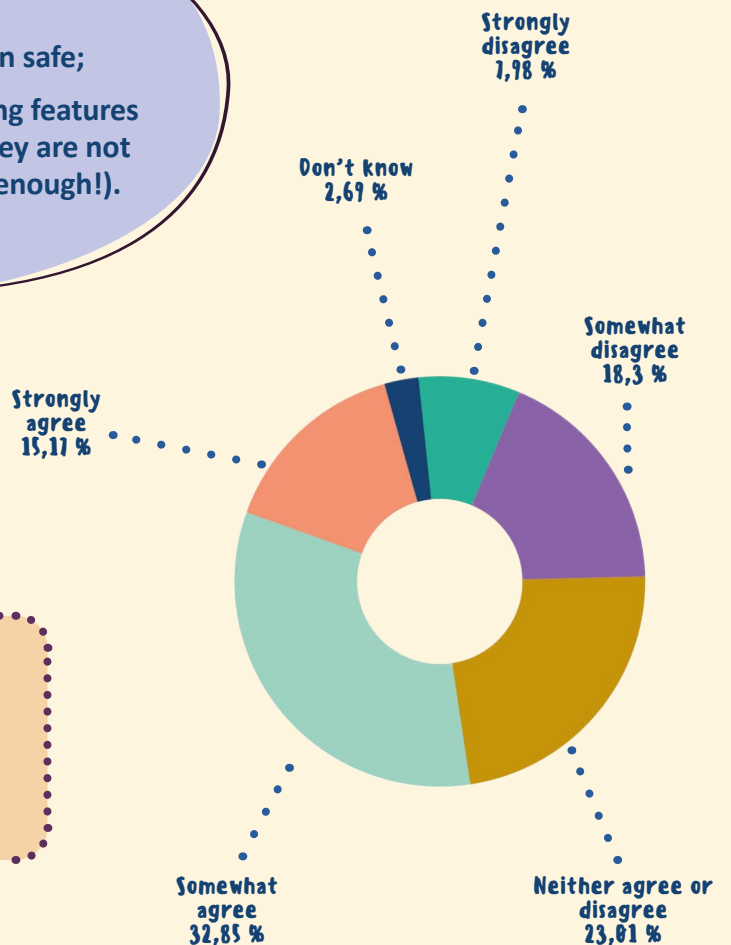
⌄ Receiving pictures and videos that make them feel uncomfortable and are inappropriate;

⌄ Being contacted by unknown people with bad intentions;

⌄ Others misusing the pictures or videos they share.

Children said to stay safe by:

⌄ Being cautious to remain safe;

⌄ In-app blocking and reporting features (although they admitted they are not user-friendly nor efficient enough!).

Only 48% of caregivers think that current policies and measures are enough to protect children from online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

From what we've talked about in this report, children and caregivers feel like they're alone when it comes to dealing with online dangers. They feel responsible for staying safe but often don't have the tools or help they need.

How much do caregivers agree that current policies are sufficient to protect children from online abuse?

Strongly disagree 1,98 %

Don't know 2,69 %

Somewhat disagree 18,3 %

Strongly agree 15,17 %

Neither agree or disagree 23,01 %

Somewhat agree 32,85 %

* When someone, whether it's a stranger or someone known, makes a child feel uncomfortable using technology. This could be sending messages with inappropriate questions and sexual requests, asking for pictures or videos, and using their personal information (like their photos) to threaten them. Questions? Read more here!

Changes children want to see

Schools, online platforms, and governments should offer children and caregivers more and better information on how to be safe online:

- Education programmes on online safety that children can understand
- Better user awareness by the online platforms
- Accessible and child-friendly information of safety tools (in languages other than English)
- Child-friendly features on online platforms

Children and caregivers want governments to take more responsibility to guarantee our safety and privacy online. They should:

- Have a plan on how to punish people who break the rules
- Make sure online platforms do enough for keeping users safe
- Make sure that online platforms check and remove harmful content

Children want online platforms to protect them from harm with safety measures and safe settings that help them make informed decisions by themselves, such as:

- 'Age assurance tools' that can signal the age of the users to make sure children are safe
- Pop-up warnings that appear in your screen warning you when you are in danger
- User-friendly reporting & blocking tools
- Searching and deleting harmful content
- Filtering friendship requests to reduce the risk of them being contacted by fake profiles and people with bad intentions

Children also want to be included in the design of features and digital policies.

> **"Only children know what we need and how we will understand something"**
> (Child from Croatia)

We would like to say a big thank you to:

The partner national organisations in all 15 countries (see table)

The children and caregivers who participated in the discussions

Eurochild, ECPAT International and Terre des Hommes Netherlands project team

The Down to Zero Alliance, funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Netherlands

The Oak Foundation

Savanta

The Eurochild Children's Councils who created this accessible report with the support of Isabella Cervino, Lenia Kriki and Laure Pailleau.

Country	National Implementing Partner
Austria	ECPAT Austria
Bangladesh	The Association for Community Development, Bangladesh Terre des Hommes Netherlands, Bangladesh Country Office
Bolivia	Fundación Munasim Kullakita
Brazil	ECPAT Brasil
Bulgaria	The National Network for Children
Croatia	Society Our Children Opatija
Estonia	Estonian Union for Child Welfare
Italy	Terre des Hommes Italia
Malta	Malta Foundation for Wellbeing Society
The Netherlands	Terre des Hommes Netherlands
The Philippines	The Center for Empowerment and Development (CoPE), ECPAT Philippines, Bidlisiw Foundation
Portugal	Instituto de Apoio à Criança
Romania	Terre des Hommes Lausanne, Romania Country Office
Spain	FAPMI
Thailand	The Life Skills Development Foundation

Thank you for reading with us the VOICE Accessible Report! If you are interested in learning more details about the research you can use the QRcode/ this link to read the bigger VOICE Report!