STUDY SUMMARY

CHILD SAFETY ONLINE

2017

The Study *"Child safety online"* was conducted by the Center for Investigations and Consultation "SocioPolis", at the request of the International Center for Protection and Promotion of Women's Rights "La Strada", in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research.

The results, factual interpretation, conclusions and recommendations of this publication reflect the opinion of the research team and of the International Center for Protection and Promotion of Women's Rights "La Strada" (Moldova).

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01.
Introduction

The speed of informational technologies development and their increased availability for children is now incomparable with the history of digital innovations. New technologies include huge possibilities and capacity for processing, storing and sharing information via mobile phones, possibilities that did not exist in the past. These provide users with opportunities to create, learn, participate, and communicate, which are not always risk-free.

Children and youth can be the first to test the new creations of the digital world, but unfortunately, it is difficult to foresee the risks they may be exposed to and the ways to prevent such risks. At the same time, the idea of creating a risk-free Internet for children and youth is an illusion. Exposing children to a wide range of technologies without making them aware of the safe use of such, and without "testing the ground" through parental education in the digital field is a reason for worries.

Usually, the possible risks that children are exposed to are associated with negative content published online, protection of personal data or communication with strangers. Also, as users of informational technologies, children are actually the most vulnerable individuals in cases of soliciting children for sexual abuse purposes or cases of sexual abuse, documented and shared online (photos/videos showing sexual abuse of children). At the age when they are open for communication and exploring, children can get involved in new experiences, and the lack of defense mechanisms against an abuse makes them vulnerable.

It is crucial to encourage and facilitate the use of the Internet in safe and flexible conditions. Parents, tutors, education institutions, media, mobile operators and Internet providers should all be involved in information and education activities for children regarding the use of information technologies. With this research, we wanted to explore the experience and practice of children and parents in using the Internet, and we succeeded in identifying a large range of risks specific to children, but also opportunities for developing digital learning and resilience towards online abuse.

The substantial number of new data, carefully collected at the national level, related to access, use, opportunities, risks, and safety practices in the use of the Internet and online technologies, is a source of data that can be used as a base for planning and designing awareness activities for children and youth, that would provide them with the necessary knowledge to avoid threats and face risks.

02.

Research goal and objectives

The **goal** of the *"Child safety online"* research was to identify and analyze the practices of Internet usage by children from 6th-9th grades, aged 12-15, from the Republic of Moldova, including their behavior in the online environment, in order to define the existent risks that children are exposed to and to allow for designing specific intervention actions in the field, based on children's and parents' needs.

The research **objectives** included the following:

- identify the ways, in which children use the Internet;
- define the time spent on the Internet;
- determine the presence of children on social networks and their actions;
- find out the problems children are facing while browsing online;
- analyze risky behaviors that may cause negative consequences;
- evaluate online communication and its risks;
- analyze children's perceptions, attitudes and behavior in their online communication;
- assess the attitudes and practices related to intimate photo/video sharing online;
- determine the information sources for children regarding online safety;
- identify the awareness degree of parents/caregivers regarding the online risks children are exposed to;
- analyze the practices used by parents/caregivers to reduce the risks children are exposed to on the Internet;
- provide recommendations that would contribute to the increase of awareness among children regarding online safety and reduction of existing risks.

03.

Research methodology

A complex methodologic approach was used to reach the goal and objectives of the research, focused on identifying the children's behavior online, but also the awareness, perceptions and attitudes of children and parents regarding the existent risks on the Internet, that would allow for triangulation of data[1]. The research was based on primary and secondary sources of data. Quantitative and qualitative research methods were applied while interviewing children aged 12-15 and their parents (see Chart 1).

Chart 1

QUALITATIVE	QUANTITATIVE
10 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS • 5 Focus Group discussions with children aged 14-15; • 5 Focus Group discussions with parents / caregivers of children aged 12-15.	1450 SOCIOLOGIC QUESTIONNAIRES Representative for children aged 12-15 from the Republic of Moldova, except the Transnistrian region.

The sample of the quantitative research included 1450 children. The research sample is probabilistic, multistage, representative for children aged 12-15 from the Republic of Moldova (except the Transnistrian region). The margin of error is ±2,6% for the level of trust of 95%. Quantitative data collection was conducted during 06 – 26 November 2017. The questionnaires were distributed to education institutions, which followed a self-management procedure. Selection of students for participating in the research was made based on the *"Parents'/caregivers' agreements for children participation in the research"*.

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1   A validation technique that combines several data collection techniques in order to diminish the inherent distortions of each. Triangulation allows to verify the accuracy and stability of results.

The qualitative research included two target groups: 48 teenagers aged 14-15 and 46 parents/caregivers of children aged 12-15 from Chisinau, Balti, Northern region, Central region and Southern region. The focus group discussion focused on deep research of specific aspects identified during the quantitative research. Ten focus group discussions were held: five with teenagers and five with parents/caregivers. The focus group discussions took place during 26 November – 10 December 2017.

The data presented in this report refer to the behaviors and situations faced by children during the last 12 months (October 2016 - October 2017).

04.

Key findings

Use of the Internet

- The research data show that 71,5% of children aged 12-15 access the Internet daily, 25,3% - a few times per week, 2,6% - a few times per month, and 0,6% - more seldom than once a month. Daily access of the Internet increases as children get older. The share of children from urban areas who daily access and use the Internet is higher than the share of children from rural areas - 75,6%, compared to 68,4%.

- Over ¾ of children access the Internet during their school days, usually between 14.00-22.00, 11,3% - between 8.00-14.00 while being at school, and 4,6% between 22.00-8.00 (see Chart 2). In the timeslot 8.00-14.00, the Internet is more accessed by the 6th grade students (17,4%). On Saturdays and Sundays, including holidays, the number of children who use the Internet increases (only 3,4 % do not use the Internet, compared to 7,4% on school days). Also, during these days the use of the Internet decreases by 19,5 p.p in the timeslot 14.00 - 22.00 and increases by 16,7 p.p. in the morning, and by 7,9 p.p. during the night. It should be mentioned that browsing the Internet during the night is more spread among the children aged 15.

**Chart 2.** Internet access hours on school days, versus Internet access hours on Saturdays and Sundays, including holidays, %
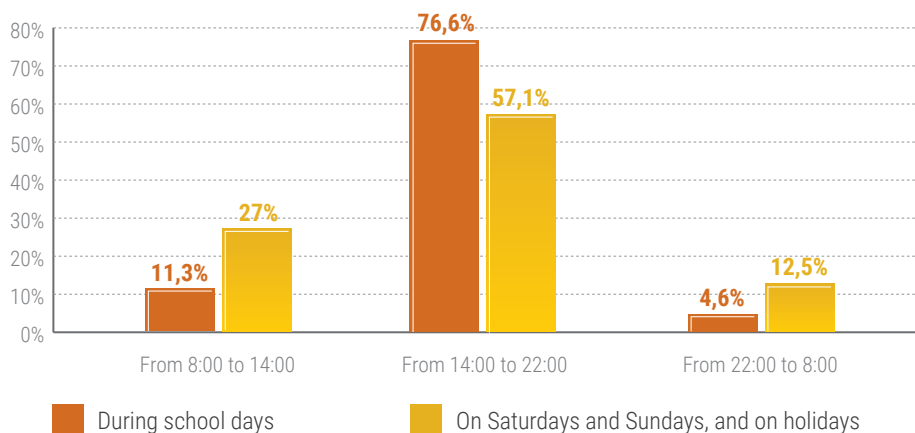
- Compared to the data of previous research conducted by the International Center "La Strada", the number of children who access and use the Internet during the night hours (22.0-8.00) decreased, but the time spent on the Internet increases for children aged 12-13 both on school days and on holidays.

- Children use several devices to access the Internet: 18,3% use only one device, 42,2% two devices, 28,3% use three devices, and 11,1% four or more devices. Compared to the research data of 2013, the number of children who use only one device to access the Internet decreased from 55,4%, to 18,3%. In most cases children access the Internet from their phone – 85,2%, from a laptop – 55,9% or from a desktop – 49,7%, rarely from a tablet – 28,4%, game consoles or other devices – 15,2% (see Chart 3).

Chart 3. Devices used to access the Internet, %
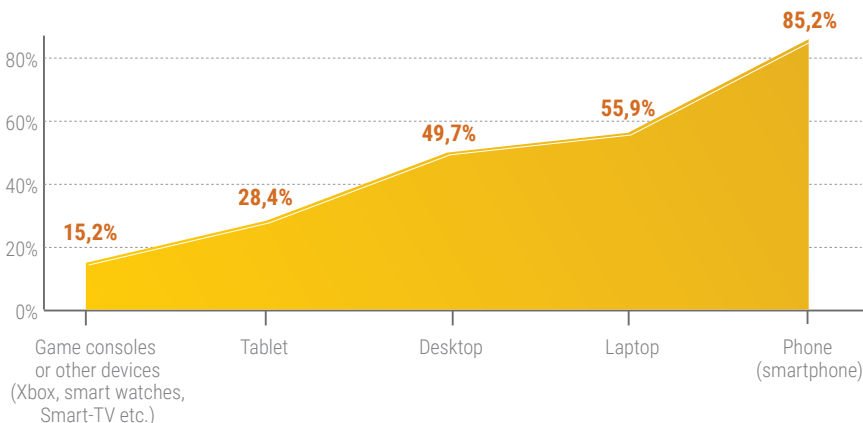
- The research data show an increase of possibilities in accessing the Internet from various places. Thus, during the last 12 months, 98% of children aged 12-15 accessed the Internet from home, 59% - through WiFi in public places, 36% - from anywhere through Mobile Internet, 32% - also from schools and 22% - from Internet-cafes. Along with the increase of children's age, there is also an increase in the number of Internet access places.

- Children aged 12-15 use the Internet for different purposes (see Chart 4). Compared to the previous studies, there are changes related to the use of the Internet – the use of the Internet for accessing social network profiles increased by 11,1 p.p., and the use of the Internet for searching information required for homework increased by 15,4 p.p. Nevertheless, the most spectacular increase identified was for sending text or audio messages in real time – by 21,6 p.p.

Communication on social networks

- It has to be mentioned that 96,5% of children aged 12-15 have an account/profile on social networks. The research data show that over 44% of children are present on social networks from an extremely young age – under 10 years, 24% from the age of 10 and 1/3 from the age of 11-13. This indicates the need to inform children about the risks in the online environment once they go to school for the first time.

- Of those 96,5% of children (1399 respondents) who have an account/profile on social networks, the majority are using Odnoklasniki (81,9%), followed by Instagram (64,3%), Facebook (63,5%), VKontakte (46,7%), less on Twitter (18,2%) or other networks – Ask.Fm, Snapchat, Twich, Timbler, Steam, Sarahah etc. (2,1%).

Chart 4. Goal of the Internet use, during the last 12 months, %

Activity	%
I accessed my profiles on social networks.	96,1%
I searched for necessary information for my homework.	94,8%
I sent / received audio or text messages in real time.	89,3%
I watched video clips, movies online.	82,9%
I read news and other information articles on the Internet.	72,0%
I watched vlogs.	60,0%
I downloaded games, movies from such sites as torrent or other sites.	50,9%
I uploaded photos or videos on sharing / livestream channels.	48,6%
I played different games online.	45,4%
I downloaded books. / I read books online.	43,8%
I bought or searched for things in online shops.	39,0%
I read blogs.	30,1%
I sent / received messages via email.	29,4%
I participated in discussion in various chat-rooms, on forums etc.	28,9%
I searched and read information about sex, sexual relations or other information which I cannot discuss or I am ashamed to discuss with someone.	13%
I sold or posted for sale on the Internet my things or those of my friends.	9,7%

- 58,5% of children aged 12-15 indicated their date and year of birth on the social network, compared to 31,8% of those who didn't make public these data and 9,7% of those who don't remember what is indicated on their social network profile. Approximately ¾ of children aged 12-15 wrote their real date and year of birth on social networks, whether this information is accessible to public or not. In 84,3% of cases, children's profiles indicate their real names and surnames. And 8,1% of children also indicate and give public access to their home address and phone number. Thus, awareness raising actions about the consequences of publishing personal data are required.

- Some children use social networks as a mean to search or accept new friends. Thus, during the last 12 months, 38,7% of children accepted friend requests from people whom they haven't met in real life (see Chart 5). As the age increases, there is also an increase of respondents, who accept to make new friends on social networks.

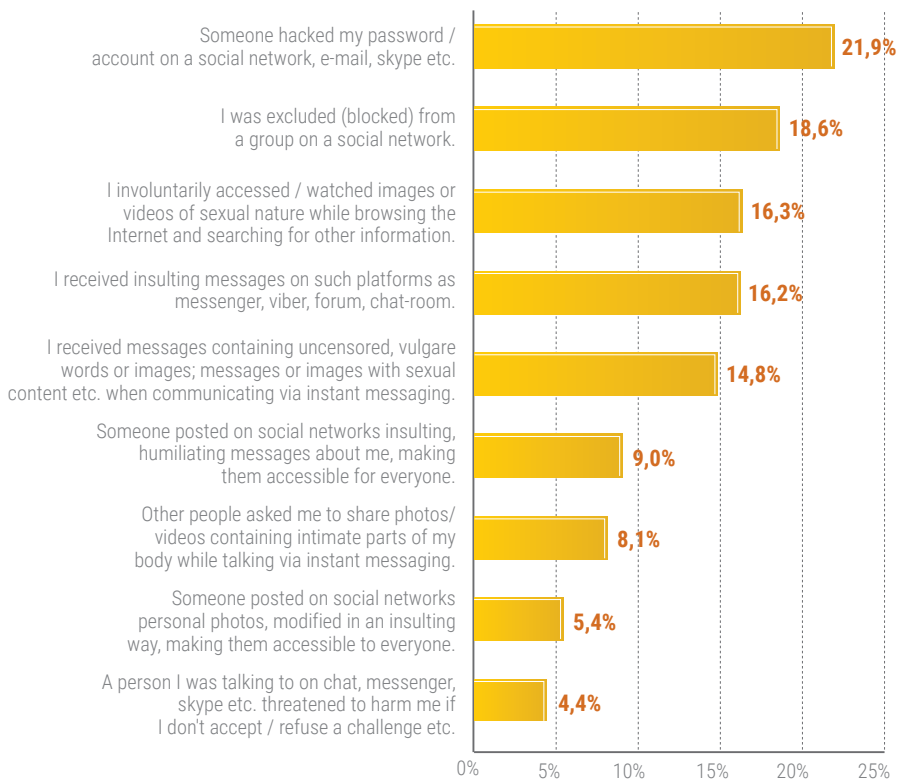Chart 5. Actions taken on social networks, during the last 12 months, %

Action	%
I uploaded photos of me, my friends or members of my family.	82,1%
I spoke in private (on chat) with persons I know in real life.	80,5%
I shared or followed my friends' posts or other posts that I liked.	71,5%
I wrote comments to posts on social networks.	56,8%
I discussed in groups (on chat) which gather many people, including those I know only on social networks.	50,9%
I uploaded pictures that are not related to me, my friends or members of my family (for example photos of football players, actors etc.)	39,5%
I accepted friend requests from people I haven't met in real life.	38,7%
I sent friend requests in order to communicate on social networks with people I have never met in real life.	31,8%
I had private discussions (on chat) with persons I met on social networks.	28,4%
I posted my location (checked-in).	21,0%
I posted information that indicated the place I live.	13,6%

- Children mentioned that there are "*1001 methods*" to communicate on the Internet, without letting parents know about their discussions. First of all, when children get home from school parents are at work, and in the worst case they communicate during the night, while parents are sleeping. Secondly, the majority of parents have less knowledge about the online environment than their children. Thirdly, the online environment provides various possibilities to hide conversations from parents, including by setting a password on the phone. Children mentioned that when they don't want parents to see their online communication, they do the following: delete messages, act incognito, create fake profiles, use live Instagram etc.

## Risky behaviors that can lead to negative consequences

- The research data point out a wide range of problems that children are constantly facing on the Internet (see Chart 6). In practice, the password/ social network profile of every fifth child aged 12-15 got hacked during the last 12 months. 18,6% of children got blocked in social network groups. 16,3% of children accidentally accessed / viewed images of sexual nature. Other insulting behaviors against a child include texts or photos/videos in private or in public.

Chart 6. Problems faced, during the last 12 months, %

Category	%
Someone hacked my password / account on a social network, e-mail, skype etc.	21,9%
I was excluded (blocked) from a group on a social network.	18,6%
I involuntarily accessed / watched images or videos of sexual nature while browsing the Internet and searching for other information.	16,3%
I received insulting messages on such platforms as messenger, viber, forum, chat-room.	16,2%
I received messages containing uncensored, vulgare words or images; messages or images with sexual content etc. when communicating via instant messaging.	14,8%
Someone posted on social networks insulting, humiliating messages about me, making them accessible for everyone.	9,0%
Other people asked me to share photos/ videos containing intimate parts of my body while talking via instant messaging.	8,1%
Someone posted on social networks personal photos, modified in an insulting way, making them accessible to everyone.	5,4%
A person I was talking to on chat, messenger, skype etc. threatened to harm me if I don't accept / refuse a challenge etc.	4,4%

- Among the risky actions taken by teenagers on the Internet we identified searching friends online (31,4%), buying things from online shops (31,2%), buying online games (13,4%), sending photos/videos to persons only met online (13,1%), sharing with other person the password of the email address or the social network profile (12,1%), exchange of personal data (phone number, home address, data about parents etc.) with people online (8,3%). These numbers show that quite many children are not aware of the risks that result from such behavior.

- Practically, 1/3 of children (35,9%) got into different contact with strangers on the Internet (see Chart 7). It is alarming that every tenth child of those 35,9% who spoke to strangers, also sent them photos on the Internet and received indecent proposals from those people.

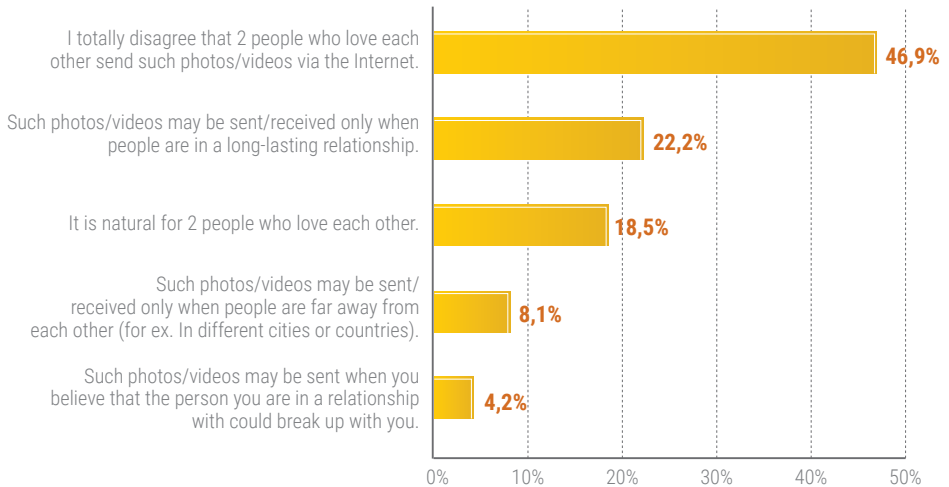**Chart 7.** Activities on the Internet with persons met only online, %[2]
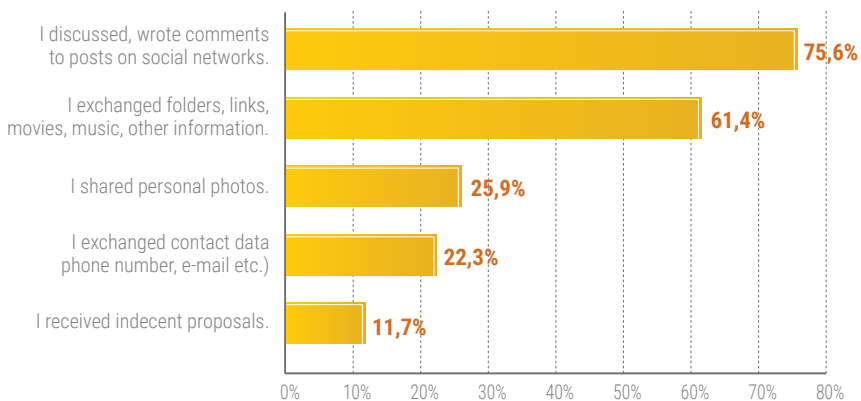
- The research data show a tendency among children aged 12-15 to meet the people met online. Such actions were taken by 35,9% of children (521 respondents from the total sample). Along with the increase of age, there is also an increase in the number of children who actually meet people whom they initially got to know on the Internet. The offline meetings with persons known on the Internet are not usually limited to one.

- Of children who ultimately met for real the persons initially known only on the Internet (521 respondents), 281 (53,9%) got into situations when they regretted, felt uncomfortable, were bothered by the meeting with the person previously known only on the Internet.

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2   Only those who stated that they spoke to persons they only knew online, 35,9% of the total of 735 respondents, students in 8-9 grades.

Attitudes and practices on sharing intimate photos/videos online

- 46,9%[3] of the respondents who participated in the research would not under any condition share on the Internet photos/videos of parts of their body that they would never show in public (see Chart 8). 22% of teenagers believe that such photos, videos may be shared in a long-lasting romantic relationship, if people know each other in reality, and their relationship is stable. Practically, every fifth teenager aged 14-15 believes that sharing such photos/videos is natural. 8 teenagers aged 14-15 of 100 believe that sharing such photos/videos is possible when people are far away from each other, and 4 of 100 admit this only in case of fear that the beloved person may want to break up. The teenagers' answers show an incorrect understanding of romantic relationships and a need for education in family life, focusing on premarital relations.

Chart 8. Opinions on sharing intimate photos/videos with an intimate relationship partner, %

Chart data:
- I totally disagree that 2 people who love each other send such photos/videos via the Internet. — 46,9%
- Such photos/videos may be sent/received only when people are in a long-lasting relationship. — 22,2%
- It is natural for 2 people who love each other. — 18,5%
- Such photos/videos may be sent/received only when people are far away from each other (for ex. In different cities or countries). — 8,1%
- Such photos/videos may be sent when you believe that the person you are in a relationship with could break up with you. — 4,2%

- Among direct consequences of sharing photos/videos online, children perceive the possibility that the intimate picture could reach another person, could get on social networks and could be *"modified, so that the person in the picture looks funnier"*. Some of the boys are used to upload their intimate photos on various sites. Such pictures finally reach their classmates, the school administration and their parents. Other consequences are: harm to image and reputation, harassment, various blackmailing actions etc.

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3   46,9% of the total of 735 respondents, students in 8-9 grades.

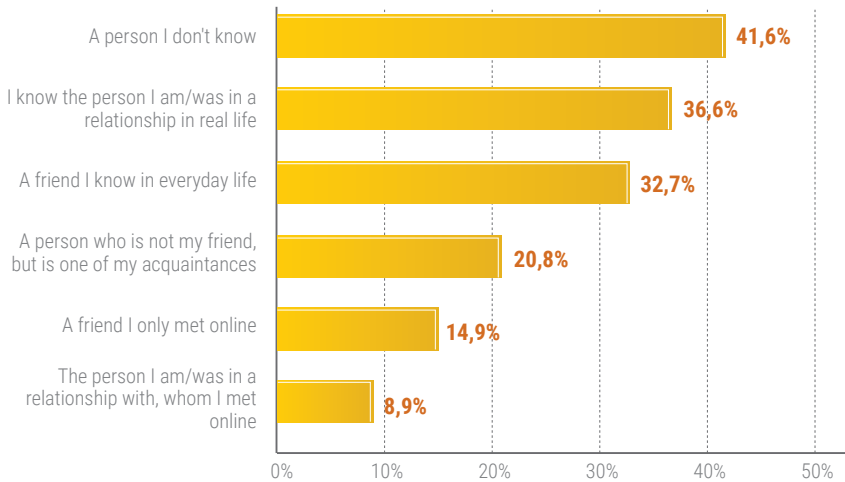- During the last 12 months, 81,9% of children have sent various messages, photos, videos etc. via Internet. Of those 81,9%, every fifth teenager aged 14-15 received photos/videos of a sexual nature on the Internet (see Chart 9), and 16,8% (see Chart 10) were asked to share their photos/videos of a sexual nature. The research data show that sending/soliciting information of a sexual nature on the Internet is done by both: persons known in real life and those met only online, and the teenager who received such information had similar experience for several times.

Chart 9. Persons, whom photos and videos of sexual nature were received from, during the last 12 months, %[4]

A friend I know in everyday life	38,0%
A person I don't know	38,0%
A person who is not my friend, but is one of my acquaintances	20,7%
A friend I only met online	18,2%
The person I am/was in a relationship with, whom I met online	8,3%

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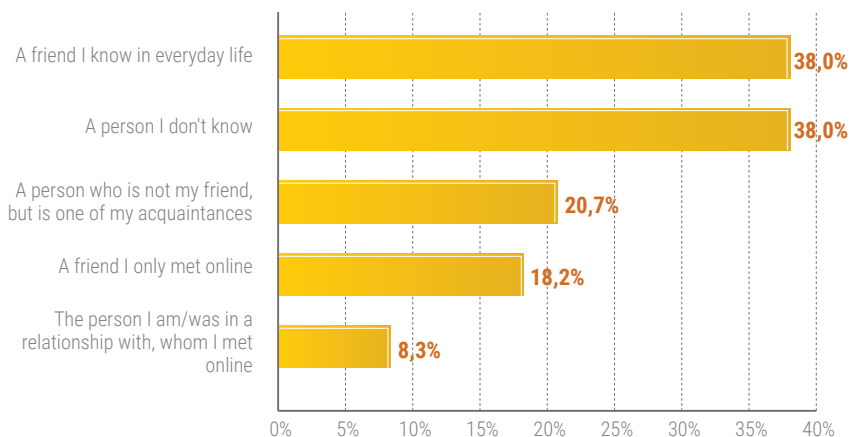
4 Of the total of those who claimed they received information of a sexual nature, 20,1% of the total of children, students in 8-9 grades.

A person I don't know — **41,6%**

I know the person I am/was in a relationship in real life — **36,6%**

A friend I know in everyday life — **32,7%**

A person who is not my friend, but is one of my acquaintances — **20,8%**

A friend I only met online — **14,9%**

The person I am/was in a relationship with, whom I met online — **8,9%**

0%　10%　20%　30%　40%　50%

- When asked to share information of a sexual nature, teenagers take various actions. ¾ of them block the solicitors, 42% delete all messages from these persons, 28% prefer not to tell anyone and do not answer the request in any way, 17% tell their friends about such requests and ask for their advice, 11% send the requested information, 9% told their parents or another adult and asked for advice, 6% of respondents changed their profile after such a request on social media.

- During the last 12 months, 52 teenagers (8,6% of the total of children aged 14-15) had sent photos/videos of their naked body/naked parts of their body. In the majority of cases, these were sent to persons they know in real life. Those who had taken such actions had various reasons. Some teenagers believe that such actions are normal when being in a relationship, because other classmates and friends also do it. Others did it out of curiosity and don't see any problem in this, since their face is not visible, or they just wanted the person to have such photos/videos. A small number of children said they did it after being blackmailed that their photos, videos or conversations will be revealed to public, or because they could get money or other things this way.

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5   16,8% of the sample of 602 respondents, students in 8-9 grades.

Raising awareness of the online risks

- 8 of 10 children said they are aware of online safety (see Chart 11). Nevertheless, the research data show that some specific knowledge about risky behavior online is limited, or teenagers know about it, but do not follow the safety rules online.

- Practically, every fifth teenager aged 12-15 doesn't know anything about online safety. Being asked about the ways in which their parents inform them about online risks, the majority of children said that parents usually hold *"moralizing lectures"* about dignity, communication between people etc. There are also parents who take extreme actions – they isolate their children from communication by taking away their laptops, tablets etc., therefore some children prefer to get informed by themselves: *"I am dealing with it on my own"*.

Chart 11. Level of awareness of online safety among teenagers, %

I don't know anything about online safety

81,9%

18,1%

I am aware of online safety
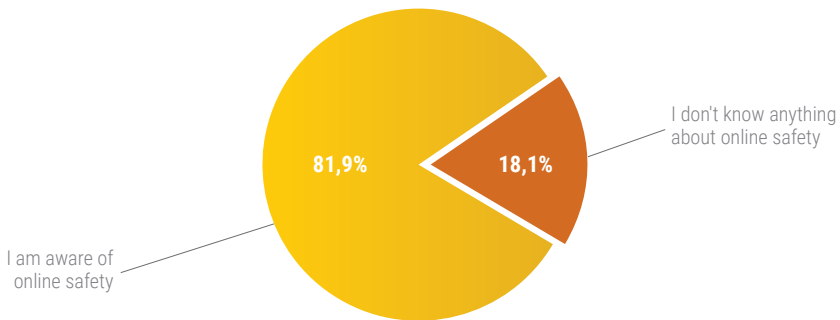
- Focus group discussions with students reveal that in many families, there is no communication practice between children and parents in general, and on online safety in particular. Parents don't really understand their own children and have no time to talk with them about the Internet. Sometimes, parents tend to exaggerate and act violently. Usually, parents aged under 40 have a closer relationship with their children and tend to talk to them and give them advice regarding the online environment.

- To inform children about the existent risks in the online environment, action from several social agents is needed, on one side there should be parents, older brothers/sisters, uncles/aunts with authority, and on the other side there should be teachers, school psychologists, professionals in the field or young volunteers trained for this purpose.

- In the cases of children whose parents are abroad, the responsibility of informing children about safety online should be taken by education institutions. Teaching staff should be trained in this regard, but they should also become more open in their relationship with children. Some teachers *"finish the lessons and leave"* and are indifferent to the problems that children are facing. Specific materials should be developed for teaching staff, class teachers, psychologists,

which they could use in their work with students. It is important that these specialists are able to answer teenagers' questions.

- An important part in the process of informing children about the online risks should be granted to young volunteers. Youth understand them better, and therefore the information is perceived easier. It is mandatory for young volunteers to be well trained and be able to catch attention and create a trustworthy relationship.

- The way in which children are informed about online risks is also important. Children want interactive methods, discussions related to real cases in order to understand the risks and identify solutions together. Information is better assimilated through the analysis of case studies or specific experience.

- The focus group discussions made parents understand that due to the lack of communication in the family, child's vulnerability to online risks increases. Discussions on this topic should be frequent within the family. In addition, there is need for a discrete supervision of the child's behavior, but the most important is to create a *"trustworthy relationship"*.

- Most of the parents do not know about the risks of the online environment. They would like to get help from teaching staff, specialists, media.

Perception of safety and safe communication on the Internet

- In the opinion of children, safety on the Internet means *"protection from unknown persons"*, *"protection"* while browsing the Internet, ensuring security, including situations of password hacking on social networks. The concept of safety on the Internet is multidimensionally perceived by children and implies that they should know the rules of behavior online, the methods and techniques to defend themselves from unknown persons[6], the actions they may take when facing specific risks online[7], including the institutions they can address, the possibilities to avoid sites with pornographic information etc. The research data on risky situations that children got exposed to during the last 12 months, show that the majority of them do not know de facto the rules of behavior online, or even if they know them, they rarely apply them and not in full complexity.

- Some children's caregivers have vague knowledge of safety on the Internet. They mentioned the following problems related to the safe use of the Internet by children: excessive use of computer, phone, tablet in general, and of the Internet in particular; lack of knowledge of ways to behave online among children and among the majority of parents; lack of understanding of the consequences following a risky behavior online among children but also among parents; access to pornographic materials; involvement in social groups that may influence them psychologically; exposure to aggression, violence; participation in virtual games etc. Parents

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6   The majority of children do not perceive the fact that some unknown persons met online can be ill-intentioned.

7   The online risks children mentioned most frequently refer to access to personal data, access to information of a pornographic nature, cyberbullying, manipulation by unknown people.

believe that there isn't and there will not be safety on the Internet, therefore, it is important to supervise all children in their activities on the Internet and make them aware of the existing risks in this environment.

Box 2. Example of cyberbullying

"My friends took some photos from my profile and created a fake account. They communicated with other friends on my behalf, telling them stupid things, and those people believed it was me".

(FG_3_C_N)

- Children said that online communication is part of safety on the Internet and implies knowing the people they communicate with in real life, since some of them use different names and have *"false sites"*. It should also be mentioned that the majority of children have a positive opinion about the persons they meet offline and even do not admit the fact that such people could negatively affect them in the virtual world.

- In the opinion of children, the risks of online communication with ill-intentioned persons include manipulation, *"damage to reputation"*, depression, online harassment, rape, robbery, suicide, homicide. An important aspect of safe communication in the virtual world is non-disclosure of personal information (name, home address, phone number etc.) to persons met online.

- The general problem mentioned by the majority of parents is that, lately, children communicate *"basically with the computer, the Internet"*. The Internet accessed by *"children with bad intentions becomes a dangerous weapon"*, they do not understand the consequences. In their real life they don't really communicate in an aggressive way, but they do it on the Internet, because it is easier. Only some of parents mentioned such risks as manipulation, blackmail *"for taking pictures while being naked"*, harassment etc.

Box 3. Example of child manipulation through complimenting and financial proposals

"Ireceived the following message: Dana, your eyes are like two pearls, and I am sending you 500 euro for shopping".

(FG_2_C_Ch)

- In the opinion of children, and also parents, the following categories of children are more predisposed to risks in their communication online: (i) children who don't get any attention from their parents; (ii) reticent children and those who have no friends; (iii) children whose parents had left abroad, including those under care of their grandparents; (iv) those who are not controlled by their parents; (v) those who are ashamed to talk to their parents and look for friends on the Internet; (vi) children from vulnerable families or marginalized by their mates; (vii) children hated by their mates for various reasons; (viii) those who join groups of friends with negative reputation; (ix) children of young age (under 14), but also teenagers that seek adventure.

05.

Conclusions and recommendations

The research data provide the following general conclusions:

- Children are up to date with new technologies, therefore, currently, the mobile phone is the device used by the majority of children to connect to the Internet (85,2%). The possibility of parental control for reducing the risks in the online environment is decreased, but the importance of informing users about online safety is increasing. Children don't know how to say **No** to indecent proposals in this environment, where to report the risky situations that they are facing, including where to seek help.

- 96,5% of children aged 12-15 have an account/profile on social networks. The age at which children start being active on social networks is decreasing. Over 44% of children are present on social networks and start communicating online from a very early age – under 10 years old. This indicator shows the need to inform children about the existent risks in the online environment from the moment they go to school for the first time.

- A large number of children have their real personal data published and open to public access on the social networks. In 84,3% of cases children profiles indicate their real names and surnames, and 8,1% of children publish their home address and phone number on their social network profile. Therefore, we can observe that many children have poor knowledge of the risks of personal data exposure.

- Sharing/exchanging photos/videos have the highest rate in the online communication activities of children. Such exchange takes place both with people met offline, as well as people met online. Every fifth teenager who had sent his/her photos on the Internet received video materials of a sexual nature, and 17% of these were asked for photos and videos of a sexual nature. This indicates that children have no understanding of the consequences that follow after getting involved in such actions.

- Approximately 1/3 of children want to make friends online. Of these, every fourth teenager shared personal photos online, and every tenth teenager got indecent proposals.

- Over 1/3 of children met the people they got to know on the Internet, and more than half of them were in situations when they regretted, felt uncomfortable or were bothered by the meeting with the person they previously met on the Internet.

- The majority of teenagers aged 14-15 agree to send via Internet photos/videos of parts of their bodies, which they would never show in public. The reasons for such sharing would be that these photos/videos are a proof and justification of love. This thing indicates the gaps in the premarital education, but also lack of understanding the consequences in case of a break-up (manipulation, blackmail, harassment online etc.).

- 8 of 10 children mentioned that they know about online safety, but the research data show that their awareness of risky behavior online is vague, since they say they know, but they don't apply the safety rules online. In addition, there are no places where children could get informed about the online risks.

The research results show the need for joining efforts of various social parties in order to increase the level of awareness of the risks, that children are exposed to online, but also to ensure their protection. Collected data allow for the following **strategic recommendations**:

Develop mechanisms to report illegal and harmful content

- Create and promote an online platform to report illegal and harmful content;
- Create and promote an online intervention platform, in cases of online abuse, to provide counselling to children and facilitate their access to specialized assistance and protection services.

Include the subject of online safety into education curricula

- Promote the subject of online safety during extracurricular activities (debate clubs for students, youth centers, youth initiative groups etc.).
- Information and public awareness campaigns to be organized by education institutions during the Cyber Security Month and the Online Safety Day.
- Include the subject of online safety in the list of topics for essays, course papers, theses.
- Information classes and activities on online safety issues to be held by teaching staff.

Train professionals from education institutions on the subject of child safety online

- Train teaching staff on child safety on the Internet.
- Develop and distribute informational resources for teaching staff, useful during classes or activities related to online safety.
- Organize information activities for school psychologists about the specifics of online abuse cases.

Include the subject of online safety in activities aiming at developing parenting abilities and competences

- Regularly organize information and awareness raising activities for parents on child safety on the Internet.
- Develop informational resources for digital education in an accessible format and content for parents (information materials, brochures, guidelines etc.)
- Promote among parents the importance of filtering harmful and illegal content on the devices used by children (for example, by installing Parental Control Programs).

Encourage participation of children and youth in the promotion of online safety

- Train school leaders who would promote the subject of online safety.

- Train and involve groups of young volunteers in informing and raising awareness of their peers about safety on the Internet.

Involve private ITC sector in promoting online safety

- Access to Wi-Fi networks to be secured by Internet service providers in education institutions, education and development centers or leisure centers for children.

- Restrict access to illegal content on all public Wi-Fi networks.

- Include the subject of online safety in the social responsibility policy of private ITC companies.

- Develop specific options to filter and restrict harmful and illegal content for children, taking into consideration the legal provisions in force, which could be proposed as an optional service to parents by the Internet service provider.

- Inform clients (parents) about the availability of additional services for filtering and securing online content on devices used by children.

Promote efficient coordination of efforts of all parties involved

- Ensure inter and intra-sectorial communication for a better cooperation in promoting child safety on the Internet.

- Develop public-private partnerships to promote existent online child protection services and existent information, counseling or reporting platforms.

Together for a safer Internet for children!

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