

# PERILS AND POSSIBILITIES: Growing up online

# Introduction



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**The rapid expansion of digital technology and increased access to the Internet has transformed young people's lives worldwide.**

From poor urban areas in East Africa, to rural communities in South America, to isolated islands in the Pacific - children in some of the world's most disadvantaged and inaccessible communities now have billions of gigabytes of information at their fingertips. Access to social networks and the World Wide Web provide young people with incredible opportunities for education, entertainment, entrepreneurship and innovation. The possibilities seem infinite.

But alongside these opportunities are risks.

*Perils and Possibilities: Growing up Online* provides a glimpse into young people's opinions and perspectives on the risks they face coming of age in a digital world.

Findings are from a recent UNICEF/Ipsos global poll of more than 10,000 18-year-olds in 25 countries, representing worldwide coverage. Over 40 per cent of the young people polled began using the Internet before they were 13-years-old. UNICEF aims to amplify these young people's voices and help us all better understand a generation growing up online.

As Internet access becomes more accessible, violence against children takes on new dimensions with deeply damaging and life-altering consequences. Children like 9 year-old Lorna\* from the Philippines who was forced to perform sexual acts that were live streamed on the Internet, and purchased by offenders from another part of the world. Or Jessica from Brazil whose cell phone was stolen and whose private photos were circulated around her school and town. Or 17-year-old Jenny\* from Madagascar who met a man on social media who abducted and repeatedly raped her for two months.

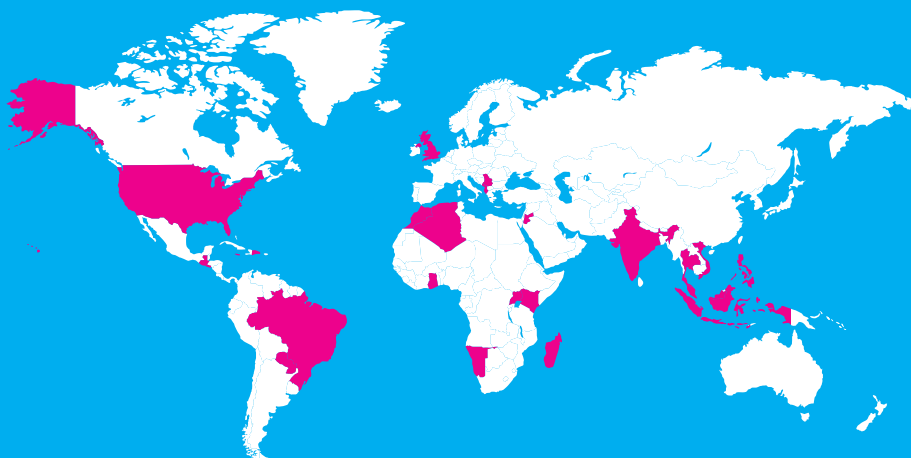
Protecting children from abuse and exploitation is everybody's business. UNICEF is urging all governments to establish coordinated responses between criminal justice systems including law enforcement, social service providers as well as education, health and ICT sectors and civil society, to better protect children

online. These responses are in line with the Statements of Action that countries, technology companies and international and civil society organizations have signed through the WePROTECT Global Alliance to End Child Online Sexual Exploitation, as well as Sustainable Development Goal 16:2 to end violence against children.

While greater responsibility from governments is key, all decision makers, including those in the ICT sector, parents and teachers, need to listen to young people so that their views can be incorporated into policies, strategies and programmes. Efforts to tackle online sexual abuse and exploitation are more effective when children's opinions and perspectives are included, and this helps guarantee young people can take full advantage of the benefits the Internet offers.

To engage young people in ending violence online, UNICEF is launching #ReplyforAll, a campaign that puts adolescents front and centre as messengers and advocates to keep themselves safe online. When young people, governments, families, the ICT sector and communities work together, we are more likely to find the best ways to respond to online sexual abuse and exploitation, and send a strong message that confronting and ending violence against children online – indeed anywhere – is all of our business.

*\*Names changed to protect young person/child's identity*



Findings in *Perils and Possibilities: Growing up online* are from an April 2016 UNICEF/Ipsos global poll of more than 10,000 18-year-olds in 25 countries: Albania, Algeria, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Montenegro, Morocco, Namibia, Paraguay, the Philippines, Serbia, Thailand, Uganda, United Kingdom, United State, Vietnam.

# The majority of adolescents recognize online dangers exist and more than half think friends participate in risky behaviours

The majority of teen respondents think that children and adolescents are in danger of being sexually abused or taken advantage of online.

**More than half (53%) of the 10,000 18-year-olds polled around the world strongly agree these dangers exist, and an additional 27% agree somewhat.**

Respondents from Latin America and the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa express the most concern, with two-thirds of adolescents in countries from each region strongly believing that young people are in danger of being sexually abused or taken advantage of online. This compares to 33 per cent of adolescents in the Middle East and North Africa strongly agreeing that young people face online dangers.

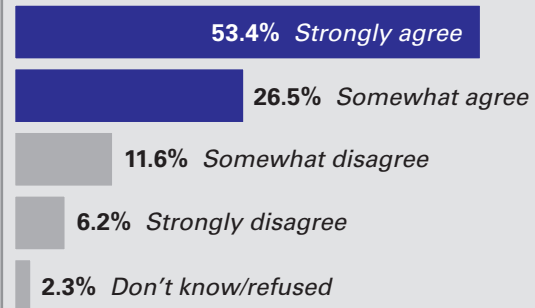
**More than half of all adolescents, 57%, think their friends participate in risky behaviours online.**

Responses differed between regions, with 67 per cent of adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean and 62 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa either believing strongly, or somewhat, that friends put themselves at risk online. This compares to 36 per cent of adolescents in the US and the UK, and 40 per cent in countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

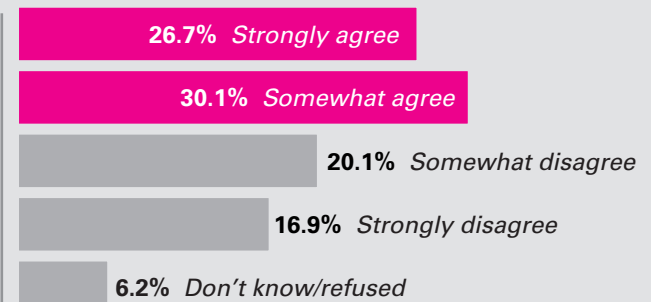
Only half of all 18-year-old respondents strongly believe they have learned to deal with online sexual harassment. Adolescents in Asia doubted their ability the most, with only 41 per cent strongly believing they know how to deal with these threats. Adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean are more confident with 59 per cent strongly believing they have learned to deal with unwanted sexual comments or requests online.

**“Thinking about since you first started using the Internet to now, do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”**

**CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS ARE IN DANGER OF BEING SEXUALLY ABUSED OR TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF ONLINE**



**I THINK MY FRIENDS PARTICIPATE IN RISKY BEHAVIORS ONLINE**





## Nearly 90% of adolescent boys and girls believe they can avoid danger online.

Despite recognition that dangers exist online, nearly nine out of 10 adolescents think they have learned how to protect themselves on social media and know how to avoid dangerous situations while using the Internet.

Adolescents in the US and the UK are most confident that they can avoid online dangers with 94 per cent of 18-year-olds from these two countries strongly or somewhat agreeing they can protect themselves on social media. In the Middle East and North Africa adolescents were less sure, with only 41 per cent strongly agreeing and an additional 37 per cent agreeing somewhat.

## Two-thirds of respondents believe that online bullying or abuse would never happen to them, with 36% strongly agreeing and 30% agreeing somewhat.

Adolescents in Asia were most confident, with 78 per cent of respondents believing somewhat or strongly they would never be a target of online bullying or abuse, compared to 54 per cent of adolescents polled in the US and the UK.

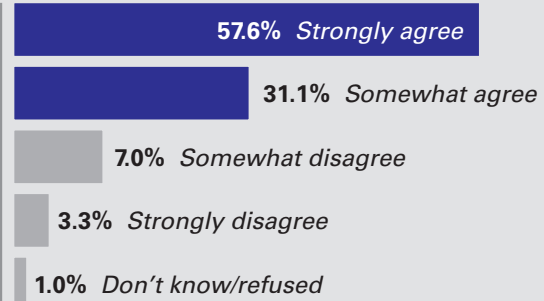
The majority of adolescents, 63 per cent, strongly believe they know more about social media than their parents. This includes 80 per cent of 18-year-olds in Central Europe and 75 per cent in the US and the UK.

When asked if the Internet offers many positive things for children nearly three-quarters of 18-year-olds somewhat or strongly agree. Young people in the US and the UK

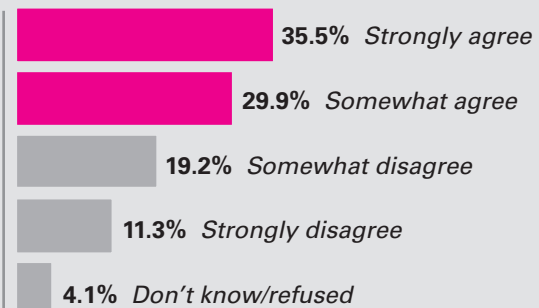
were most likely to agree, 81 per cent, compared to 64 per cent of adolescents in the Middle East and North Africa.

**“Thinking about since you first started using the Internet to now, do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”**

**I KNOW HOW TO AVOID DANGEROUS OR RISKY SITUATIONS ONLINE**



**ONLINE BULLYING OR ABUSE WOULD NEVER HAPPEN TO ME**



### Seventeen-year-old Rosalyn\*

reads a story to her two younger brothers, ages 10 and 6, in their home at a shelter in the Philippines. Rosalyn and her 6 siblings were rescued during a cyber-crimes police raid 6 years ago when their parents were caught forcing the two oldest girls to perform sexual acts that were live streamed on the Internet.

Rosalyn remembers her childhood fondly until her parents lost their jobs at a local factory. Uneducated, they were unable to find work and the family soon sank into extreme poverty. A neighbour told Rosalyn she could earn money by performing sexual acts on the Internet. She never received money directly but noticed that her family no longer went hungry. Her parents eventually bought a computer and continued to force their two older daughters to perform sexual acts over the Internet. The parents are now in prison awaiting trial.

Rosalyn and her siblings were placed in a shelter away from their community, where they receive counselling and support. Rosalyn is going to university to become a social worker. She is also an advocate for online safety, and speaks to fellow students in school seminars about online risks.

*\*Name changed to protect identity.*



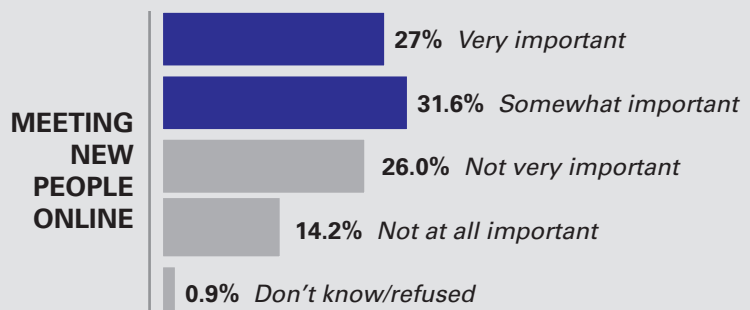
**Approximately 6 out of 10 adolescents polled, 59%, think that meeting new people online is either somewhat or very important to them.**

Adolescents in Sub-Saharan Africa appear to value meeting new people online the most, with 79 per cent saying it is either very or somewhat important. In the US and the UK around two-thirds of adolescents, 63 per cent, say it is not very important or not at all important for them to meet new people online.

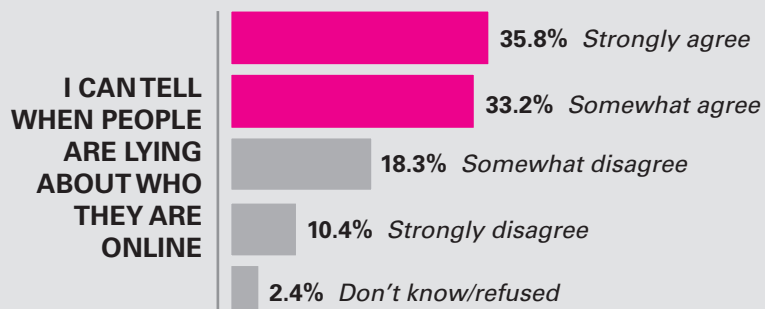
Approximately 90 per cent of 18-year-olds think that socializing and communicating with their friends online is either very or somewhat important. Adolescents in Sub-Saharan Africa value socializing with their friends online most, with 95 per cent saying it is important. In Central European countries 18-year-olds value socializing and communicating with friends the least, but still a large majority of respondents from these countries, 83 per cent, say it is either somewhat or very important to them.

While many adolescents say that socializing with their friends and meeting new people online is important,

**“How important is the following to you?”**



**“Thinking about since you first started using the Internet to now do you agree or disagree with the following statement?”**



**only 36% of respondents strongly believe that they can tell when people are lying about who they are online.**

Only 28 per cent of 18-year-olds from Asia and 30 per cent of adolescents in the US and the UK, strongly agree they can determine if somebody is lying about who they are on the Internet.

Overall, approximately half of adolescents strongly feel they are relaxed while online. In the US and the UK 3 out of 5 adolescents say they strongly feel relaxed online compared to one-third of adolescents in the Middle East and North Africa.

**Seventeen-year-old Jenny\*** (left) and her mother speak to a Police Commandant at a UNICEF-supported help centre in Antananarivo, the capital city of Madagascar.

Jenny met a man on social media and then met him in real life. The first time they met the man brought Jenny to his house where he held her captive for two months and repeatedly drugged and raped her. Neighbours reported seeing Jenny to the police, and the girl was eventually rescued and brought home.

The police referred Jenny to the help centre where she received medical and psychosocial support as well as counselling. The Malagasy government, with UNICEF and its partners, set up the help centre with counsellors, doctors and police on call, to help vulnerable children.

“I used to cry a lot after what he did to me... I could not expect that the man whom I spoke to for 6 months could have done such bad things to me. I did not realize that they might harm me when we met. I thought they were very kind,” said Jenny.


\*Name changed to protect identity.





# More adolescents turn to friends than parents or teachers when they feel threatened online

When adolescents are threatened or feel unsafe online,

54% 

OF RESPONDENTS STRONGLY AGREE THEY WILL TELL A FRIEND

48% 

STRONGLY AGREE THEY WOULD TELL A PARENT

19% 

SAY THEY WOULD TELL A TEACHER

44% strongly agree they can help a friend who is facing an online risk.

The exception is Latin America and the Caribbean where more respondents would tell a parent about an online threat, 67 per cent, compared to a friend, 55 per cent.

In Central European countries, 63 per cent of adolescents strongly agree they would tell a friend if they felt threatened online compared to 46 per cent who would tell their parent and only 9 per cent who would tell a teacher. Eighteen-year-olds polled in Sub-Saharan African countries seem most reluctant to tell a parent, with only 34 per cent of respondents in Africa strongly agreeing they would.

Only 30% of respondents in the Middle East and North Africa strongly believe they could help a friend facing an online risk. Latin American and the Caribbean adolescents are most confident, with 50% of respondents strongly believing they could help a friend who felt threatened online.

"Thinking about since you first started using the Internet to now do you agree or disagree with the following statement?"

I WOULD KNOW HOW TO HELP MY FRIEND IF THEY WERE FACING A RISK ONLINE

49.5%

Latin America & the Caribbean

30.1% 

Middle East & North Africa

40.5%

Asia

47.4%

Central Europe

49.3%

Sub-Saharan Africa

46.1%

the US and the UK

# Adolescent boys seem to value privacy and security less than adolescent girls

**More than two-thirds of adolescent girls, 67% strongly agree they would be worried if they received sexual comments or requests from someone online, as opposed to less than half of adolescent boys, 47%.**

This difference was most significant among 18-year-olds polled in Central European countries where more than double the number of 18-year-old

girls, 78 per cent, would be worried if they received sexual comments or requests online, compared to only 33 per cent of the boys.

Slightly more adolescent girls say that protecting their security and privacy online is very important, 76 per cent, compared to 71 per cent of adolescent boys. Girls in Central Europe seem most concerned with their online security, with 91 per cent believing that their security and privacy online is very important, compared to 79 per cent of boy respondents from the same countries.

Girls are also more willing to tell somebody if they feel threatened online. More than half of girls, 58 per cent, strongly agree they would tell a parent, compared to only 39 per cent of adolescent boys. This difference was largest among adolescent respondents from countries in

Central Europe where 64 per cent of 18-year-old girls would tell their parent if they felt threatened online, more than double the proportion of boys, 27 per cent.

**“Thinking about since you first started using the Internet to now, do you agree or disagree with the following statement?”**

**I WOULD BE WORRIED IF SOMEONE WERE TO MAKE SEXUAL COMMENTS OR SEXUAL REQUESTS TO ME**



## To better protect children online, UNICEF is calling for:

### **Governments and the Information Communication and Technology (ICT) sector**

to listen to children and young people's viewpoints through direct consultation or through research, and to incorporate their thinking into policies, strategies and programmes designed to tackle online sexual abuse and exploitation.

**ICT companies** to work with government ministries, other ICT companies, law enforcement, and civil society organizations to create a safe online environment for children by implementing the Guidelines for Industry on Child Online Protection. This includes protecting privacy by default, developing tools to report and remove child sexual abuse material, and promoting online safety education for children, parents and educators.

### **National governments**

to establish coordinated responses between criminal justice systems including law enforcement, and child welfare, education, health and the ICT sectors as well as civil society, to better protect and empower children online.

### **Parents and other caregivers**

to talk to their children about online safety, make sure children understand online risks and what to do if they find themselves in trouble.

### **National governments**

to design and implement laws and policies that protect children from online violence, sexual exploitation and abuse. Laws should be in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. Legislation should prioritize the best interests of the child and link to broader child protection laws and policies, such as criminalising all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation of children, including possession of child sexual abuse material.

**Teachers** to learn about the social tools and online platforms children use in their country to better understand the risks children face online and where there are opportunities for their empowerment.

**Schools** can incorporate information on digital safety into the curriculum and provide school-based counsellors and peer-to-peer support for children who have had negative experiences online.

### **Children and young people**

to support one another by sharing information about how to protect each other, and speaking out against online violence, as they explore the many opportunities available through the online world.



JESSICA CHECKS HER MOBILE PHONE IN TAIÓBEIRAS, BRAZIL. JESSICA WAS THE VICTIM OF CYBERBULLYING, SOCIAL ISOLATION AND EMBARRASSMENT DURING HIGH SCHOOL, WHEN EXPLICIT IMAGES OF HERSELF WERE SHARED WITH HER PEERS AT SCHOOL AFTER HER PHONE WAS STOLEN DURING SUMMER VACATION.

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