

Estimates of childhood exposure to online sexual harms and their risk factors

A study of childhood experiences of 18-year-olds in four European countries

Poland country profile

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Executive summary

This WeProtect Global Alliance study, conducted by Economist Impact, explores the experiences of 2,000 18-year-olds across four European countries (France, Germany, the Netherlands and Poland) who had regular access to the internet as children to understand their experiences of and exposure to **online sexual harms**¹ during childhood (see Figure 1 for details on the harms).^{2,3} This profile explores the childhood experiences of the 500 respondents in Poland.

1. A set of harmful behaviours considered as risk factors for potential or actual child sexual exploitation and abuse online.
2. 'Regular access to the internet' is defined as someone going on the internet (i.e., not watching a friend, family person or other adult use the internet) at least once a week. 'Childhood' is defined as the period before the age of 18 years old.
3. Conducting research on online sexual harms and sexual exploitation and abuse during childhood is challenging. Ethical concerns around surveying children, the risks of retraumatisation and sensitivities around sexuality and gender identity can restrict the survey population and the questions asked.

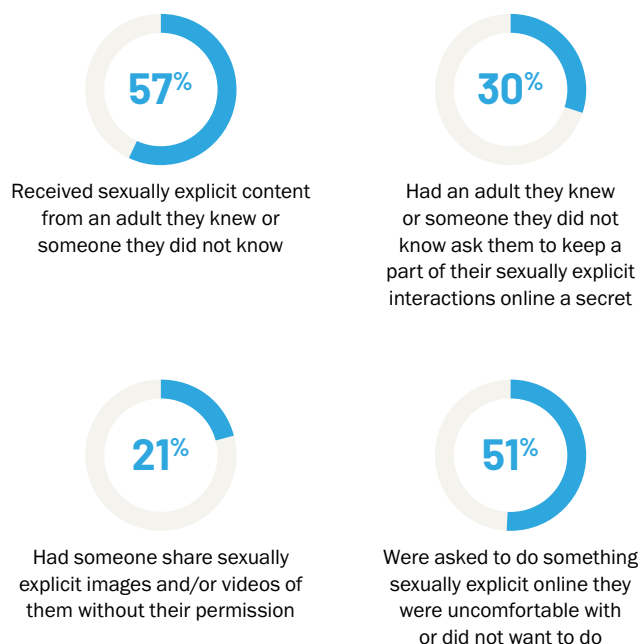
Experiences of online sexual harms in Poland

69% of 18-year-olds in Poland had experienced at least one type of online sexual harm during childhood.

Almost three in five respondents (57%) reported a stranger or an adult they knew trying to talk to them about sexually explicit topics or send them sexually explicit material online before they were 18 (see Figure 1). While 77% of respondents had these experiences at 16 to 17 years old, 27% experienced this when they were 12 or younger. Being asked to do something sexually explicit online that they were uncomfortable with or did not want to do was the second most common harm: 51% of respondents experienced this during childhood. Almost one-quarter (24%) of respondents experienced this harm when they were 12 or younger.

Experiences of online sexual harms happen on mobile devices through private channels: 81% of respondents in Poland who had experienced someone trying to talk to them about sexually explicit topics experienced this through their mobile phones, and 58% of these occurrences happened through private messaging services. In most of these cases, respondents in Poland deleted or blocked the person (85%) rather than reporting the problem or speaking to an adult (see Figure 2).

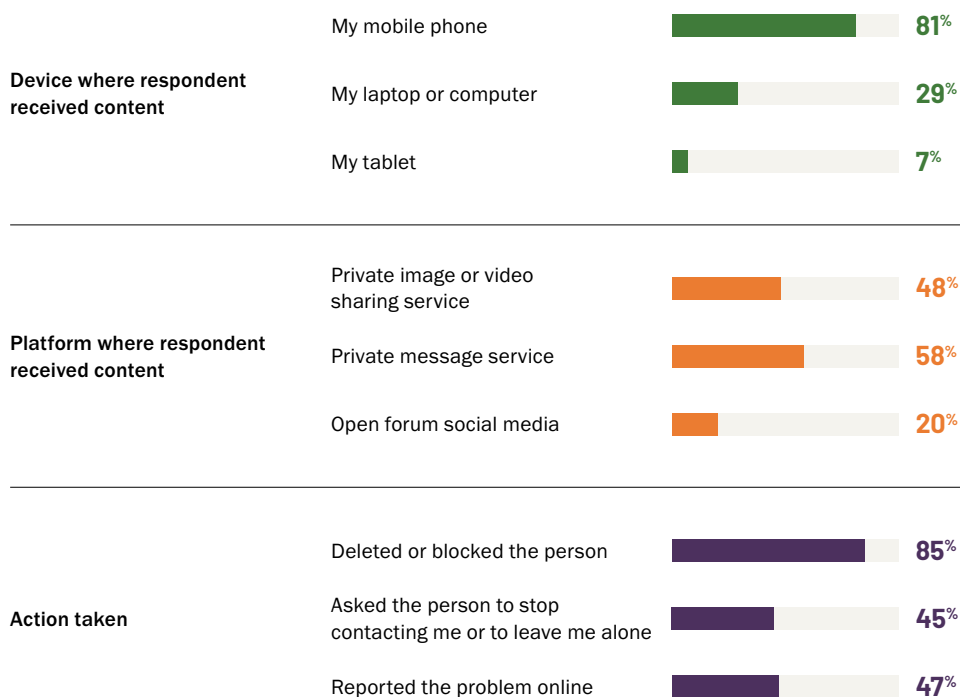
FIGURE 1
Respondents in Poland experiences of online sexual harms by type of sexual harm



THREE FIFTHS

of respondents' experiences of someone trying to talk to them about sexually explicit topics or send them sexually explicit material occurred on private messaging services.

FIGURE 2
Respondents in Poland who received sexually-explicit content by type of device and type of platform



The risk-protection gap

72% of 18-year-olds in Poland believe they could identify potentially harmful content when they were children.

Giving children the tools to recognise threats online and feel comfortable using response mechanisms to report and respond to online sexual harms is key to both preventing and responding to online sexual harms. Across the protection measures considered in this study, respondents had the highest confidence in their own ability to identify messages and/or content that was potentially linked to a harmful or dangerous source. In Poland, 72% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the following statement: 'When I was under 18, I was able to identify a message or content that was potentially linked to a dangerous or harmful source'.

And while over three in five respondents (62%) in Poland agreed that they had a trusted adult to go to if they received sexually explicit content online, fewer than half (47%) of respondents said these responsible adults had a good awareness of what they were doing online when they were under 18.

FIGURE 3
Access to protective measures in Poland

% who agreed with the following statement



Notes: n=500

European comparisons

Poland's reported experiences of three of the four online sexual harms assessed were on par with the other countries studied: 57% of respondents in Poland received sexually explicit content from an adult they knew or someone they did not know, compared with an average of 55% across the other three countries. 18-year-olds in Poland were significantly less likely to experience someone sharing sexually explicit images and/or videos of them without their permission (21% compared with 43% in the Netherlands and 41% in Germany).

The likelihood of 18-year-olds in Poland experiencing online sexual harms during childhood was on par with other countries across Europe.

FIGURE 4
Percentage of respondents who experienced at least one online sexual harm by country



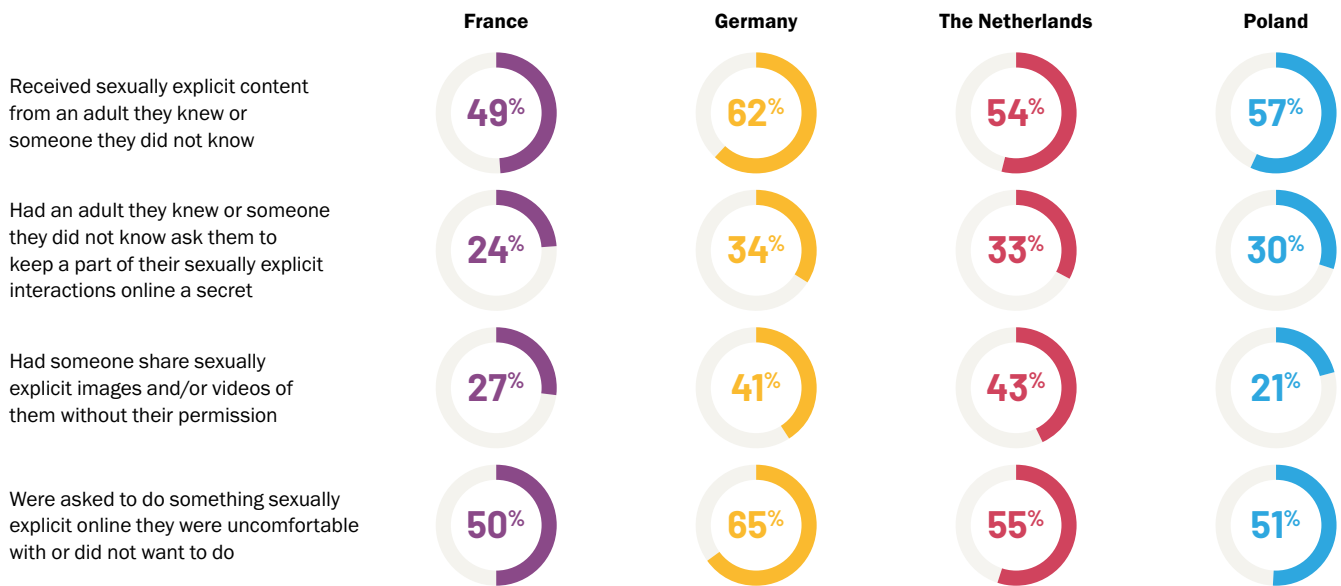
Notes: n=500 per country

21% of respondents in Poland experienced someone sharing sexually explicit images and/or videos of them without their permission, compared with an average of 37% across the other three countries surveyed.

Respondents in Poland were least likely (7%) to have experienced someone trying to talk about sexually explicit topics through a tablet, compared with an average of 16% across the other three countries. Occurrences through private messaging services in Poland was 12 percentage points higher than the Netherlands, the second highest country (58% versus 46% respectively).

FIGURE 5

Respondents' experiences of online sexual harms by type of sexual harm by country

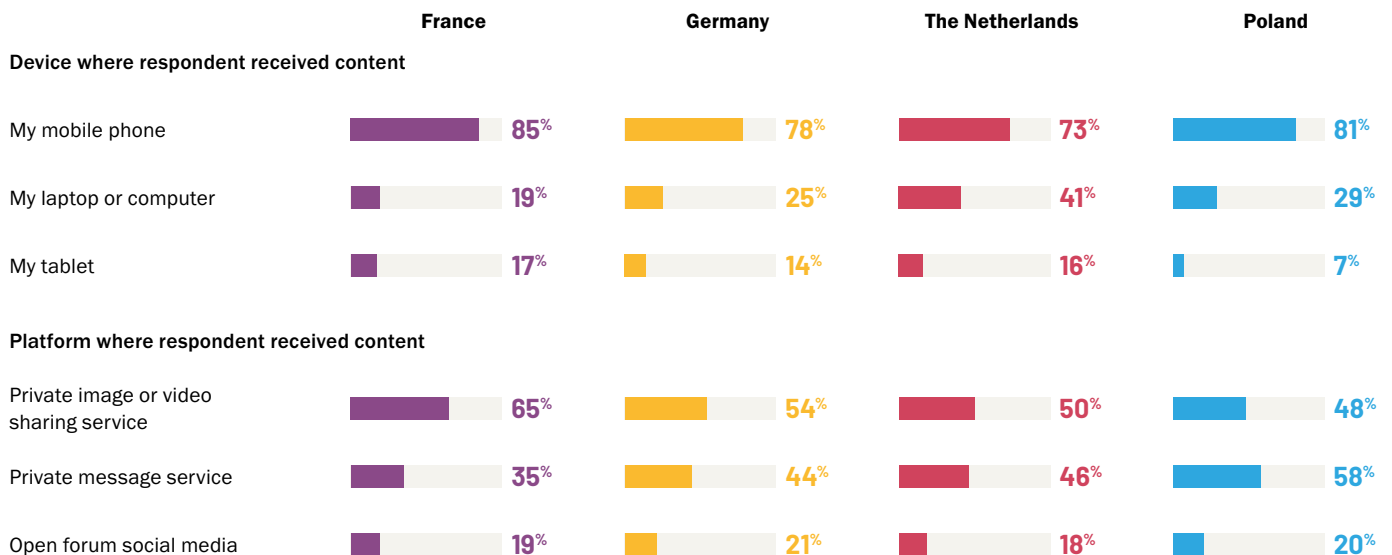


Notes: n=2000, n=500 per country

Respondents in Poland were most likely to experience someone trying to talk about sexually explicit topics through their mobile phones.

FIGURE 6

Respondents who received sexually-explicit content by type of device and type of platform by country





To learn more about this study and its findings, please visit:

<https://www.weprotect.org/economist-impact-european-survey/>

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