

EU CONSENT

ELECTRONIC IDENTIFICATION AND TRUST SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN EUROPE

Creating a safer digital world for children throughout the European Union

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Project objectives

The euCONSENT consortium will put into live operation extensions to the eIDAS infrastructure required to deliver its vision for pan-European, open-system, secure and certified interoperable age verification and parental consent to access Information Society Services.

Our solutions will be designed with the help of Europe's children and the guidance of the continent's leading academic experts, NGOs and other key stakeholders in child rights and protections online.

The new system will then be used during a three-month pilot by over 1,500 children, adults and parents from at least 3 EU Member States. Their user experience will be independently evaluated to provide convincing evidence for these infrastructure solutions to be adopted across the Union, with hundreds of Europe's kids already positioned as its most enthusiastic advocates to their peers, parents and policymakers.

Regulating video-sharing and online content from the perspective of families

- A rapid evidence review of children's concerns and experiences regarding accessing potentially harmful content, including negotiating parental controls, responding to parental mediation especially restrictions, workarounds for filters, age restrictions, etc.
- Recognises families' domestic practices, digital engagement, and wider structural and cultural contexts.
- To formulate evidence-based, child rights-respecting recommendations for the future development of age assurance, parental consent and parental control tools.



Family struggles over technology

"My mom put this on my phone. Awful invasion of privacy! Worst thing ever!"

"This totally takes ALL my privacy away."

"I used to feel happy with what little privacy and internet time I had but you made the little into none... Now I feel that I have no privacy. Thanks for ruining my life!"

"I know better what's good for my child"
Leonor, 44, UK

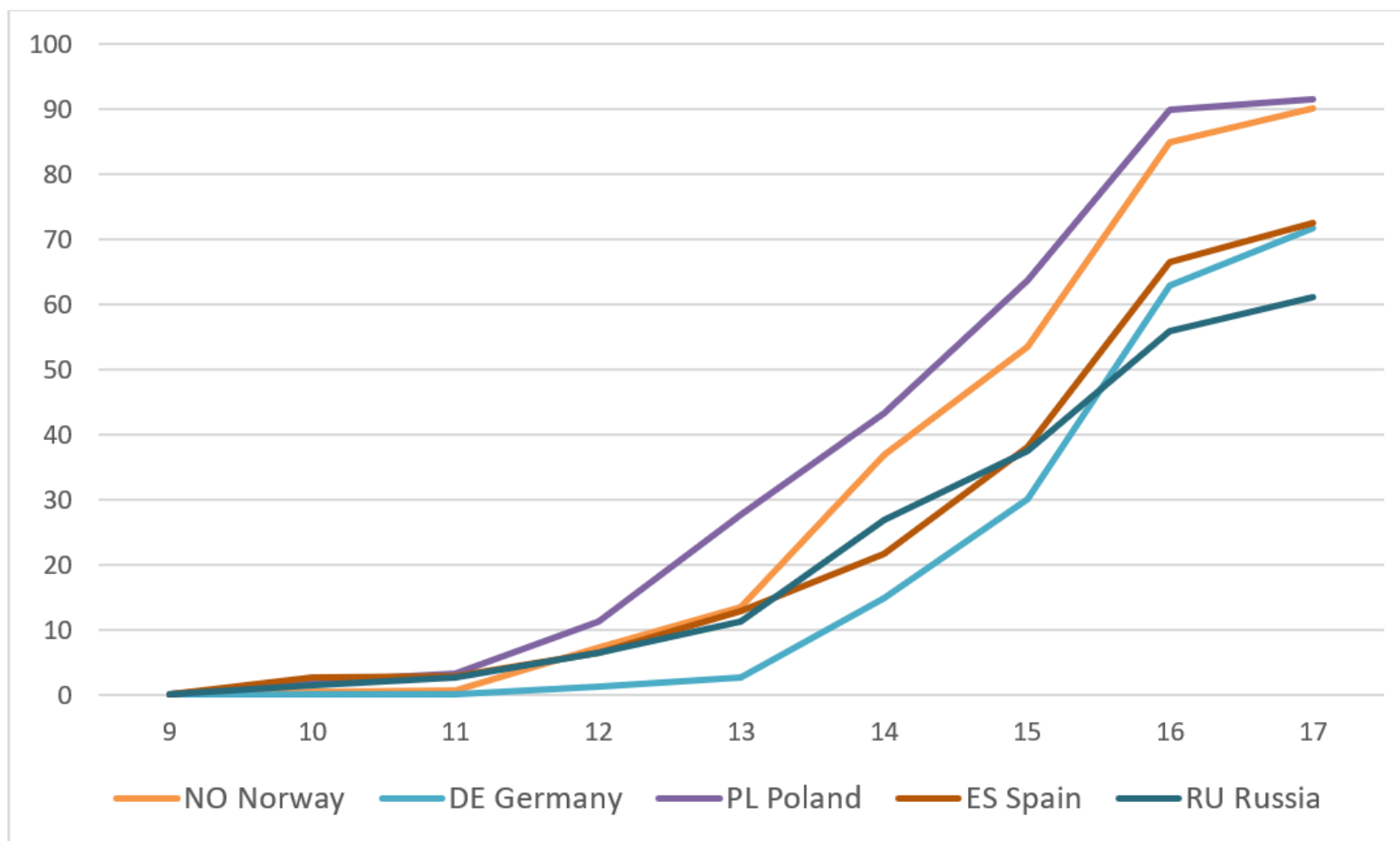
"What happens when some parents decide to help their children create a fake ID? How does that feel for the other kids? They start pressing us to do the same, and sometimes we just give in".
Melina, 35, Cyprus

"A strict AV mechanism would be a blessing, because then parents would have an excuse not to yield to the children's' constant insistence".
Katia, 40, Cyprus

REVEALING REALITY



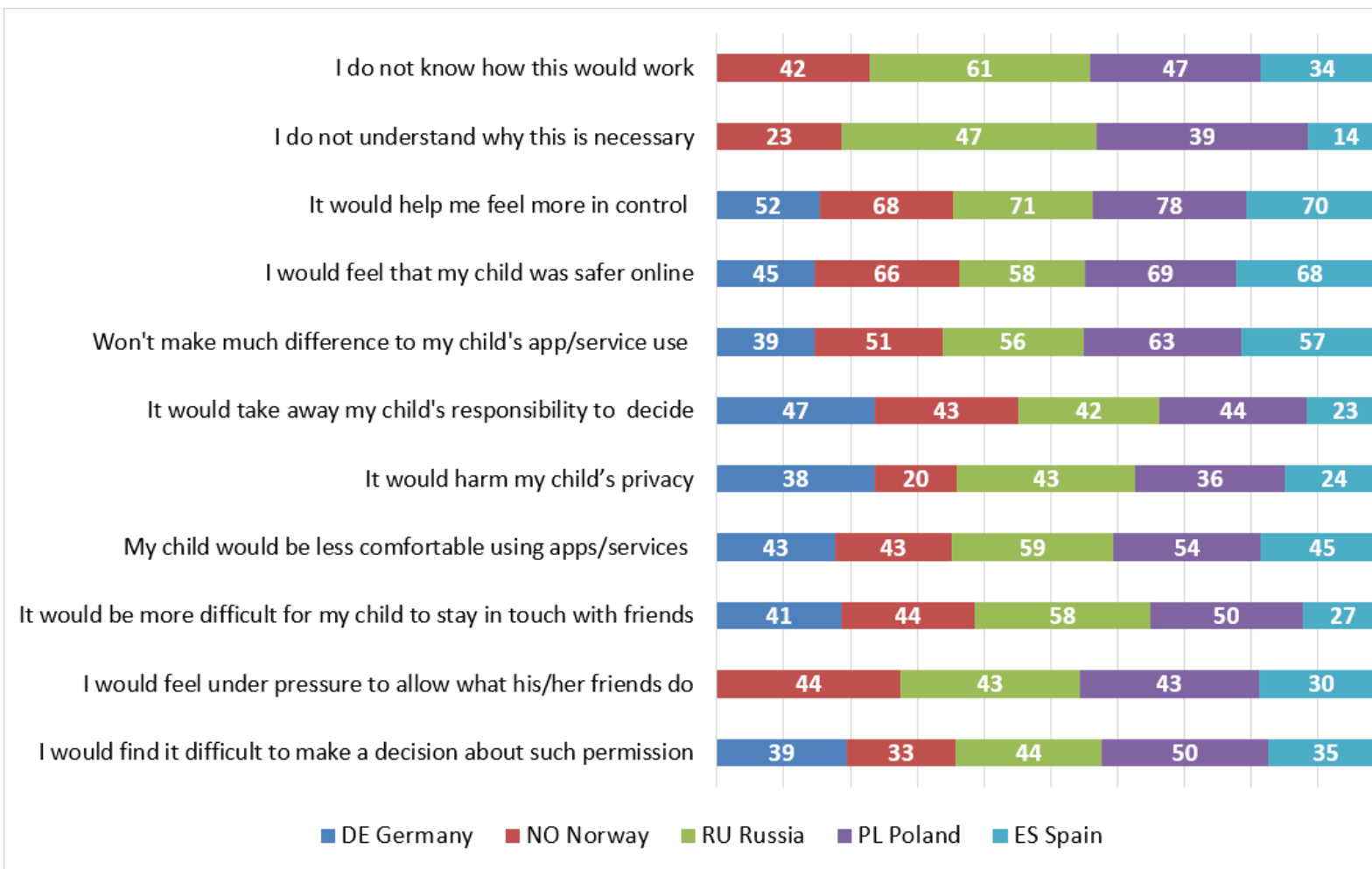
At what age do you think your child will be or was old enough to make their own decisions about the websites, social media, apps or games they use? (Smahel et al., 2020)



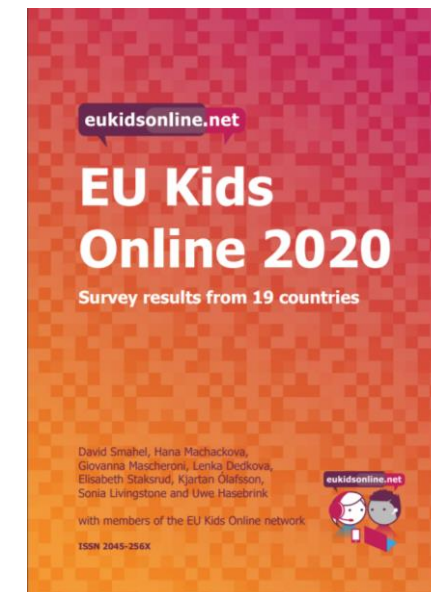
Note: The graph shows the cumulative percentage of the age limits to indicate where parents are more relaxed vs. more strict. Base: Parents of children aged 9–16 who use the internet



Attitudes to parental control tools (% of parents who agree; Smahel et al., 2020)



Note: Referring to: 'In the future, young people under 16 may have to ask their parents for permission in order to be able to use social networking sites, apps and smart devices.' Response scales differ slightly between the countries, presented as % for 'Agree' and 'Strongly agree' or 'I tend to agree' and 'I definitely agree'. There was no data on Germany for three items.





Reviewing the evidence

- Methodology: a rapid evidence review across 5 databases supplemented by grey literature and expert suggestions.
- 1500+ results since 2010 screened down to 61 studies.
- Gaps: the evidence is mostly on parental controls, from the USA and Europe, and vague about the technical parameters of the measures, as well as age of children.

Findings

- Given the realities of everyday life, current **age assurance measures are often ineffective**. They are rarely used, easy to bypass, and parents expect to be able to override them flexibly.
- **Parental controls have mixed effects**. Some studies show reduced risk (e.g. less access to age-inappropriate content, tho' also fewer opportunities); some suggest increased risk because more family conflicts, loss of trust and privacy); some show no effect.
- Children find unjustified restrictions frustrating. To function effectively, technical measures must be age-appropriate, address the needs of **both children and parents** and be explained to both.
- The use of technical measures is **not a stand-alone practice** but is (and must be constructively) embedded in diverse processes of parental mediation of digital access and family life.



Implications for children's rights

- Measures should do more **to enable children's right to be heard**, and be co-developed with children.
- Many age assurance measures **do not respect children's rights to privacy or autonomy** and some encourage excessive parental surveillance: measures should consider children's rights and best interests holistically.
- Children's **increasing capacity to make their own choices should be better supported**. We found little evidence for granularity of measures that can support these changing needs.
- Some measures might be **discriminatory** (e.g. by assuming the presence of an engaged adult, or that don't provide for children with disabilities).
- There needs to be **more attention** to how child protection measures can have a positive (encouraging, enabling, enriching) effect on child rights.

