



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

Germany 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 Germany.

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 Germany

73% of 18-year-olds in Germany had experienced at least one type of online sexual harm during childhood.

Two thirds of respondents (65%) reported a stranger, a peer or a known adult asking them to do something sexually explicit online that made them feel uncomfortable during their childhood (see Figure 1). While 89% of respondents had these experiences at 16 to 17 years old, 24% experienced this when they were 12 or younger. Similarly, 62% of respondents experienced a stranger or an adult they knew trying to talk to them about sexually explicit topics or send them sexually explicit material online. These experiences occurred at a younger age: 68% of respondents experienced this at 13 to 15 years old and 23% experienced this when they were 12 or younger.

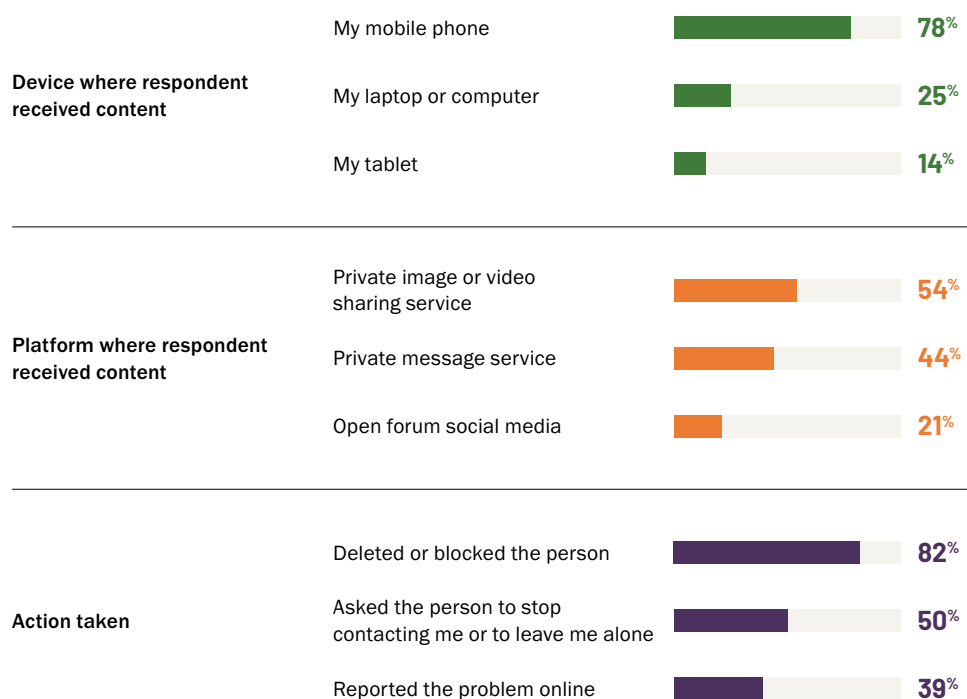
Experiences of online sexual harms happen on mobile devices through private channels: 78% of respondents in Germany who had experienced someone trying to talk to them about sexually explicit topics experienced this through their mobile phones, and 54% of these occurrences happened through private image or video sharing services. In most of these cases, respondents in Germany deleted or blocked the person (82%) rather than reporting the problem or speaking to an adult (see Figure 2).

54% of respondents' experiences of someone trying to talk to them about sexually explicit topics or send them sexually explicit material occurred on private image or video sharing services.

FIGURE 1
Respondents in Germany's experiences of online sexual harms by type of sexual harm



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



The risk-protection gap

73% of 18-year-olds in Germany 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 Germany, 73% 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 seven in ten respondents (70%) in Germany agreed that they had a trusted adult to go to if they received sexually explicit content online, only 57% 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 Germany

% who agreed with the following statement



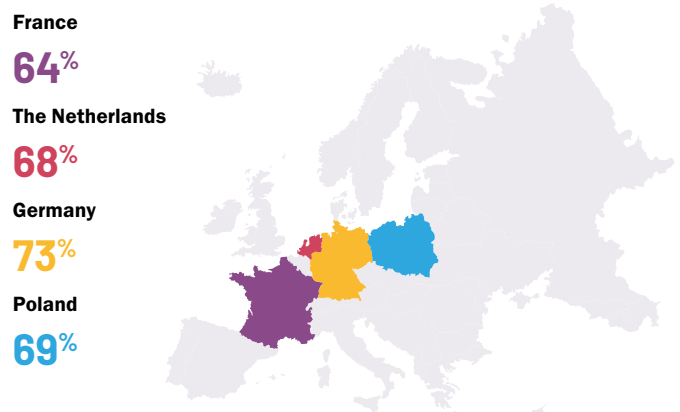
Notes: n=500

European comparisons

Germany has significantly higher reported experiences across three of the four online sexual harms assessed compared with the other countries studied. Just under two-thirds (65%) of respondents in Germany were asked to do something sexually explicit online they were uncomfortable with or did not want to do, compared with 55% in the Netherlands, 51% in Poland and 50% in France.

18-year-olds in Germany were more likely to experience online sexual harms during childhood than in other European countries.

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



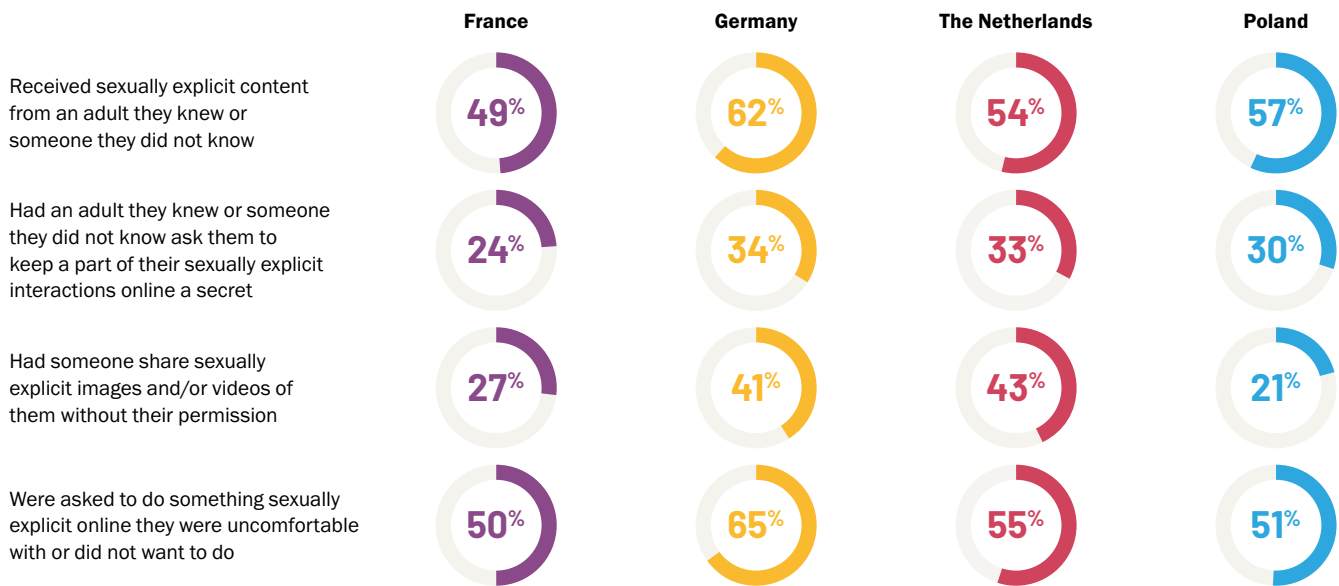
Notes: n=500 per country

65% of respondents in Germany were asked to do something sexually explicit online they were uncomfortable with or did not want to do compared with an average of 52% across the other three countries surveyed.

Respondents in Germany's experiences of the platforms and devices where an adult they knew or someone they did not know tried to talk to them about sexually explicit topics or send them sexually explicit material reflect respondents' experiences across Europe. Just under eight in ten (78%) of these occurrences happened on the respondents mobile phone—compared with an average of 80% across the other three countries studied—and 54% of those experiences occurred through private image or video sharing services.

FIGURE 5

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

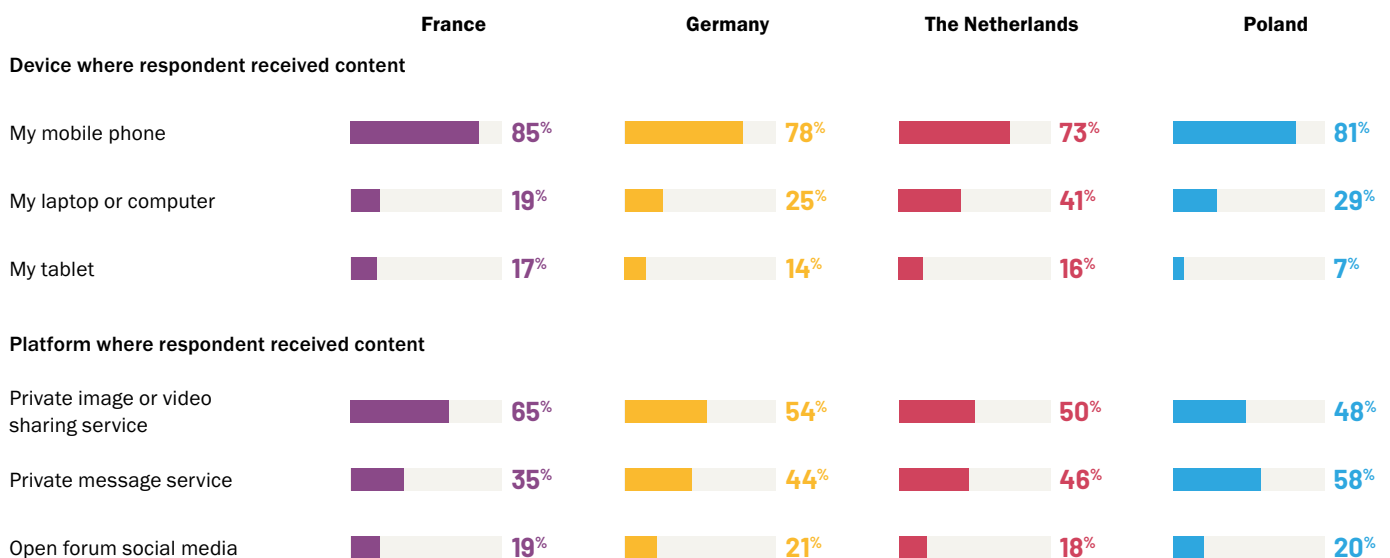


Notes: n=2000, n=500 per country

Respondents in Germany 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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