

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

The Netherlands 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 the Netherlands.

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 re-traumatisation and sensitivities around sexuality and gender identity can restrict the survey population and the questions asked.

Experiences of online sexual harms in the Netherlands

68% of 18-year-olds in the Netherlands had experienced at least one type of online sexual harm during childhood.

55% of respondents 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 81% of respondents had these experiences at 16 to 17 years old, 28% experienced this when they were 12 or younger. Similarly, 54% 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 29% experienced this when they were 12 or younger.

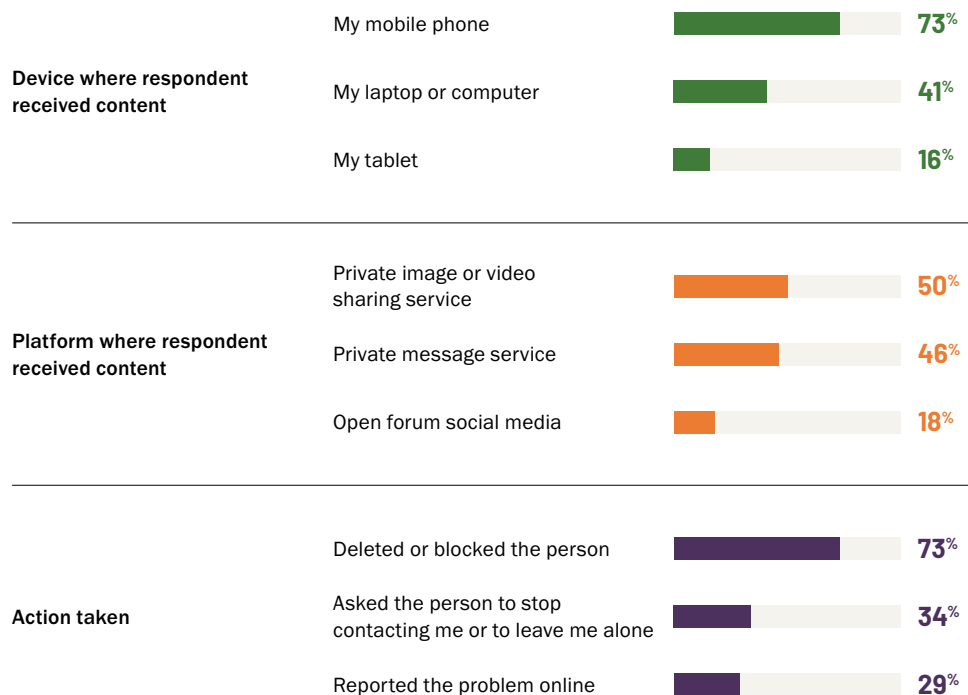
Experiences of online sexual harms happen on mobile devices through private channels: 73% of respondents in the Netherlands who had experienced someone trying to talk to them about sexually explicit topics experienced this through their mobile phones, and 50% of these occurrences happened through private image or video sharing services. In most of these cases, respondents in the Netherlands deleted or blocked the person (73%) rather than reporting

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



HALF 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 2
Respondents in the Netherlands who received sexually-explicit content by type of device and type of platform



The risk-protection gap

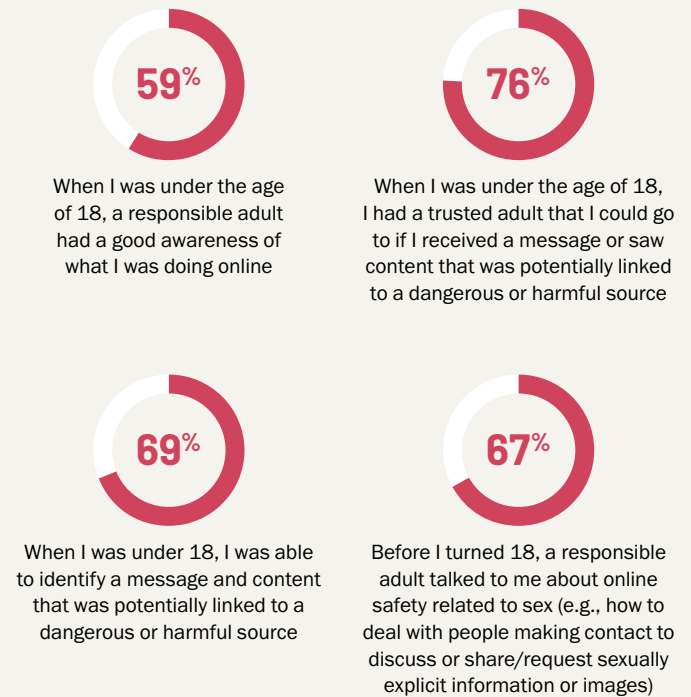
69% of 18-year-olds in the Netherlands believe they could identify potentially harmful content when they were children.

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 the Netherlands, 69% 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-quarters (76%) of respondents in the Netherlands agreed that they had a trusted adult to go to if they received sexually explicit content online, only 59% 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 the Netherlands

% who agreed with the following statement



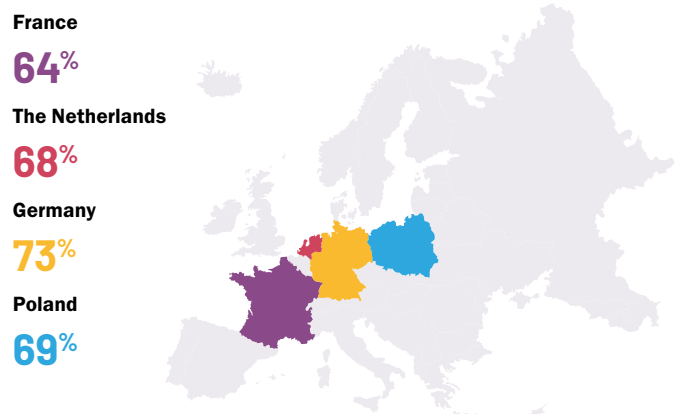
Notes: n=500

European comparisons

The Netherlands' reported experiences of three of the four online sexual harms assessed were on par with the other countries studied: 55% of respondents in the Netherlands reported a stranger, a peer or a known adult asking them to do something sexually explicit online that made them feel uncomfortable, on par with an average of 55% across the other three countries. 18-year-olds in the Netherlands were significantly more likely to experience someone sharing sexually explicit images and/or videos of them without their permission (43% compared with 21% in Poland and 27% in France).

The likelihood of 18-year-olds in the Netherlands 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

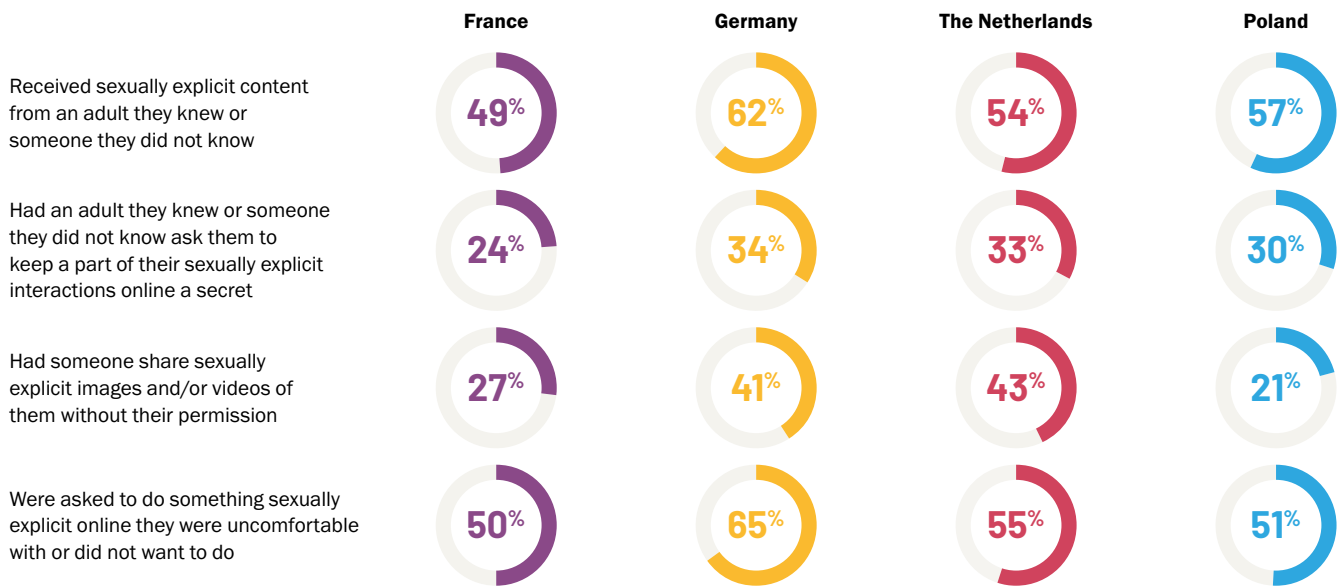


Notes: n=500 per country

43% of respondents in the Netherlands experienced someone sharing sexually explicit images and/or videos of them without their permission compared with an average of 30% across the other three countries surveyed.

Respondents in the Netherlands were most likely (41%) to have experienced someone trying to talk about sexually explicit topics through their laptop or computer, compared with an average of 24% across the other three countries. The Netherlands was the only country in the study where these occurrences happened almost equally through private image or video sharing services (50%) and private messaging services (46%). In France and Germany, the percentage point gap between occurrences on private image or video sharing services and private messaging services was 30 and 10 points respectively.

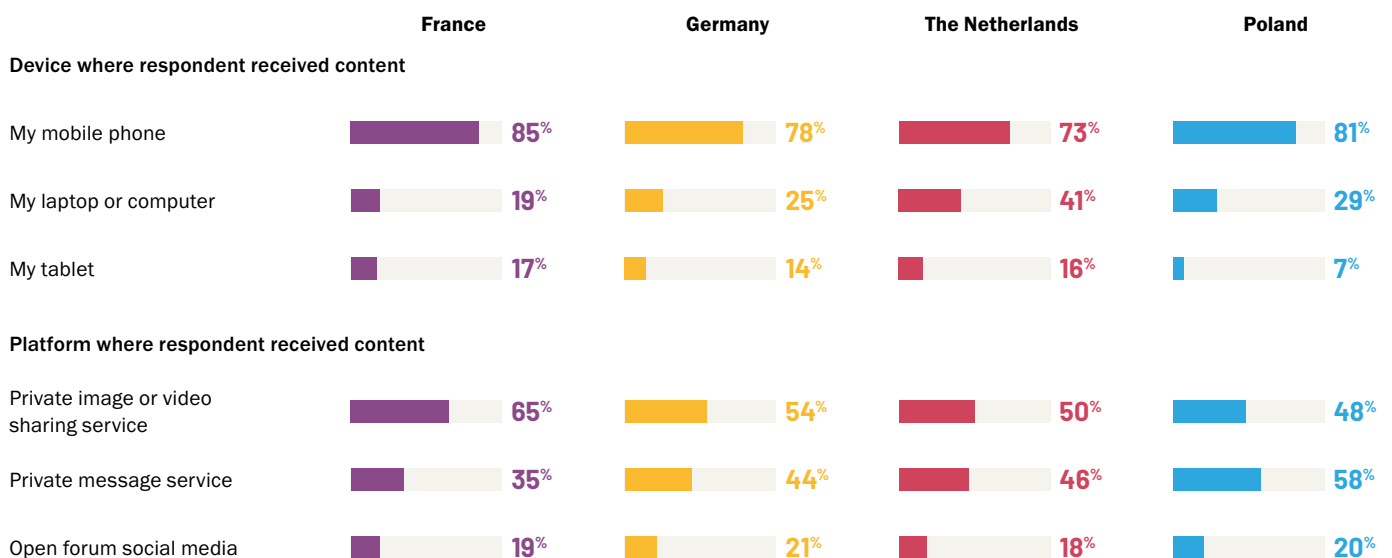
FIGURE 5
Respondents' experiences of online sexual harms by type of sexual harm by country



Notes: n=2000, n=500 per country

Respondents in the Netherlands were more likely than respondents in other European countries to have experienced someone trying to talk about sexually explicit topics through their laptop or computer.

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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