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Net Children Go Mobile – new European project launches

The world of digital technology is rapidly changing, with children, now more than ever, able to gain immediate access to the internet through smartphones and tablets. While this increased mobile access at home, school or out and about can provide children with new opportunities, it can also expose them to new dangers, such as excessive use and greater commercial and privacy risks. Despite the rapid advances in mobile technology, however, there is a lack of up to date and comparative data on how these may be affecting children.

A new European research project, Net Children Go Mobile, which launches today (Tuesday 29 January) aims to address this problem by examining children's online experiences through mobile media. In the UK the LSE will be conducting the survey of children's use and group interviews with children, parents, teachers and other youth workers.

The project, funded by the Safer Internet Programme, will run across the UK, Denmark, Italy and Romania. It will assess how children cope with the new opportunities and risks that may arise through this greater engagement with the online world and ask whether parents should change their approach to helping children deal with the internet when children can assess the world around them on more personal devices.

Giovanna Mascheroni, from the Coordinator team at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan, said: "Access to the internet from mobile devices may lead to an intensification of some of the risks that children may encounter online, such as exposure to sexual content, conduct risks such as cyberbullying and sexting. We need to assess empirically to what extent these risks are effectively increased, and how children perceive and cope with them."

Quote from Dr Leslie Haddon, LSE's Department of Media and Communications, said: "Children's mobile access to the internet is arguably the newest substantial development in children's online experience. It has many potential consequences but has so far been little researched. Yet it is vital that we understand how these changes may be affecting children in order to plan effective policy and awareness initiatives aimed at promoting children's online safety."

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