

# YOUNG CHILDREN (0 - 8 YEARS OLD) AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

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An exploratory qualitative study  
National Report Portugal



**CATÓLICA**

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COORDINATED BY THE JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION



## **PARENTS, CHILDREN, DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES**

This study, coordinated by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, aims to explore the engagement of children under 8 years old, and their families, with digital technologies in the household. More specifically, our research questions explore the dynamics between children and parents, and also between uses and perceptions of both, in order to identify digital activities and practices, and the benefits and risks associated to them.



## **FAMILY CONVERSATIONS**

Our qualitative approach used interviews to both parents and children, and included diversified activities, such as filling a daily routine schedule, a game about favourite activities, and a digital tour in which children showed us their devices, their favourite activities with them and the context of use.

Our sample included 10 families with children aged 6 or 7 years old, thus attending the first or second year of Primary School, and who use a digital device at least once a week. The same protocol was conducted in the 18 countries which were part of the project in 2015 (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, The Netherlands, United Kingdom).



## **RESULTS**

In what ways, if any, are children and/or their families empowered by the use of new (online) technologies? This question is organized in two axes, the individual-family dynamics and the uses-perceptions dynamics, thus originating 4 research topics. Our main findings are presented according to them.

## Individual use

### ***How do children under the age of 8 engage with new (online) technologies?***

- The tablet is the favourite device.
- Games are the main activity.
- Gender is determinant in the choice of games and activities.
- Digital activities mirror offline preferences.
- Children are resourceful and savvy with digital technologies.



## Awareness of risks and opportunities

### ***How are new (online) technologies perceived by the different family members?***

- YouTube is where children are more exposed.
- Learning activities are under-explored.
- Digital devices have the advantage of performing actions in a fast and easy manner.
- The disadvantage of digital media is a decrease in resourcefulness and social skills.
- Parents think it is too early to worry about digital dangers.



## Family dynamics

### ***What role do these new (online) technologies (smartphones, tablets, computers, video games, apps, etc.) play in children's and parents' lives (individually and in relation to family life in general)?***

- Children play with tablets on their own.
- Children know more about digital media than parents might think.
- Income does not determine digital skills.
- The tablet is the new babysitter.
- The smartphone is an “emergency” entertainer.



## Parental Mediation

### ***How do parents manage their younger children's use of (online) technologies (at home and/or elsewhere)? Are their strategies more constructive or restrictive?***

- Parental mediation is negotiated and flexible.
- Parents monitor time and content.
- Parents believe more in dialogue than in filters.



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# RECOMMENDATIONS

## FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS



- Parents must overcome the gap between their own childhood and their children's. They must be encouraged not to look at their children "through the rear-view mirror".
- Parents must be attentive to media education and digital safety, and promote good practices in their homes.
- Younger children are vulnerable to certain online risks, such as commercial issues and inappropriate content.

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## FOR POLICY-MAKERS

- Policies for further research: policy-makers should promote and enable further research on the topic of digital technologies and early childhood.
- Parents campaigns: more research and publicizing is needed in order to sensitize parents and help them guide children towards a balanced use of digital media.
- Policies for media education: policy-makers must ensure and promote media education focused on digital technologies and safety. A "safety kit" for parents could be developed and promoted.



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## FOR SCHOOLS, LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS



- Policies for formal learning: schools play a key role in fostering access to digital media and the development of digital skills. They can also be the pivots of promoting responsible parenting regarding digital safety and awareness towards the potential of digital tools for learning.

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## FOR THE INDUSTRY

- More pedagogical content in national languages.
- Easier and more visible coding system for app safety.

