

**PRIVACY AND SAFETY OF  
PERSONAL DATA  
OF 15 – 18 YEARS STUDENTS  
ON SOCIAL NETWORKS**

**RESEARCH PAPER**

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## Introduction

The rapid development of information technology led to radical changes on any aspect of life in the last decades. The information society is based on unlimited and unstoppable processing of information. Children today, including all group ages, have been growing up at the time where the use of personal computers, internet, online communication, social media are accessible and utilized by all group ages. The communication in social networks and through downloadable applications on the smart phone is the most popular manner of all virtual communications of children.

Now days, we are facing a new development of information technology and robotics. The Internet of Things (IoT) Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Virtuality (AV) are some of the latest innovations of advanced technology, which will have larger impact to new generations.

These technological and communicative developments create forms of behavior which us, as adults should be familiar with, understand them and prepare the youth about the potential risks. This research paper, along with other activities organized by the Commissioner's Office through years, is focused on students, teachers and parents' awareness in order to protect fundamental rights and in particular the right to a private life in online communications. On the occasion of 10th anniversary of 28 of January, Data Protection Day, the Commissioner's Office initiated an awareness campaign to students of high schools related to the use of social networks and consideration to protect privacy.

During last year, the representatives of the Commissioner's Office held conversations with students from 36 high schools of Albania, by addressing practices of the use of social networks, exposure of private life, the importance of online security and data protection regarding online threats.

Materials made available by the representatives of the Commissioner's Office as leaflets, presentations on protection of privacy in the internet, guideline on publication of images and data safeguards, raised awareness for students on the topics that were addressed.

This meetings offered an opportunity to the Commissioner's Office to make a survey through 1063 conducted interviews with students of 36 high schools of the cities of Tirana, Durrës, Vlora, Elbasan, Fieri, Berat, Gjirokastra, Lezha, Shkodra, Korça, Kukës, Lushnja, Saranda, Tepelena, Përmet and Pogradec.

The involved group age in this survey is from 15 to 18 years old students. Students were voluntarily and anonymously interviewed after being informed on the purpose of this survey by representatives of the Commissioner's Office. The rate of interviewed students is 29 from each school, approximately 40 participants in each of the meetings that have taken place at this education institution. The majority of participants in this questionnaire live in urban developed centers, the most popular in the country, with some exemptions in Tirana and Kukës schools.

In this survey, alongside to the data analysis obtained by students it shall be introduced also a comparative analysis with similar data carried out earlier in Albania and other countries, mainly in European states.

The objective of this survey is to contribute in an updated analysis of the status of online communication usage and mainly to communication by means of social networks by Albanian teenagers, from the perspective of the protection of the fundamental rights and especially the protection of privacy. This survey will come to help all public authorities, in particular the education sector, in support to drafting policy and strategic papers in order to provide an efficient private life and personal data protection for students.

This survey is also a contribution of the Office of Information and Data Protection Commissioner in the framework of the “Resolution for the Adoption of an International Competency Framework on Privacy Education”, which was approved in the 38th International Conference of Data Protection and Privacy Commissioners on October 2016. Since 2014, the Commissioner’s Office is part of the Working Group on Digital Education, approved on 2013 in Warsaw at the International Conference of Data Protection and Privacy Commissioners. As members of this working group, the Commissioner’s Office has contributed in the document “Personal Data Protection Competency Framework for School Students”. This document shall promote the use and practical development of the competency framework on education of privacy, as part of study or curriculum programs and training of teachers, despite the exercised discipline.

The Commissioner's Office wants to thank all supporters in accomplishing this survey from Education Directorates Staff to the teachers and principals of all 36 visited schools.

The Information and Data Protection Commissioner shall continue to address the education of youth group ages with data protection principles as priority, by being determined for the necessity to develop an informed and capable generation in facing new challenges.



## Results

According to a survey published in 2015 by Open Data Albania, the use of internet in Albania has increased. Within 5 years (2010-2014), the number of subscribers with broadband access from established networks is increased to 72%. On the other hand, subscribers of 3G internet are increased with over 400% within 2011-2014. This enormous progress is due to 3G technology, with which the internet service is provided in smart phones.

EU Candidate Countries	Number of internet users	Internet penetration
	30 June 2016	(%)
Albania	1,823,233	60.00%
Bosnia-Herzegovina	2,628,846	68.10%
Kosovo	1,523,373	80.90%
Macedonia	1,439,089	68.50%
Montenegro	388,057	60.20%
Serbia	4,758,861	66.60%
Turkey	46,196,720	57.50%
Total (candidate countries)	58,758,179	59.40%

Tab. 1 Source <http://www.internetworldstats.com>

Furthermore, data disclosed from the portal Statistics.com indicate that in June 2016, Albania had over 1.8 Million internet users with 60% penetration level of the population, thus, compared to other countries of the region which are also candidates for membership in the European Union, it is slightly higher than the common average.

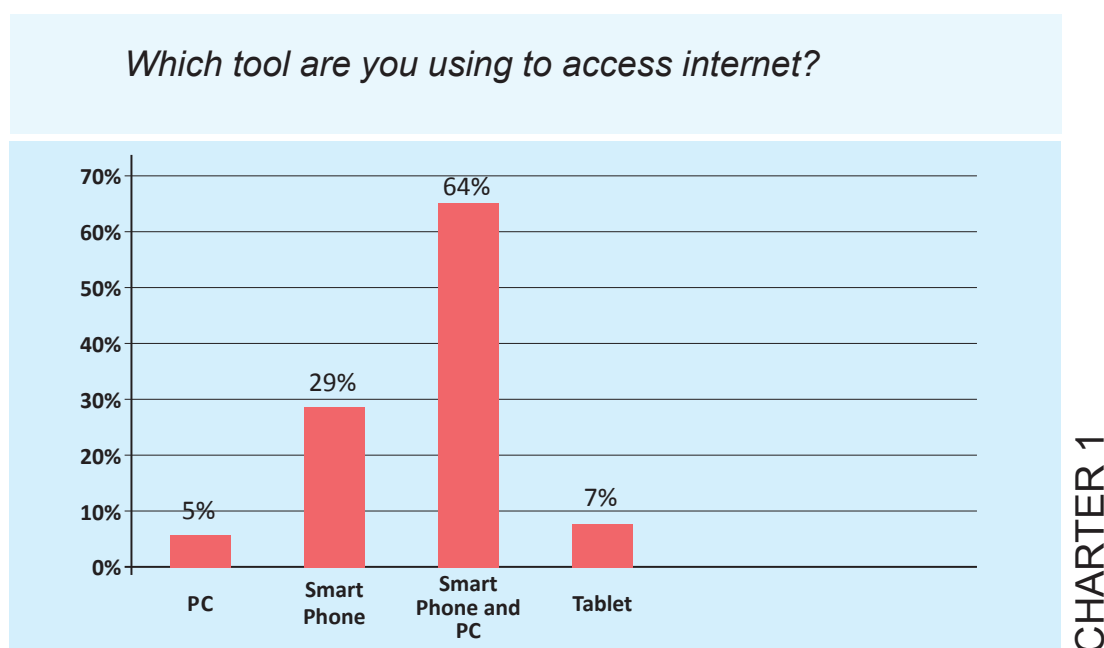
Meanwhile, data of autumn 2016 published by the Authority of Postal and Electronic Communications (APEC) indicate that the number of Albanian citizens accessing the internet is increasing. Compared to the data last year, it is noticed that number of internet users with established line is increased to 13,9%, while the number of those using 3G and 4G network through mobile phone is increased to 51,3%.

<b>Internet Services</b>	<b>QIII 2016</b>	<b>Annual Change 2016 – 2015</b>
Number of subscribers established line	261,747	13,9%
Number of subscribers 3G/4G	1,833,231	48,3%
Through mobile phone	1,708,745	51,3%
Through cards/modem/keys (no mobile phones)	124,486	17,1%

Tab. 2 Data obtained from the official website of AKEP <http://akep.al/statistika>

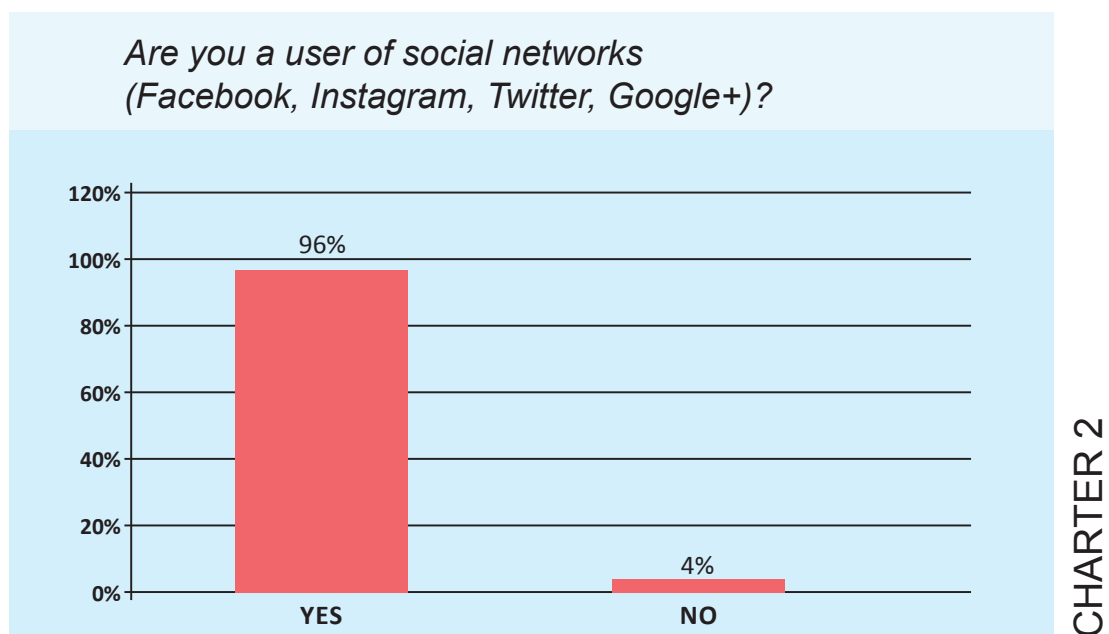
Meanwhile, by processing of data of the study “Privacy and safety of personal data using social networks” is noted that From the survey data processing, it is evidenced that only 5% of students use personal computer to connect to internet, opposed to 29% of their friends that use only smart phone for the same purpose.

Meanwhile, 64% of students declare that they access internet through two main devices, PC and smart phone. In the meantime, only 7% of them stated that they are using only the tablet to get connected.



Teenagers’ bond with smart phones is more than understandable considering the fact that the latest smart phones provide a variety of functions and opportunities for communication, entertainment and information that several years back were unimaginable.

By the interviewed students, 96 % of them stated that have at least a social network account, while 4% of them said they were not members of any social network. This result is somehow surprising as regards to the high interest shown by Albanian teenagers to communicate via social networks compared to other European students' surveys.

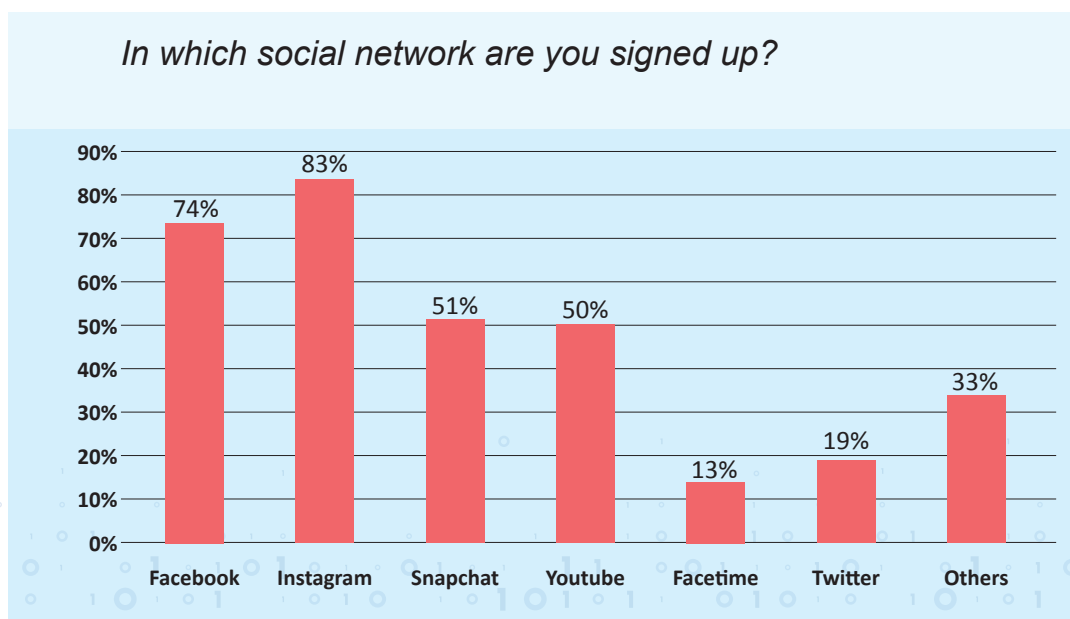


By the survey carried out from EUKIDSONLINE center ([www.eukidsonline.com](http://www.eukidsonline.com)), first, in 2010 and repeated in 7 countries (Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Ireland, Portugal, Romania and United Kingdom) in 2014 "Net Children Go Online" resulted that 63% of children 11 - 16 years old had an account in social networks.

Reasons to this trend may be related to the enhancement of technical opportunities, starting from the massive use of smart phones, reducing the cost of internet service but also with psychological causes in our society to communicate with acquaintances and new friends on internet. The charter below indicates that the most popular network for Albanian teenagers is Instagram. This social network allows photos to be used as mean of communication and video as well. Instagram is popular also worldwide to youths and this global trend is followed by Albanian youth too.

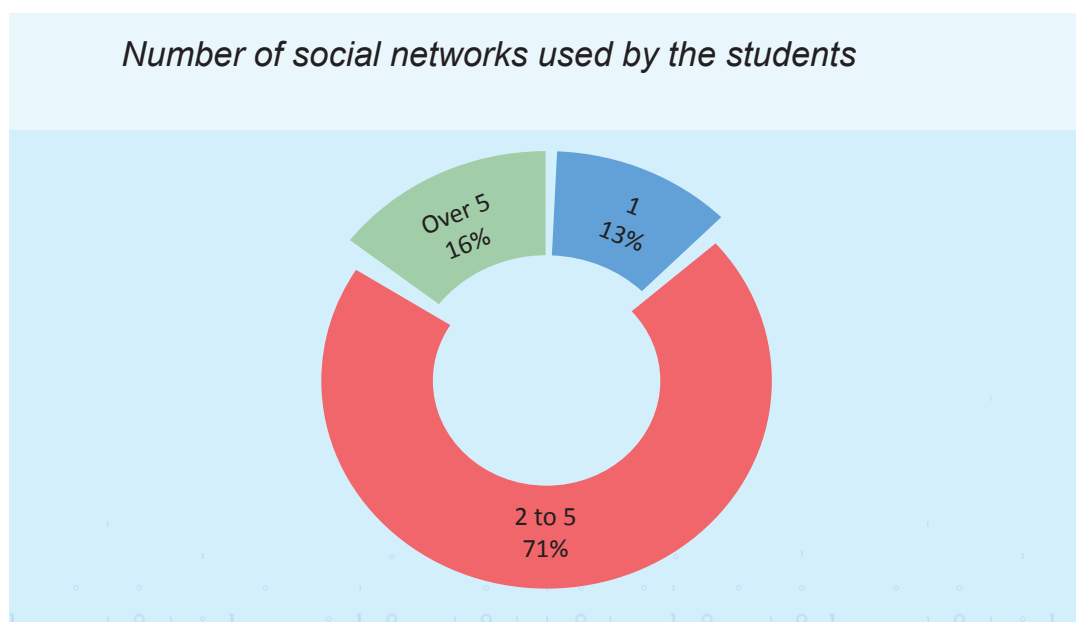
The wish to communicate through images is noticed with youths' preference to use a new tool as Snapchat with less than two years from its worldwide success, this network having the video as main communication exchange, occupies the third place of preference with 51% of teenagers, whom have an account in this network.

This trend seems to be in line with trends of all youths worldwide, whom find attractive the communication with images and videos by sharing with their friends.



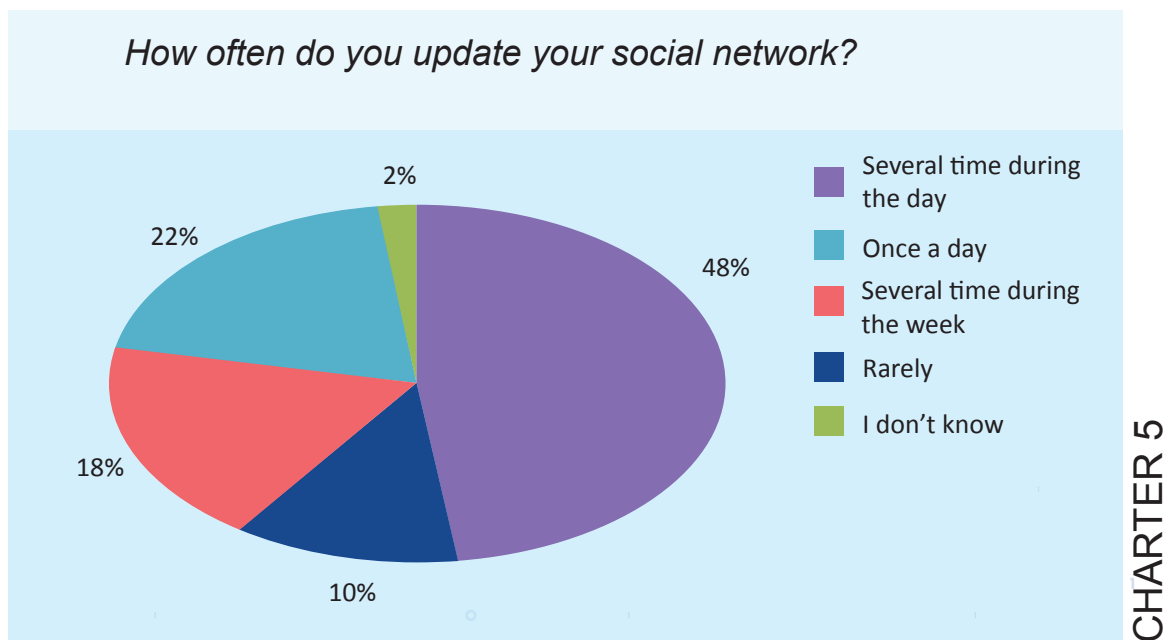
This trend is noticed also by the fact that the most popular social network worldwide, Facebook, with more than 1.7 billion users is a second preference for Albanian youth, while twitter is the sixth preferred. It is noticed that 30% of the youth use social network that are not so popular due to the preferences and their interest in such applications. Some of the most mentioned networks are Pinterest, Tumblr, Vine, We tirk, Ask. fm, Wish.com, KIK, 500px, Stardoll, Weheartit, Candiid, Phhphoto, etc.

This trend of Albanian teens to communicate through social networks is noted in the charter no. 4 regarding the number of social networks being used by each of them. It results that 13% of them have at least one social network profile, while the majority of students 71% have at from 2 up to 5 social networks profiles. The remaining 16% have declared that are subscribed in more than 5 social networks.



Membership in many social networks seems like an addiction, similar to pathologic behaviors and psychological disorders. These effects that affect children online may bring up psychological reactions as fear, anxious, compassion, desires, etc., which affect directly their real life.

Almost half of the interviewed or 48% declare that they update their profile several times a day by uploading photos, videos, statuses, and information or all together. By analyzing numbers, the percentage that update their profile very often (considering categories that update several times daily, only once daily and several times weekly) composes 2/3 of students interviewed, so 75% of them.



According to the study published by Hungarian Data Protection Authority “On the safe and conscious use of internet by children”, since the 90s, in the bibliography of psychological and psychiatric studies, topics on addiction and abnormal use of internet were included. Recently, additional issues were added to these studies as pathologic behaviors and use of social networks. The recent literature of psychology has analyzed the impact of Facebook phenomenon with regard to human relations, individuals’ personality as well as society structural changes. New and modern techniques are being used by experts related to various online behaviors influence parts of the brain. But how do these behaviors affect children?

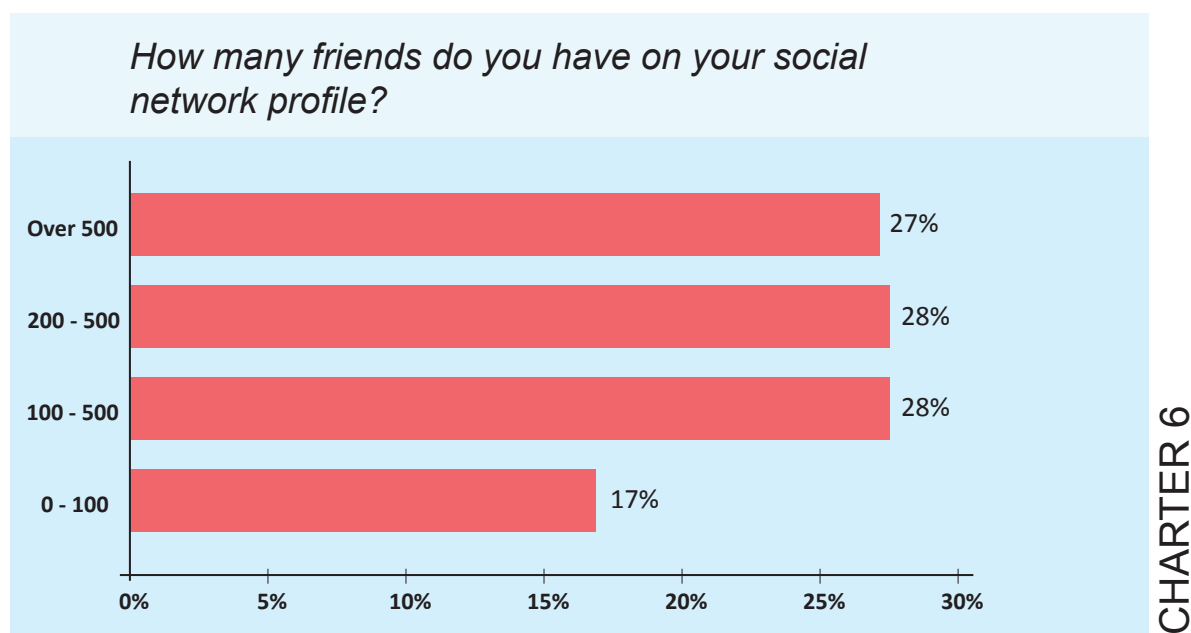
Something is for certain, children, teenagers and Albanian youth are increasingly using the online communication due to the massive use of smart phones which have replaced personal and static computers and awareness should be increased with family members, teachers and institutional stakeholders in order to avoid various problems that may appear.

The importance of privacy protection and data security when using social networks is closely linked to the practices used by teenagers. The friends’ number in the social network, their acquaintances in the real life, as well as technological knowledge to protect privacy when using social profiles, are some of the indicators of online privacy risks and security.

The more information is shared on social networks, the bigger is the number of “real unknown friends”, and the greatest is the possibility of abuse of personal data.

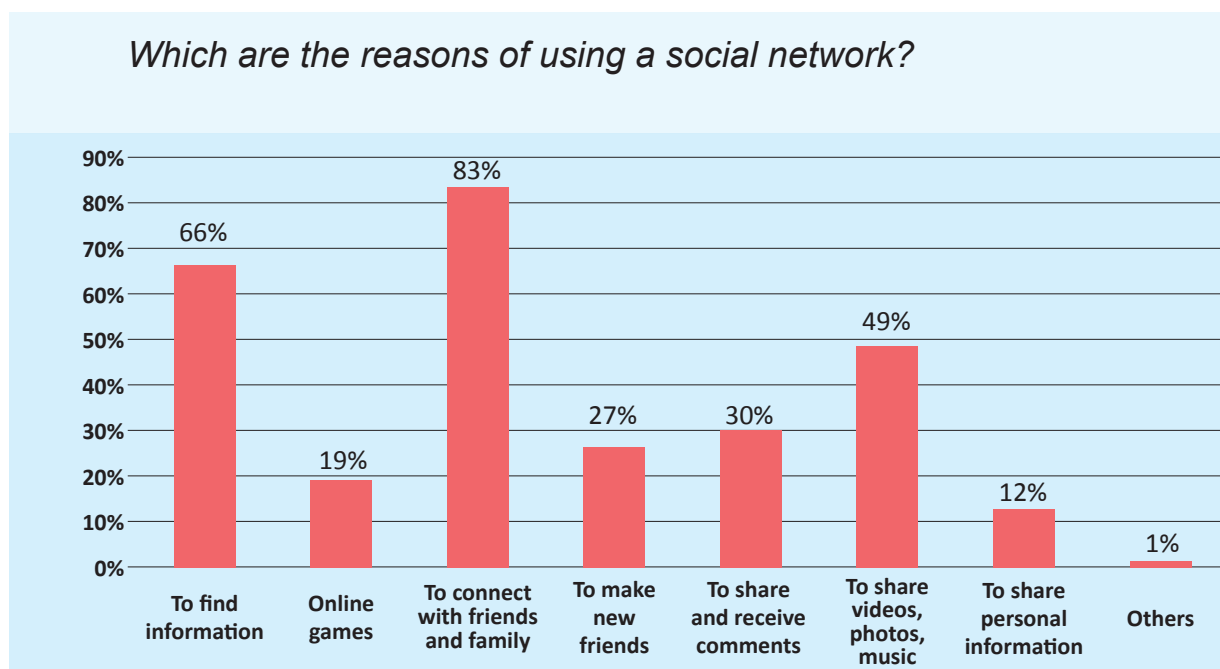


Thus, 45% of students accept that they have less than 200 friends in their account, while more than the half, 55% of the interviewed students have more than 200 virtual friends. At the charter below it is noticed that there is a trend to have many friends drawing its attention to the fact that the students that have more than 500 friends, consist the 27% of the total, versus 17% of students that have less than 100 friends.



A 2011 survey, carried out by the British Center EU Kids Online entitled “Social networking, age and privacy”, indicated that 38% of children of 13-16 years old of 26 countries of the European Union had more than 100 friends in their account. In the meantime, a 2013 survey in Hungary evidenced that 33% of children from 9-13 years old have 110 to 300 friends in their account and 13% of them have more than 300 friends.

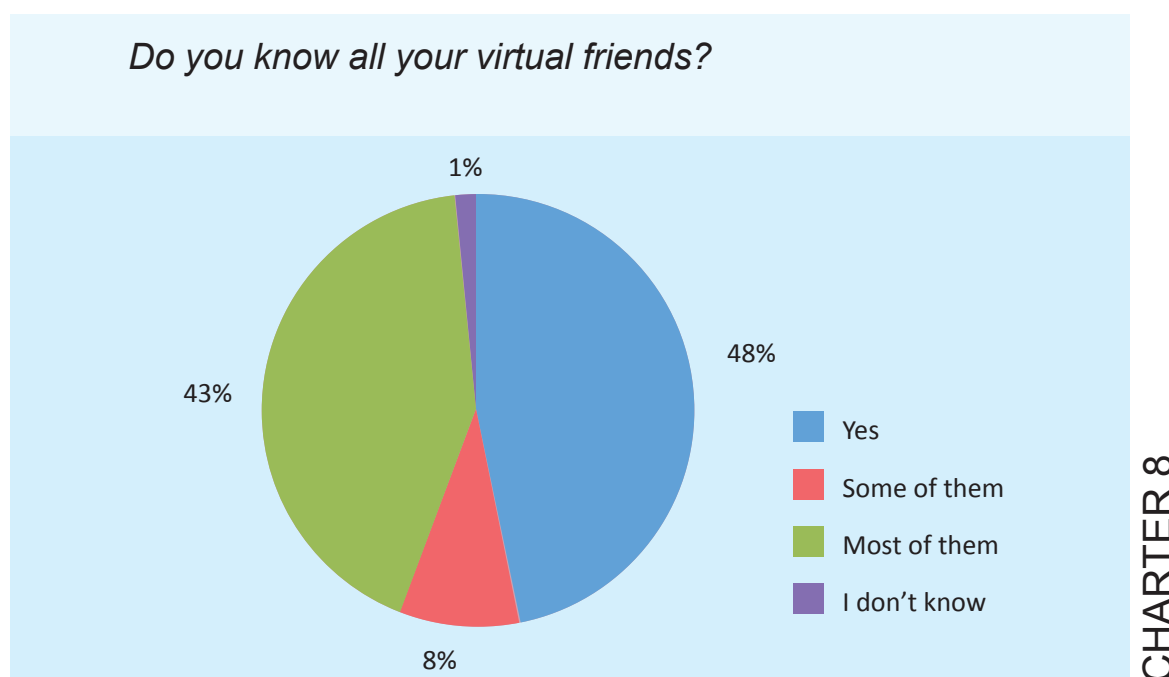
The interviewed students highlighted that the main reason they use social networks is for contacting their family and friends. This is for 88% of the interviewed. 66% of them declared that they use personal data to seek information and 49% to share video/photo/music with friends. In the rank of these preferences, the online games are less preferred. Important to this survey is the percentage of students that use social networks to make friends. 27% of the interviewed stated that they use their account for this purpose.



## CHARTER 7

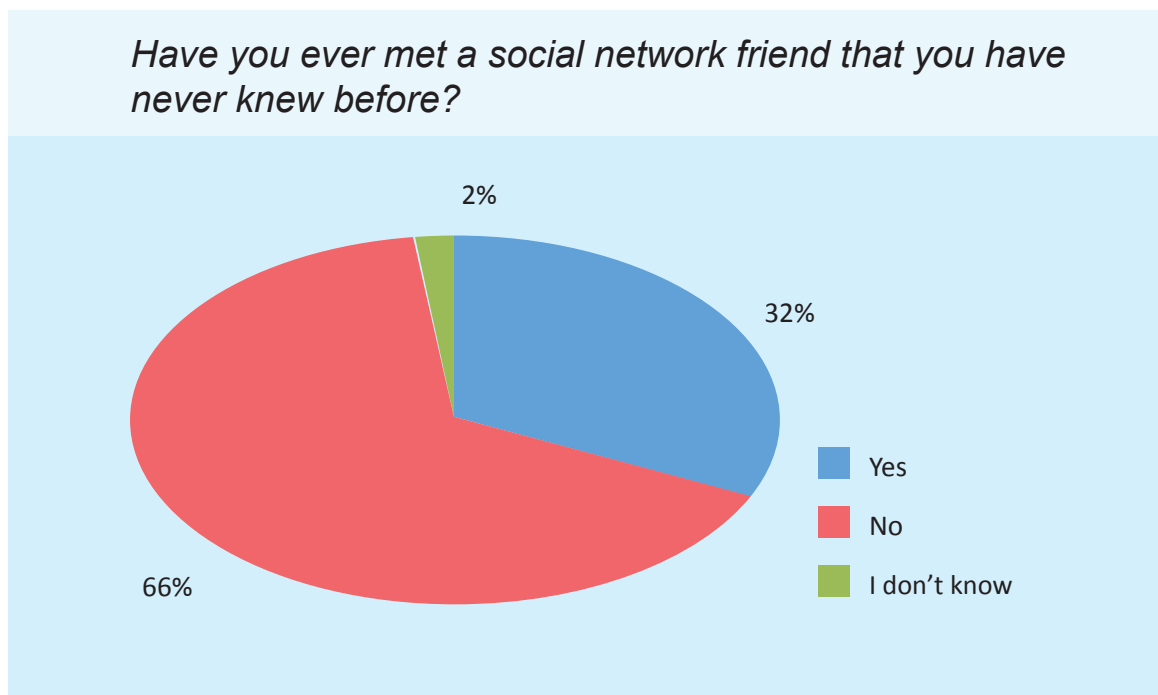
Making new friends through social networks without knowing them in the real life, is a behavior that affect directly the children's life and may have negative consequences for which this group age is not aware of.

The result of the question “Do you know all your friends in social networks?” shows that 48% of the students accepted that they were familiar to them. Meanwhile, 43% said that they know some or the majority of their friends in the social network they use, while 8% of them declare that they know only some friends. Referring to the last number, we acknowledge youth’s trend to make more friends and communication through social networks and simultaneously their trend to make online new friendships. This practice may constitute a danger factor for the private life and personal data which may be copied, revised, published or used for various purposes including threats, abusive behaviors, intimidation, etc.



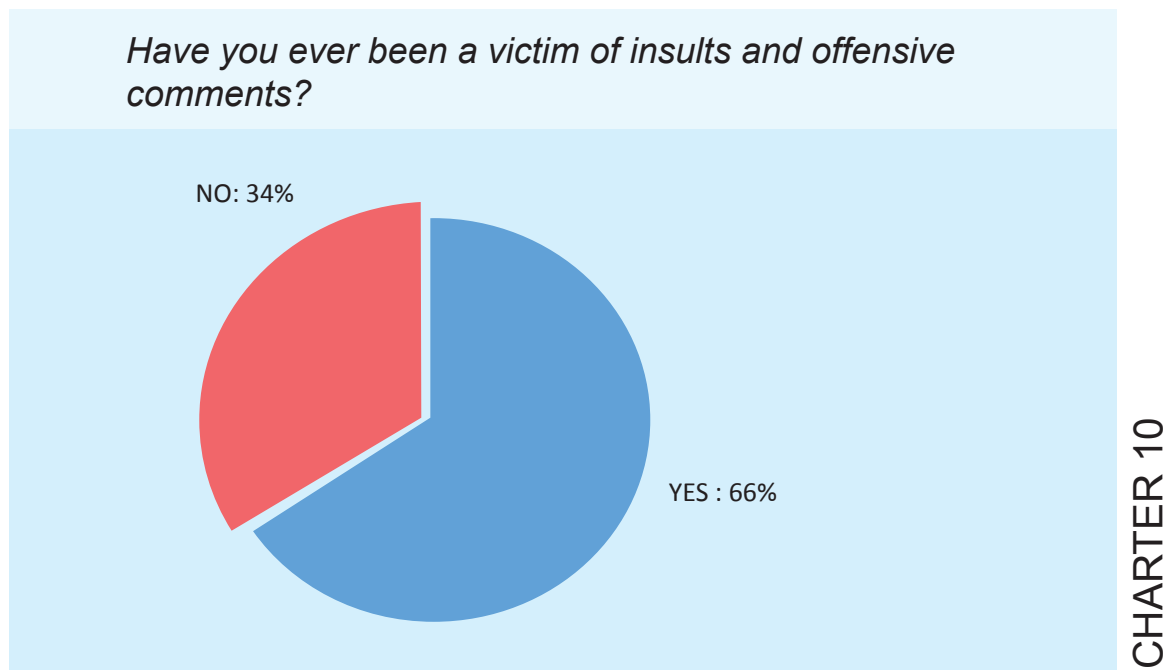
The online communication with strangers is one of the key factors that increase the risk level of the use of social networks, mainly by children. A 2014 survey conducted by World Vision Albania evidenced that in 900 Albanian children of 13-18 years old, 47% of them were contacted online by an individual last year.

This survey evidences that 32% of the students, or approximately 1/3 of them have admitted that they have met a friend with whom have priory initiated an online conversation in a social network.



Knowing people in social networks where the possibility to be hidden under a false profile is very high, requires that children, students, teachers, school psychologists and parents should address this topic in order to raise awareness on potential risks that individuals may face in the real life.

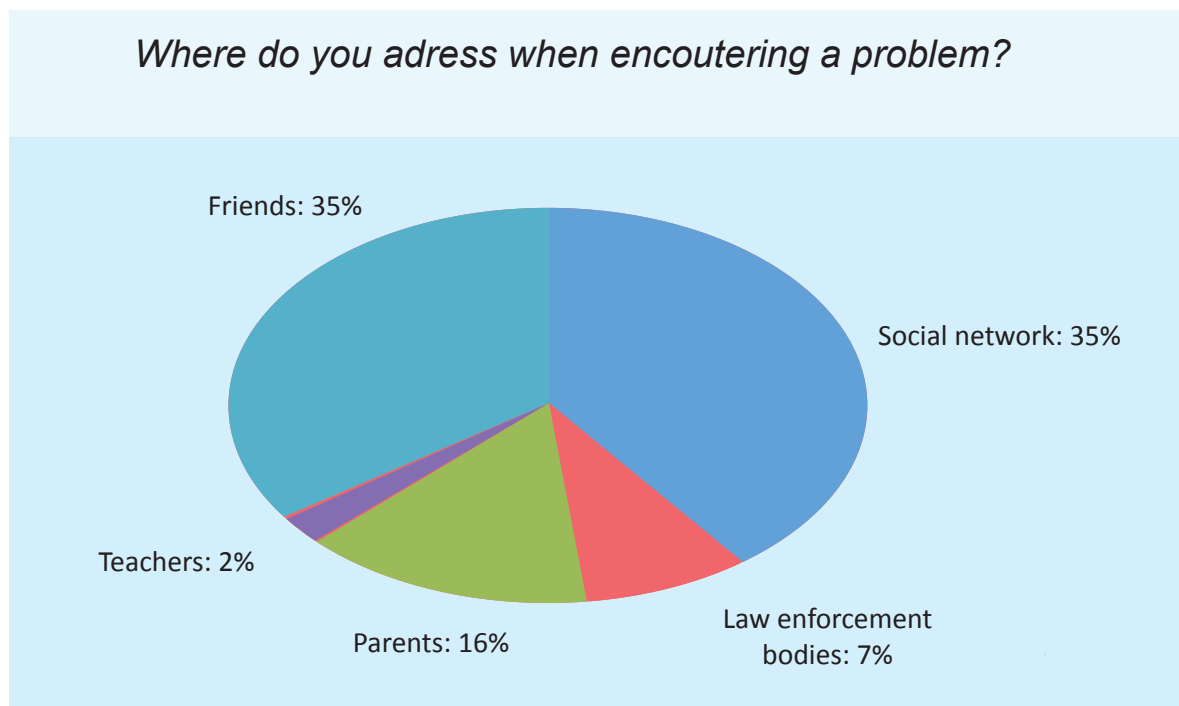
The use of networks and social profiles seems to be an entertaining time with problems, as approximately 2/3 of the interviewed students, accurately 66% of them stated that they had issues with virtual friends by being victim of insults and disrespectful comments.



This high number of students that faced these insults and disrespectful comments during online communication in social profiles is a risk indicator, which should also be taken in consideration by all stakeholders involved in education system, as the psychological and physic consequences may have a high damage for the society.

The alert is mainly falling to the teachers and parents competency regarding best practices of online communication considering the results of the following question.

Referring to the question “To whom you return in case you encounter online problems” 40% of the students admitted that they return to the social network itself to delete comments or other abusive contents, while 35% of them return to friends. A small percentage of 16% return to parents, as a smaller percentage address to law enforcement bodies as police and prosecution. As the last alternative, teachers are likely to be the one to return in case of any problem in the social network.

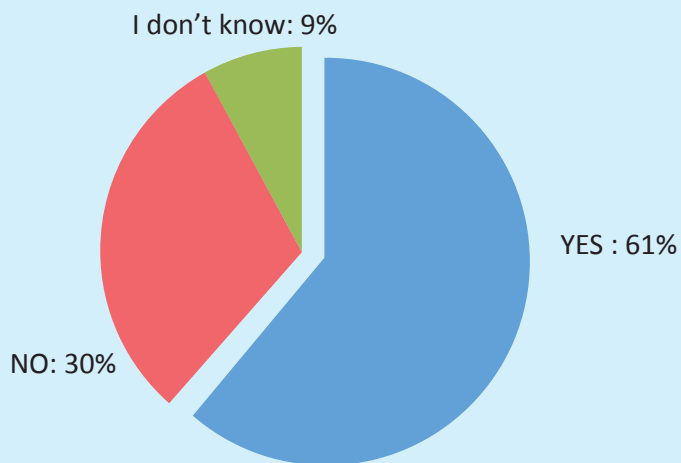


During the conversations with students, they revealed the lack of trust in their parents, law enforcement agencies or teachers because of their reduced knowledge regarding online communication. Capability of stakeholders of education sector is imperative for the future of education in Albania.

The three following charters provide an overview of the current information of youths with privacy policies in social networks, as well as security practices they use to get better protected.

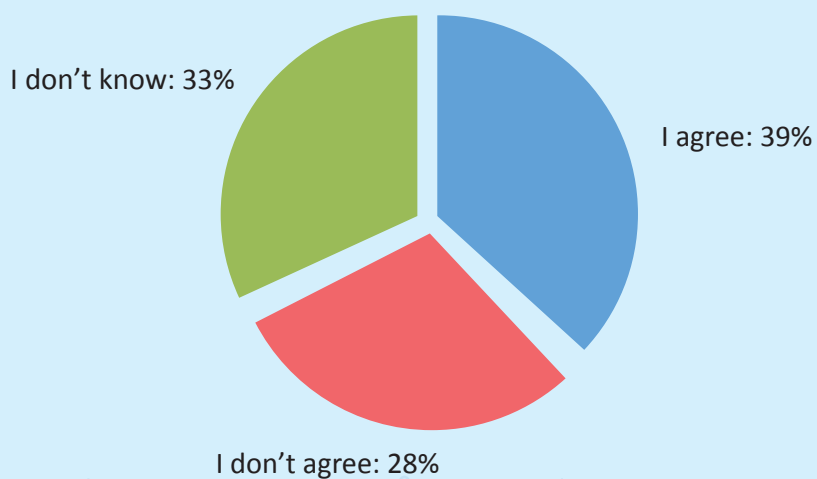
Referring to the question “Do you have knowledge on privacy policies in social networks?” 61% of the students provided positive response, while the other, 39% of the interviewed, weren’t aware of it. As regards to the question “do you think privacy policies are clearly explained in social networks?” only 39% provided a positive answer. In the charter n. 14, it is explained as you may notice that 59% of the youth have knowledge on manners to protect personal data when using internet and only 25% of them does not have knowledge. In the meantime, some other groups are not interested to protect their personal data, namely 16% of them.

*Are you aware on privacy policies on the social network?*



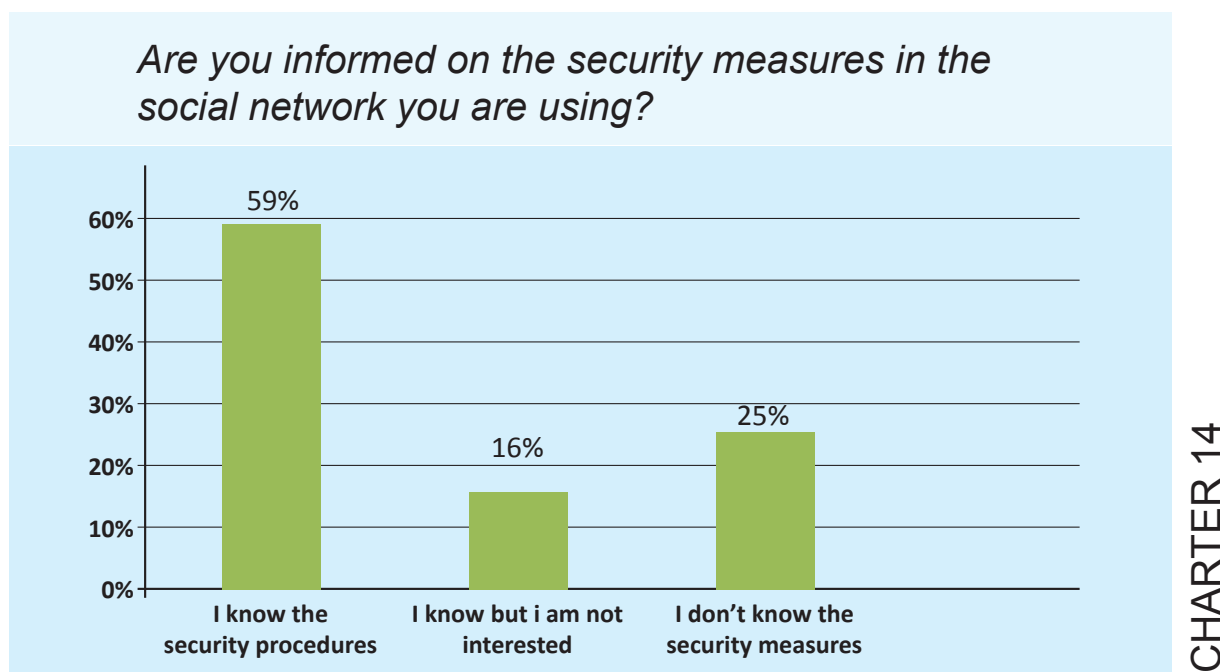
CHAPTER 12

*Do you think that privacy policies are clear enough to be understood?*



CHAPTER 13

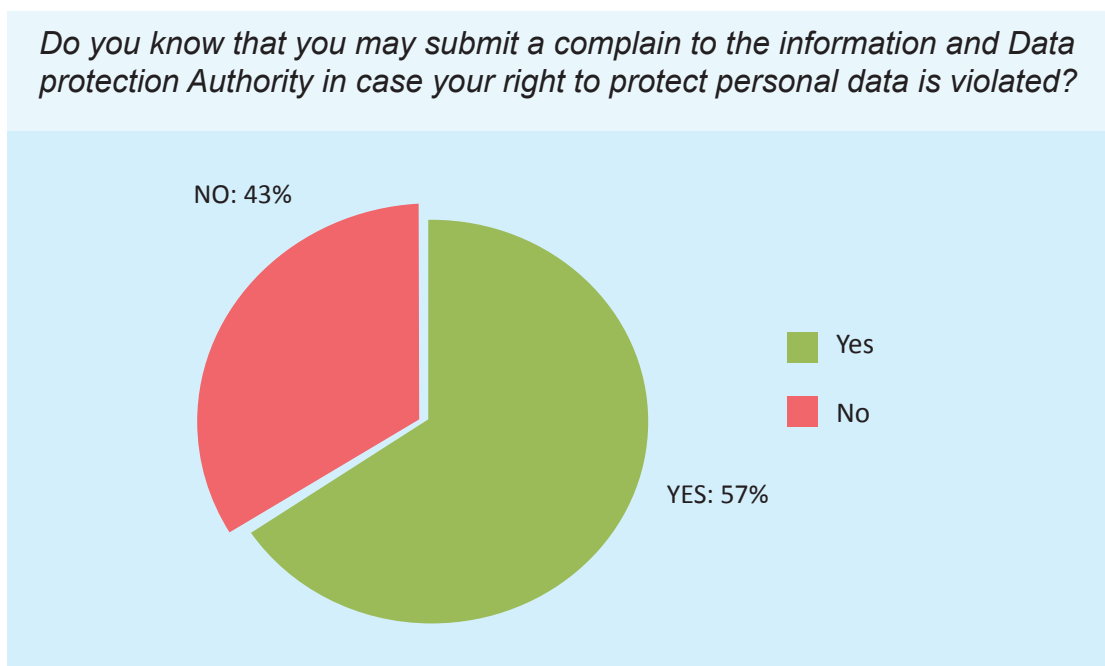




During the conversations with students, it was noticed that they feel unprotected in case of problems or online abuse. One of the main reasons is the lack of knowledge on their constitutional rights and of the public authorities that may assist them in managing their data in order to minimize problems of their personal life.

Referring to the question if students were informed on the Office of Information and Data Protection Commissioner, as the institution where they may address to in case of personal data concerns, more than the half were aware on the data protection authority.

The results of this question may have been improved due to awareness activities conducted by the Commissioner's Office with primary and high school students by distributing several leaflets, which may be found attached to this survey.



## Conclusions

Questionnaire's results indicate unequivocally, that this group age massively use internet services where the main attraction is communication through various social networks. The internet access, which is easily practicable by the use of smartphones, provides communication and information advantages but also could lead to risks that may affect individuals.

This current situation requires additional efforts by all stakeholders involved in the protection of children's rights – family, teachers, psychologists, social employees, law enforcement agencies for a safer digital environment by fostering coordination of resources and exploiting all necessary available instruments to this purpose. The establishment of this safe environment for an efficient protection of children alongside requires raising awareness of this group age in order to manage various risks aiming to prevent or minimize negative consequences from the use of internet in general and from social networks in particular.

Data obtained in this survey indicate that the time spent on social networks occupies a considerable daily activity of teenagers. This relation is not always proportional to youths' school obligations even though social networks are more and more inclusive communication platforms.

There is a trend between the students to have more accounts in various social networks, as well as a massive number of virtual friends. This trend often leads to potential threats as individuals are connecting to people they are not familiar in the real life and the possibility to any problem may occur.

The topic of conflicts appearing in social networks was generally discussed. The students admitted that they return to the social network itself or to friends than parents or family to delete comments or other abusive contents. Furthermore, the youth have good knowledge to report their problems with the respective social network. High school students think that it would be easier to resolve an online problem with the social network or friends rather than with family and teachers.

Only in 18% of the cases, the youth were addressed to the latter. A potential explanation is related with the fact that the knowledge about practice on using social networks are found more in youngest group ages and the trust to resolve problems is dedicated to those who are more informed on the issue.

Although, aware to the protection of their personal data, students are negligent on security measures when using social networks. This is found also by the information obtained in this questionnaire referring to the level of knowledge on privacy policies. Possibly, the language understanding may be a reason of this issue. As well, from the information obtained shows that insults and humiliations should be treated with accountability.

The findings of this study aims to initiate a comprehensive discussion among several institutions. Addressing issues of this group age found in this questionnaire, is important in order to convert the theme of privacy protection in the center of interest of the education system.

The work should involve the legislative framework, draft strategic policies in the education system as well as the implementation in practice. We believe that the advantages of the internet access are massive and the digital environments shall increase but also we know today that some problems may arise.

Therefore, we believe that in Albania as well, it is time to address with accountability these topics in order to give them efficient solutions. The Office of Information and Data Protection Commissioner considers this campaign as a success due to massive interest of students and teachers on data protection and security on the internet.

In the future, the Commissioner's Office shall extend its cooperation with the education stakeholders to develop such awareness activities in primary schools where pupils may need more information due to their younger age.

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