Die Drogenbeauftragte der Bundesregierung

Drug Commissioner of the Federal Government

The Importance of Being Earnest about MMORPGs - Policy Options to Manage Internet and Video Game Addiction Risks

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Conference

„Promotion of Mental Health and Well-Being of Children and Young People – Making it Happen“

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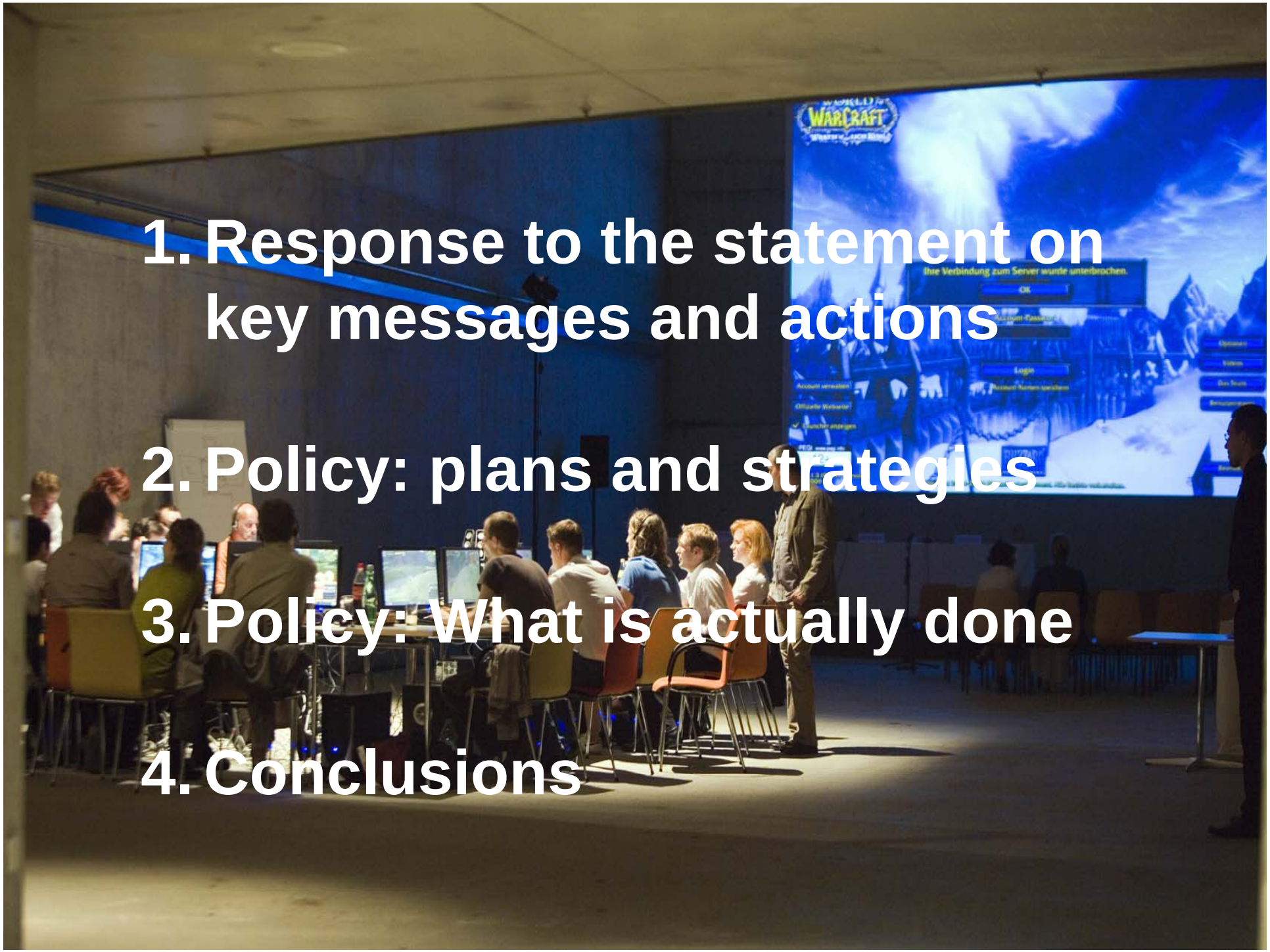
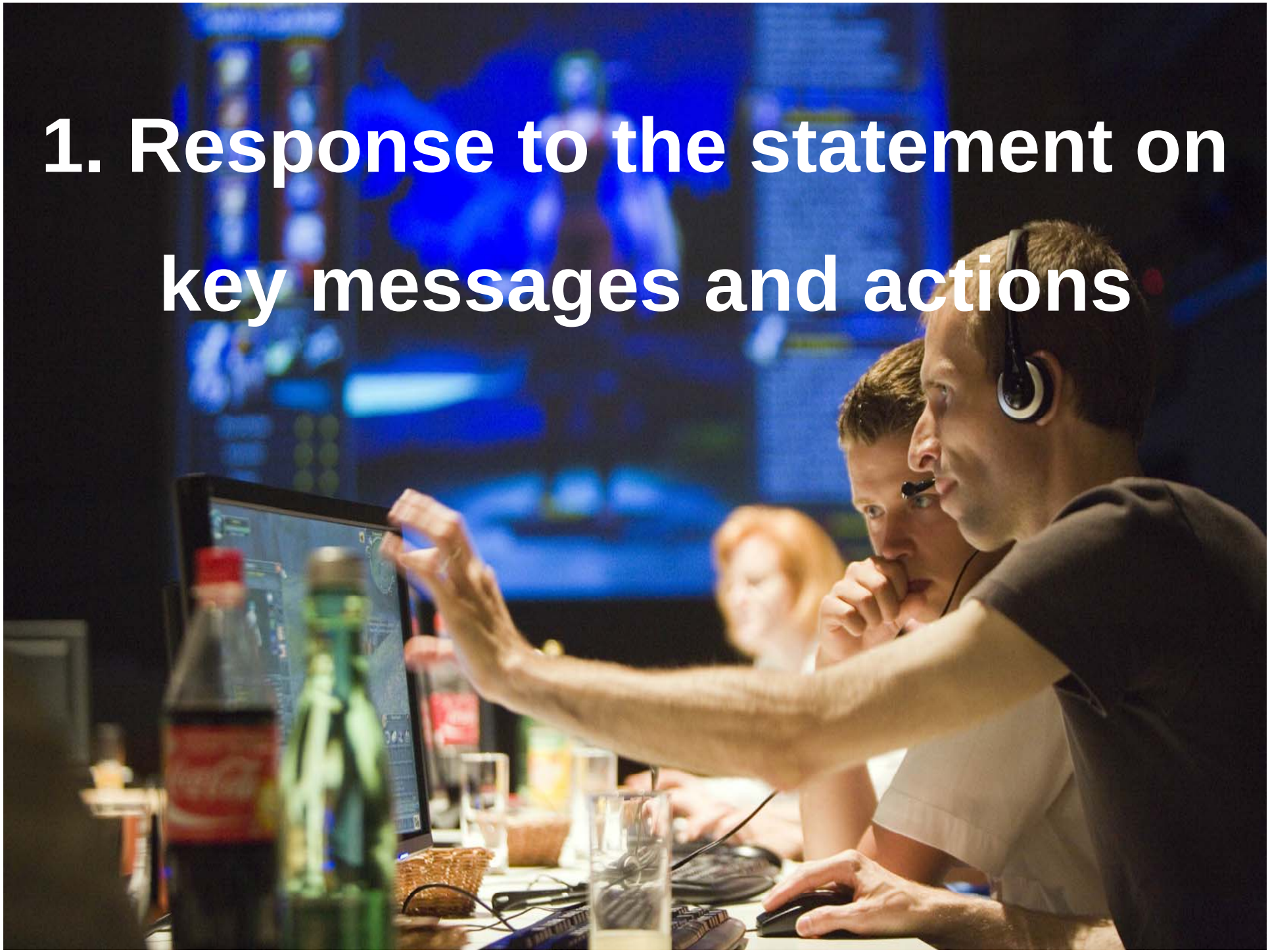


1. Response to the statement on key messages and actions
2. Policy: plans and strategies
3. Policy: What is actually done
4. Conclusions

1. Response to the statement on key messages and actions



1. Response to the statement on key messages and actions

- new media technologies have been embraced rather uncritically by opinion-formers and politicians

- the public critical debate has just begun

1. Response to the statement on key messages and actions

- topics NOT included:
  - cyber-bullying, abuse or online pornography
- included:
  - internet and video game addiction

1. Response to the statement on key messages and actions

- inclusion of non-substance-related addictions marks a shift in drug and addiction policy in Germany
- provides an opportunity to enhance political and public awareness for the problem

1. Response to the statement on key messages and actions

- practical problem:

  health insurance only covers diseases listed in the ICD

→ patients from more vulnerable groups are less likely to receive adequate treatment

→ ethical problem: this undermines the ethical principle of solidarity that lies at the heart of the German health system

1. Response to the statement on key messages and actions

- related problems:

→ objective discourse about the prevalence of internet and video game addiction is difficult

→ danger of a misallocation of spare (financial) resources

1. Response to the statement on key messages and actions

good news:

- problem of internet and video game addiction is recognised
- political stakeholders are willing to respond

- the discussion focuses on practical issues:
  - exact diagnosis
  - exact description of symptoms
  - number of persons affected
  - prevention
  - counselling and therapy

1. Response to the statement on key messages and actions

extent of the problem: data for Germany are scarce, but suggest that

- 5-10 % of all 14-16 year-olds are excessive users
  (= more than 4.5 hours average daily online or playing time)

- 3% are addicted, i.e. show
  - loss of control
  - craving
  - tolerance
  - withdrawal
  - negative consequences for work and education

- 2.7 % are male, 0.3 % are female

2. Policy: plans and strategies

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The Bundestag has agreed on June 17th, 2009 to support

- research on
- prevention
- therapy

of media and online addiction

- without additional funding.

2. Policy: plans and strategies

In this decision, the German government was called upon to:

- support the inclusion of internet and video game addiction in the ICD
- support research
- provide more information about technical means of control
- to work together with the federal states to integrate online and new media addiction into existing youth protection regulations
- to work together with the federal states to enhance the media competence of children, young people and adults

3. Policy: What is actually done

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current priorities at the federal level:

- blocking and banning harmful contents
- raising the age limit for offline sales for WoW
- relying on present systems of self-regulation, e.g. PEGI, USK

3. Policy: What is actually done

A study on “counselling and treatment for pathological internet use" by the German Center for Addiction Research in Childhood and Adolescence (DZSKJ) has shown that

- 70 % of all institutions already use the ICD-10 criteria for diagnosis
- only 9 % of all cases were female
- 70 % of all male persons were between 15 and 24 years old
- in 90 % of all cases, peers played the decisive role for the motivation to seek counselling

(Petersen et al. 2009)

4. Conclusions

4. Conclusions (1)

→ boundary between excessive, but harmless use and addiction has to be defined

→ internet and video game addiction should be recognised as an independent diagnosis in the ICD in order to make treatment affordable for vulnerable groups

→ more research into the causes and effects of internet and video game addiction use is required, especially on the effects of long-time use on health and social performance

4. Conclusions (2)

→ as boys seem to run a ten-times higher risk to develop an addiction, a gender-sensitive approach is necessary

→ additional resources for research, counselling, treatment and prevention are required

→ media education for adults is the key for successful prevention of internet and video game addiction

Tack så mycket !

Thank you very much !

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This paper was produced for a meeting organized by Health & Consumers DG and represents the views of its author on the subject. These views have not been adopted or in any way approved by the Commission and should not be relied upon as a statement of the Commission's or Health & Consumers DG's views. The European Commission does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this paper, nor does it accept responsibility for any use made thereof.