



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Information Society and Media Directorate-General

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Safer Internet and online technologies for children

This document has been prepared by the Commission's services for consultation purposes. It does not in any way prejudice, or constitute the announcement of, any position on the part of the Commission on the issues covered.

Practical information

- ❖ The consultation is being launched in English, with an electronic version of the document. If you have received the document by mail and wish to reply electronically, please go to the website indicated below or send an e-mail to the address given below.
- ❖ Interested parties are invited to send their comments, suggestions and replies to the following questionnaire to the Commission **by 07 June 2007 at the latest** using one of the following means of communication:

- Internet: <http://ec.europa.eu/saferinternet>
- E-mail: saferinternetconsultation@ec.europa.eu
- Post:

*European Commission
Directorate-General for Information Society and Media
Unit E-6 Safer Internet and eContent
For the attention of Mr Richard Swetenham*

- ❖ Electronic contributions received in reply to the consultation will be published on the Internet at the above-mentioned address. Publication online will be regarded as acknowledgement of receipt of your contribution by the Commission. For replies sent in paper form, an acknowledgement of receipt will be sent within 15 working days of receipt.

If you do not wish your contribution to be made public, please indicate this clearly at the beginning of your reply. In that case, your reply will also not be mentioned in future documents which may refer to this consultation.

- ❖ If you are replying on behalf of an organisation, please state your name, address and official title in your reply. Any reply on behalf of an organisation which does not state the interests which it represents or the extent to which it is representative of the sector (number of members, size of organisation in relation to the sector to which its members belong) will be regarded as an individual reply and not a collective one.

At the end of the period during which contributions are accepted, after reading and analysing all the replies received, the Commission will prepare a report summarising how the consultation was carried out and the main points emerging. Contributions that you do not wish to be made public will not be mentioned in this document.

Public consultation questionnaire

The use of online technologies being more and more spread throughout Europe, this also implies a number of risks for the users, both children and adults. An increasing number of children use the Internet for various purposes: finding information for school work, read news, searching for information about hobbies/interests, playing games, participating in competitions and quizzes, downloading, listening and watching music and films, communicating with friends and getting new friends through own home pages, social networking sites, chats, instant messaging services, e-mail and mobile phones. However, when doing so children are also exposed to a wide range of risks.

Most of the risks that children encounter when using online technologies are not specific to them - the risks are the same for adults - and they are not confined to their use of online technologies as they may encounter the same risks in the real life as well.

However, the consequences for children can be more severe as they are considered to be more vulnerable:

- they use the technologies differently from adults, and;
- even though they are expert users of online technologies, sometimes excelling the expertise of their parents, they do not necessarily have the experience and knowledge to keep safe in an online environment;
- a specific risk is associated with the fact that there is a gap between what the parents think they know about their children's use of online technologies, and what they actually know.

The online environment now encompasses Internet, mobile phones and game consoles. What these technologies have in common is the way that children and adults communicate through them, and the fact that they can access illegal and potentially harmful content through them.

Protecting children online means taking into consideration the fact that children themselves are users of the technologies and therefore might be exposed to both potentially harmful content and conduct, such as bullying, harassment and online grooming for sexual abuse (i.e. strangers “making friends” with children with a view to meeting them). But the online environment has also become the primary channel for distribution of evidence of sexual abuse of children. The production and distribution of such material is considered illegal in most European countries, and has severe consequences for the children involved.

Possible means of addressing the risks linked to the use of online technologies can involve a large variety of actors at different levels, such as public administration in the Member States, childcare organisations, industry (content and service providers, software producers etc), financial institutions, schools, parents and the European Commission.

The European Commission has addressed these issues through a succession of Safer Internet programmes. The current Safer Internet plus programme will end in 2008. In order to create a basis for deciding whether to propose a follow-up programme from 2009 onwards or not, the Commission is conducting an impact assessment process.

The Commission will use a variety of sources of information¹ to analyse what is needed to make the online environment and communication technologies safe for children in particular, how to meet the needs, what stakeholders should be involved in meeting them and in particular what role the Commission can play.

The purpose of the following questionnaires is to gather the knowledge and views of the relevant stakeholders. Its starting point is the perspective of the child using communication technologies, the risks associated with their use as well as other ways in which children are at risk in an online environment. The objective is to get a full picture of the possible risks and of the best means and ways to address them.

The European Commission recently carried out an online consultation on the specific issues related to child safety and mobile phone services². The responses to that consultation will also feed into this process.

Finally, the Commission is currently working on a Communication on Media Literacy to be adopted by the end of 2007, which would represent a first step to a European policy on Media Literacy adding a further building block to European audiovisual policy. In this framework a public consultation on Media Literacy was carried out between October and December 2006. Its results will be published in April 2007³.

¹ See annex

² http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/public_consultation/index_en.htm

³ http://ec.europa.eu/comm/avpolicy/media_literacy/consultation/index_en.htm

Annex I

Sources of information

Can you indicate other sources of which the Commission should use, such as user surveys?

Existing sources include:

1. Evaluations of the Safer Internet Action Plan (1999 to 2004) and the Safer Internet *plus* programme

Implementation report of Safer Internet *plus* (2005-Mid-2006)

Ex-ante evaluation for Safer Internet *plus*

Final evaluation of Safer Internet 2003 – 2004

Evaluation of Safer Internet 1999 - 2002

Evaluation of Safer Internet 1999 – 2000

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/programme/evaluations/index_en.htm

2. Eurobarometer surveys on Safer Internet

The Eurobarometer survey presents the attitude of European Union citizens towards illegal and harmful content on the Internet and their knowledge of how to protect their children against it.

Eurobarometer survey 2005

Eurobarometer surveys 2003-2004

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/eurobarometer/index_en.htm

3. Child safety and mobile phone services - Public consultation

The public consultation was launched on 25 July 2006 and was open until 16 October 2006. The consultation document "Child safety and Mobile phone services" explored the issues raised by the use of mobile phone services by children and young people.

Public consultation site

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/public_consultation/index_en.htm

Summary report

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/docs/public_consultation/public_consultation_rsults_en.pdf

4. "The Appropriation of New Media by Youth" (Mediappro research project) – final report

Mediappro aims to enhance user safety by identifying how young people appropriate digital media and how their practices differ within different contexts of use (at school and at home, for example).

<http://www.mediappro.org/publications/finalreport.pdf>

5. Recommendation on the Protection of Minors and Human Dignity

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/avpolicy/reg/minors/index_en.htm

6. Media Literacy website

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/avpolicy/media_literacy/index_en.htm

Public consultation on media literacy (results to be published in April 2007)

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/avpolicy/media_literacy/consultation/index_en.htm

Annex II

Questionnaire 1

Fighting illegal content

The definition of illegal content varies from country to country due to differing cultural traditions and national legislations. It can be accessed via the Internet, through mobile phones and game consoles. Even though the definitions of what is illegal content varies across countries, from racist and discrimination material to cyber crime, fraud, hacking, identity theft etc., the production and distribution of child sexual abuse material is considered to have the most severe consequences for children, and it is illegal in most European countries.

The production and distribution of child abuse material is facilitated through commercial websites, user generated web sites and peer-to-peer/file sharing networks.

- 1.1 In your opinion, is there a need beyond the year 2008 to pro-actively fight against illegal content?
- 1.2 If so, please give indications on what kinds of illegal content/material should be dealt with.
- 1.3 Which should be the means of fighting the production and distribution of illegal content, in particular child sexual abuse material, and what stakeholders should take initiatives (industry, governments, NGOs, financial institutions etc.)? Please suggest ways in which the different stakeholders can contribute in fighting against production and online distribution of illegal content.
- 1.4 A central element of the fight against illegal content for the Safer Internet plus Programme has been to support an international network of civilian hotlines where the public can report illegal content, should they chance upon it online. In your opinion, is this the most appropriate way of dealing with illegal content beyond 2008? How could their cooperation with law enforcement agencies be strengthened?
- 1.5 How can other organisations support national/local and international law enforcement agencies in dealing with the production and online distribution of illegal content?
- 1.6 The internet has a global dimension: illegal content can be produced in one country, distributed from a second, and accessed/downloaded in many countries across the world. Please specify which actions should be taken internationally. Are there specific countries which should be focussed on?
- 1.7 Research and development of efficient technological tools (filtering systems, image recognition etc) can contribute to reducing online distribution and indirectly the production of illegal content. Which are the subjects which should be addressed when supporting the development of technologies?
- 1.8 Analysis of psychological effects of victims and studies of how offenders use the Internet to distribute the evidence of the sexual abuse of children can also contribute to the fight against illegal online content. Which are the subjects which should be addressed in these areas when conducting research?
- 1.9 The legal situation concerning online distribution of illegal content and indeed the definitions of what is illegal differ across the EU Member States. Which are the issues which should be addressed when harmonising legal provisions across Member States?

Questionnaire 2

Fighting harmful content

Harmful content is content that potentially can be harmful or dangerous for children, and includes content which parents and carers do not want their child to have access to. It can be accessed through Internet, mobile phones and game consoles. What is considered harmful for children varies across cultures. However, in most cases it ranges from pornography, violence, racism, xenophobia, self-mutilation, anorexia, suicide sites, dangerous sects or hate speech to child sexual abuse material.

Risks for children who are exposed to harmful/unwanted content are psychological trauma and encouragement of harmful behaviour, such as violence against oneself (self-mutilation, developing eating disorders, and suicide) and others (inflicting violence or sexual abuse of others, bullying, happy slapping etc). In addition, accessing and downloading such content can give rise to security risks: viruses, spam, hacking, identity theft which may cause financial problems and damage to the computer, inadequate advertising, copyright infringement and co-participation in an illegal activity.

- 2.1 In your opinion, is there a need beyond the year 2008 to pro-actively fight against harmful content? If so, please give indications on what kinds of harmful content/material (subjects to be covered) should be dealt with.
- 2.2 Which are the means of fighting the production and distribution of harmful content and what stakeholders (media, governments, industry, NGOs, schools etc) should take initiatives? Please suggest ways in which the different stakeholders can contribute in the fight against the online distribution of harmful content.
- 2.3 In your opinion, should the media take an active part in the awareness-raising in this sphere and in what way?
- 2.4 Which role could education have in empowering children to deal appropriately with harmful content? Should it be integrated into school curricula? If so, which would be the best ways of doing so?
- 2.5 A primary activity of the fight against harmful content for the Safer Internet plus Programme has been to support an international network of awareness nodes which promote public campaigns informing the public of the risks linked to the use of online technologies and on safeguard measures. In your opinion, is this the most appropriate way of dealing with harmful content beyond 2008? If so, please indicate in what ways this line of action can be strengthened.
- 2.6 Efficient technologies can help to make the use of the Internet, mobile phones and game consoles safer for children to use (eg. filtering software by Internet Service Providers or at user's computer, age verification mechanisms etc). Which are the subjects which should be addressed when supporting the development of technological tools?
- 2.7 Research on sociological issues and analysis of psychological effects of particularly of the harm to children on different kinds of harmful content can contribute to building knowledge about how to deal with these issues. Which are the subjects which should be addressed in these areas when conducting research?

Questionnaire 3

User- generated content and online communication

Children and adults alike use online technologies for communication. It takes place in a number of different ways; through mobiles, e-mail exchange, sites which facilitate users to create profiles, virtual networks, image exchange sites, Instant Messaging Services, blogs, chats and peer-to-peer services, dating sites and other "social networking sites" and user interactive services. Amongst others, the risks for children using these features are grooming, disclosure of sensitive personal information/images, exposure to harmful content (pornography, sexual speech, violence etc) encouragement to harmful behaviour (e.g. happy slapping"), bullying and harassment.

Internet allows both children and adults to create their own content ("user-generated content") and make it accessible to other users through Internet or mobile phones. Children are particularly vulnerable as they more easily disclose sensitive personal data (information and images), they sometimes engage in behaviour that is risky to themselves and can quickly get out of hand. They can also get traumatic experiences when confronted with illegal and harmful content or conduct. In addition, their use is in some cases associated with copyright infringement.

- 3.1 Which are the best means of addressing these risks with the aim of child online protection, in particular grooming and bullying? Which stakeholders should be responsible for initiatives in this field, and what roles should they have (industry, media, governments, schools, NGOs etc)?
- 3.2 Can you name further, not listed risks or further potentially dangerous forms of communication? Which are the best means and ways of addressing them?
- 3.3. Which role could education have in empowering children to deal appropriately with harmful and illegal user-generated content? Should such issues be integrated into school curricula? If so, which would be the best ways of doing so?
- 3.4 Should the media take an active part in the awareness-raising in this sphere and in what way?
- 3.5 A central element for the Safer Internet plus Programme in making Internet safer for children has been to support an international network of awareness nodes which promote public campaigns informing the public of the risks linked to the use of online technologies and on safeguard measures. In your opinion, is this the most appropriate way of dealing with communication risks and user-generated content beyond 2008? If so, please indicate in what ways this line of action can be strengthened.
- 3.6 Development of efficient technologies can help to make the use of the online communication safer (e.g. monitoring social networking sites, age verification systems etc). Which are the subjects which should be addressed when supporting the development of technologies within this field?
- 3.7 Research on sociological issues concerning use of online technologies, particularly how children themselves perceive risks, how offenders use online technologies to get into contact with children, the effects of grooming and bullying on children, as well as analysis of effective awareness-raising methods, can help to understand better how trends, behaviours and risks evolve in the society and to formulate awareness-raising initiatives in this field. Which are the subjects which should be addressed in these areas when conducting research?
- 3.8 The legal situation concerning grooming online differs across the EU Member States. Which are the issues which should be addressed when harmonising legal provisions across the Member States?