

**Implementation of the Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU:  
Testing of 20 Social Networks in Europe  
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## **YAHOO!EUROPE**

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### **Introduction**

Yahoo! has two services that were evaluated. Flickr is primarily a picture-sharing service i.e. a site for posting one's own pictures and viewing other people's pictures. Users can make their pictures visible to everyone, or just to certain social networks, they can search for their friends' photos and there are various other functionalities. In Yahoo! Answers, users post their own questions about any topic, they may supply answers for other people's questions, they may search for question topics to see what has been covered in the past, they can vote on other people's answers, or, for example, read an Answer's blog.

The reason why both services are included in this test is that both services have some SNS elements, mainly user profiles, but also the opportunity for other users to communicate e.g. in terms of comments regarding pictures posted in the case of Flickr. For both Flickr and Yahoo! Answers the minimum age of users is 13 years old.

This declaration covers the two different services and it is not always specified exactly how issues are handled for each of the services. That said, there were areas in the principles which the self-declaration did not address. As regards tests, Flickr did not have all the elements claimed in the self-declaration (principles 3 and 4), whereas Yahoo! Answers was compliant with its self-declaration.

### **The principles**

*Principle 1: Raise awareness of safety education messages and acceptable use policies to users, parents, teachers and carers in a prominent, clear and age-appropriate manner*

In the self-declaration, the provider includes information about the terms of use as well as the additional *Community Guidelines* for its different services. Safety information is noted at various places in the document, while the *Privacy Centre*, amongst other locations, provides privacy guidance. The declaration says that because young people gain an understanding of safety issues from peers, the priority is to target information at children. The document notes that this information is shown in a prominent fashion, widely available (typically at the bottom of the page), and presented in a systematic way and easy to understand language. Guidance regarding inappropriate content and conduct is provided, with an indication of the consequences of breaching the terms of service. The provider has also created targeted advice

to educate and support parents and carers, although there are no comments that explicitly mention teachers.

Flickr: All the policy statements (terms of use, safety, privacy, code of conduct) are easy to find through links at the bottom of the page. Safety tips aimed at children and parents took a little longer, found via FAQs. There was nothing explicitly addressed to teachers. The advice was always easy to understand for children of various ages and adults, and certainly sufficient in terms of raising a range of issues. Clear examples of the types of content and conduct that will not be tolerated are provided, as is an indication of the consequences of breaching the terms of conduct (e.g. pictures deleted, account suspended). Of the risky material tested, the Flickr site only explicitly mentions bullying, someone doing something to make me feel uncomfortable (the nearest item to stranger danger) and no nude pictures (the nearest item to porn and sexually provocative photos) – there is nothing explicitly on hate speech (maybe less relevant for a picture site), violence, divulging personal information and images of child abuse: at best, more general comments are contained in the community guidelines.

Overall, since the principle explicitly mentions that providers ‘should’ supply teachers with material, and there is nothing in the self-declaration (nor anything on the site) explicitly for teachers (only the wider concept of ‘carers’ who receive the same material as parents), the self-declaration has to be judged partially compliant with the principle. On the other hand, in testing, in general the site does what it claims to do in the self-declaration – e.g. guidance is provided.

Yahoo! Answers: All the policy statements (terms of use, safety, privacy, code of conduct) are easy to find through links at the bottom of the page. Safety tips could also be found there, addressed to children and to parents ‘and carers’ but not explicitly to teachers. The advice was always easy to understand for children of various ages and adults, and certainly sufficient in terms of raising a range of issues. Clear examples of the types of content and conduct that will not be tolerated are provided, as is an indication of the consequences of breaching the terms of conduct (e.g. account terminated). The declaration mentions most of the items listed in the test (hate speech, porn, violence, bullying, stranger danger, divulging personal information and posting sexually provocative photos), but not self-harm.

Overall, since the principle mentions that providers ‘should’ supply teachers with material, and there is nothing explicitly for teachers (nor anything on the site distinct from the material for parents), the self-declaration has to be judged partially compliant with the principles. On the other hand, in testing, in general the site does what it claims to do in the self-declaration.

### *Principle 2: Work towards ensuring that services are age-appropriate for the intended audience*

It is made clear in the self-declaration that community services (such as Yahoo! Answers and Flickr) are not appropriate for children under 13, but since the declaration covers different services, it is not specified how the minimum age is made clear to users (given that this detail varies by service). The self-declaration states that there are steps to deny access to under-age users (although it does not say what the steps are – but again, this may vary by service). It does, however, state that the profile of anyone discovered to be under-age (i.e. who lied about their age) will be deleted. One mechanism to support compliance with the minimum age requirement is that the date of birth originally provided cannot be modified, although there is no mention of further steps to prevent those users re-registering. We are told in the self-declaration that advice and material for parents is provided and where (‘help pages’). The provider indicates the user flagging system (as well as a company reviewers and technical solutions) to counter inappropriate content. As regards contact, the provider notes the profiles are not, in any case, as developed as in dedicated SNSs and not searchable, but there are a

number of other mechanisms in place to make these private, safety messages about posting content and the ability to block contact.

Flickr: It is clear on the Flickr site that the minimum age is 13, and when registering for a Yahoo! account applicants have to give date of birth (although there is no email verification system). At the next stage, correctly, Flickr rejected the attempt to sign on as an 11 year old, with the message that the applicant was under 13. Since the 11 year old Yahoo! details could not be changed, as noted in the declaration, a different age and name for a new Yahoo! account was submitted, and the user was able to go onto Flickr as a 15 year old – so the user could have been an 11 year old pretending to be a 15 year old.

Overall, the provider has reacted to some suggestions in the principle, and so the declaration has to be judged compliant with the principles. In terms of testing, the mechanism for blocking under-age access could be better, but since it did what was claimed in the self-declaration to must be judged compliant.

Yahoo! Answers: As in Flickr, it is clear on the Yahoo! Answers site that the minimum age is 13, and when registering for a Yahoo! account applicants have to give a date of birth. Even a person registered as an 11 year old can view questions, but when such a user tries to react to them, correctly, Yahoo! Answers did not allow this saying the person was not old enough. Since the 11 year old Yahoo! details could not be changed as noted in the declaration, as in the test for Flickr, a different age and name for a new Yahoo! account was submitted, and the user was able to go onto Yahoo! Answers as a 15 year old – so the user could have been an 11 year old pretending to be a 15 year old.

Overall, while the provider has reacted to some suggestions in the principle, and so the declaration has to be judged compliant with the principle. In terms of testing, the mechanism for blocking under-age access could be better, but since it did what was claimed in the self-declaration to must be judged compliant.

### *Principle 3: Empower users through tools and technology*

The document states that under 18 profiles are not searchable and default to private. There are safety messages about connection invitations, and means to block (or advice to ignore) such requests. The declaration says nothing about posting comments on profiles because on neither service can you do this, nor about posting comments on photos (applicable on Flickr). The document notes that there is an easily identifiable (and in practice easy to use) ‘report abuse’ flag for dealing with inappropriate contact (and conduct is implied). The declaration indicates that it has developed advice and guidelines for parents/carers.

Flickr: As specified in the self-declaration, under 18 profiles are not searchable. Users can block others (or rather ‘specific others’, not defining which groups - e.g. age groups - can make contact). Some, limited, parts of the profile appear to be visible to all by default (user name, when he/she joined), while others are by default only visible to my friends (email and IM names). The default is to show posted photos, including photos posted by minors, to everyone and allow all comments, although users can change this setting, while notes and tags are by default allowed only by one’s contacts. Comments are about photos rather than profiles. Reporting is discussed under the next principle. There does not seem to be advice for parents on the Flickr site (even if there is advice on the Yahoo! site the information is not replicated on or easily accessed from Flickr), and the provider notes that Flickr does not offer tools for parental controls.

In sum, various steps have been taken to address principle 3 and so the provider must be judged compliant with the principle. In testing, the advice for parents noted in the declaration

that relates to the Yahoo! Help pages is missing from the Flickr site and so the site must be judged partially compliant with the self-declaration

Yahoo! Answers: As specified in the self-declaration, under 18 profiles are not searchable. Users can block others (though it is rather ‘specific others’, it is not clear if they can define which groups can make contact). The profile is by default visible to my friends, though it can be changed to be visible to all. If the users wants to add to his/her profile the system suggests using a nickname to protect your privacy. Information about parental controls was easy to find via *Safety Tips* at the bottom of the pages where there are questions.

In sum, various steps have been taken to address principle 3 and so the provider must be judged compliant with the principle. In testing, the site provided what was claimed in the self-declaration and so is compliant.

*Principle 4: Provide easy-to-use mechanisms to report conduct or content that violates the terms of service*

The self-declaration notes that there is a ‘report abuse’ button to report inappropriate content, contact or behaviour, a button that is always accessible by virtue of being on every page. It does not specifically add that the mechanism is easily understandable (although it is in practice) or age appropriate. The declaration says that that reports receive an automated response and are acted upon in a timely way, typically being resolved within 48 hours. It does not say that the users are provided with the information they need to make an effective report (but there is no need since the options are clear in practice). It does say how, in general, reports are handled.

Flickr: Users can report inappropriate contact and conduct via the *Report Abuse* link at the bottom of the page, which leads to various options about what to report. The reporting tool is easy to understand, including for children, but the user has first to realise that the mechanism is at the bottom of the page. The user is offered various options – the user does not write a message, but picks from choices (which means that the actual wording of the test could not be used). When clicking on the report ‘*behaviour of another Flickr member is making me feel uncomfortable*’ option, for example, the system suggests that you block anyone who is troubling you and tells you the consequences of doing so – but it did offer the option to send off an actual report and there was no feedback from the system that any report had been sent. However, if the user reports the content of a picture, the system notes the page details and provides a message that this report is in a queue to be reviewed.

Overall, the self-declaration is compliant with the principles (even if it does not explicitly mention that all questions will get an answer). In testing, there is a clearly worded reporting mechanism that does report problematic content. But since the system does not actually send off a report if you try to report contact this service must be judged to be partially compliant as regards this issue.

Yahoo! Answers: Users can report both inappropriate contact and conduct via the *Report Abuse* link that appears when the users look at particular questions. The information seems more geared up to reporting any content within the questions that infringe rules, but you can report contact if the person answering is ranting, insulting, threatening or harassing you, for example. It is clearly worded, visible and easy to understand. The system offers the person making the report various options, including the reporting of unwanted contact – the user does not write a message, but instead picks from choices (which means that the actual wording of the test could not be used). There is notification when a report has been sent (the system thanks you for reporting) and there is information about general next steps (e.g. under what conditions the question might be removed).

Overall, the self-declaration is compliant with the principles (even if it does not explicitly mention that all questions will get an answer). In testing, Yahoo! Answers is partially

compliant, since “acting upon” a complaint needs to include some form of feedback to the person making the complaint. In the present case, that could include a request for further information from the complainant, a reference to a help page or a response stating that the complaint was not being taken further. Here there was only an acknowledgement and general information.

*Principle 5: Respond to notifications of Illegal content or conduct*

The self-declaration does not explicitly say that processes are in place to review and remove content - but it does say that that reports are ‘acted upon’. It does indicate arrangements are in place to share reports of illegal content with law enforcement bodies and that there are links with hotlines (e.g. Inhope).

These measures were not tested in Flickr or Yahoo! answers, but if they are in place then the provider has to be judged compliant to the principle for both services.

*Principle 6: Enable and encourage users to employ a safe approach to personal information and privacy*

Yahoo! makes it clear that the profile pages on its services are not the same as standard SNS ones, but are more like ‘user cards’ containing limited information that ‘does not prompt the sharing of personal details’. The self-declaration says nothing about providing users with information to make informed decisions about what they post online, but users may change their privacy settings at all times. While there are no comments on the implications of automatically uploaded registration information for profiles, notification to users that this information is used in profiles and the ability of users to edit this information, to put this into perspective, the initial profiles on Flickr and Yahoo! Answers are very limited

Flickr: A user can check and change the privacy setting in *Your Account* at any time. On registering for a Yahoo! account, the user provides information about age (birthday), gender, postcode (which almost identifies address), first and last real names and an alternative email address. The user is not warned at this point how information might be used in the profile. When signed up for Flickr the profile automatically reveals just the user name and when they joined. Any extra information later volunteered (e.g. real name, gender, hometown, description of yourself, email address) is also revealed.

In sum, the provider has to be judged compliant with the principles, given that the initial profiles generated are very limited. From the tests, while it would be better if the user were informed about what information would appear on the profile when registering, it is subsequently clear that very little information about the user is provided on the profile by default. And since in privacy settings can also be easily viewed and changed, the provider is in compliance with the self-declaration.

Yahoo! Answers: As in Flickr, the users can check and change the privacy setting in *Your Account* at any time. As noted above, on registering for a Yahoo! account, the user provides information about age (birthday), gender, postcode (which almost identifies address), first and last real names and an alternative email address. The user is not warned at this point how information might be used in the profile. When signed up for Yahoo! Answers the profile automatically reveals just the user name, when the user joined the service and some other data about questions asked and answered. Users can volunteer descriptions of themselves and photos if they wish.

In sum, the provider has to be judged complaint with the principles, given that the initial profiles generated are very limited. From the tests, while it would be better if the user were informed about what information would appear on the profile when registering, it is

subsequently clear that very little information about the user is provided on the profile by default. And since in privacy settings can also be easily viewed and changed, the provider is in compliance with the self-declaration.

*Principle 7: Assess the means for reviewing illegal or prohibited content/conduct*

The provider states that it employs automated solutions to check content as well as human review (e.g. on Flickr). Users receive automated responses confirming the receipt of a complaint. There is no comment on the steps taken to vet any human moderators but this reflects the fact that staff do not have real time one-to-one contact with children.

Based on the limited information in the declaration that there are multiple systems in place, both services must be judged compliant to the principle.

## **Summary of results and conclusion**

Since one declaration covers two services sometimes it can be difficult to be too specific in the self-declaration because an issue is handled slightly differently in each service. That said, there were areas in the principles which the self-declaration did not address. As regards tests, Flickr did not have all the elements claimed in the self-declaration (principles 3 and 4), whereas Yahoo! Answers was compliant with its self-declaration.

## Flickr

### A. Assessment of the Principles vs. the Self-declaration

Principle	Compliant	Partially Compliant	Not Compliant	Not Applicable	Comments/Clarification
1		X			
2	X				
3	X				
4	X				
5	X				
6	X				
7	X				

### B. Assessment of the Self-declaration vs. the measures implemented on the SNS

Principle	Compliant	Partially Compliant	Not Compliant	Not Applicable	Comments/Clarification
1	X				
2	X				
3		X			
4		X			
5			<i>Not Tested</i>		
6	X				
7			<i>Not Tested</i>		

## Yahoo! Answers

### A. Assessment of the Principles vs. the Self-declaration

Principle	Compliant	Partially Compliant	Not Compliant	Not Applicable	Comments/Clarification
1		X			
2	X				
3	X				
4	X				

5	X				
6	X				
7	X				

B. Assessment of the Self-declaration vs. the measures implemented on the SNS

Principle	Compliant	Partially Compliant	Not Compliant	Not Applicable	Comments/ Clarification
1	X				
2	X				
3	X				
4		X			
5			<i>Not Tested</i>		
6	X				
7			<i>Not Tested</i>		

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