

Empowering and protecting children online



In recent years, the EU has coordinated and supported efforts to make the internet a safer place, especially for children. These efforts are ongoing and in the next five years, under the umbrella of the *Safer Internet Programme*, € 55 million will be used to fight illegal content and harmful behaviours on the Web such as *bullying* or *grooming*.

A new Safer Internet Programme for 2009-2013

In February 2008, the European Commission (EC) proposed a new Safer Internet Programme. Last October, the European Parliament backed this EC proposal by an overwhelming majority. The programme was eventually adopted by the European Parliament and Council in December 2008.

The renewed Safer Internet Programme, set up for the period 2009-2013 with a € 55 million budget, encompasses Web 2.0 communication services, such as social networking, and co-funds projects to:

- ensure awareness of children, parents and teachers on how to stay safe online;
- provide citizens with national contact points to report illegal and harmful content and conduct, especially on child sexual abuse material and grooming;
- foster self-regulatory initiatives in the field;
- stimulate children to become involved in creating a safer online environment;
- establish a knowledge base on the use of new technologies and related risks by bringing together researchers engaged in online child safety at European level.

Of the **€ 55 million** budget, almost a half, 48%, should serve to ensure public awareness, 34% to fight against illegal content and tackle harmful conduct online, 10% to promote a safer online environment and 8 % to establish a knowledge base.

What has already been achieved?

Between 2005 and 2008, the Safer Internet Programme supported wide co-operation between stakeholders, from mobile operators to child welfare NGOs. The goal was to develop and spread the best ideas for making internet use safer. The programme, endowed with a **€45 million** budget in this period, also coordinated activities between different EU Member States.

It focused on four main actions:

- **fighting illegal content**

The programme has set up and funded a unique **hotline network** of national contact points to which all citizens can report the existence of illegal content, in particular child sexual abuse images. The network has also been welcomed by non-European countries including Australia, Canada, Korea, Taiwan and the USA.

- **tackling harmful content**

The Safer Internet Programme has encouraged the creation of tools, such as filters, to limit and manage spam or junk messages. A study benchmarking the effectiveness of available filtering technology was launched in November 2005. It has shown that many filtering solutions can effectively block pornographic content. In short, tools have improved over the last three years and have become easier to install.

- **promoting a safer environment**

The Commission created the **Safer Internet Forum**, under the umbrella of the Safer Internet Programme, as a platform where industry, child welfare organisations and policy makers can discuss internet child safety issues and find the best ideas to promote a safer internet for children.

In February 2007, following a European Commission initiative, the mobile phone industry agreed on the creation of a code of conduct for safer mobile phone use by teenagers and children. It includes commitments on classification of content, availability of parental control tools, raising awareness of safer mobile phone use and reducing circulation of illegal material through mobile phones.

In 2008, the European Commission launched a similar initiative to promote guidelines for safer use of social networking sites by teenagers and children.

- **raising awareness**

To reach the largest possible number of people, the Commission supports multiplier organisations, like the European network of awareness centres.

This network coordinates awareness raising activities in 25 countries. The centres ensure the exchange of best practices and train teachers, parents and children in the safer use of the internet. They provide information and organise awareness campaigns in close co-operation with other national, regional and local stakeholders.

The European network of awareness centres organises the **Safer Internet Day**, which has taken place each February since 2004 and also involves countries outside Europe. 56 states took part in 2008.

For further information

Safer Internet Programme Helpdesk and Website:

saferInternet@ec.europa.eu and <http://ec.europa.eu/saferInternet>

Information Society and Media DG:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/information_society/index_en.htm

Information Desk: BU31 01/18 B-1049 Brussels, Email: info-desk@ec.europa.eu

Tel: +32 2 299 93 99, Fax: +32 2 299 94 99

Europe's Information Society Thematic Portal: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society