Making the Internet
a safer place

European Commission
Information Society and Media

The Internet and other online technologies should be as safe as possible, particularly for children. The Safer Internet *plus* Programme aims to protect online environments from illegal and harmful online content, which ranges from racism and bullying to child pornography and child grooming. From 2005 to 2008, the EU will have spent more than €45 million to make the Internet a safer place.

FROM POLICY TO ACTION

Illegal and harmful content and conduct online have been a big worry for lawmakers, industry, parents and teachers ever since the web put them only a click away from any Internet user. In the era of the Information Society and easy access to the Internet, the risks for children are even greater and urgently require a concerted response.

Over the years, the European Union has set certain legal standards to address online risks. But legal measures alone are not enough. Since 1999 the Commission has therefore funded activities at national and European levels to promote the safer use of the Internet and other online technologies.

SAFER INTERNET *PLUS* PROGRAMME

The €45 million Safer Internet *plus* Programme (2005-2008) supports wide co-operation between stakeholders, from mobile operators to child welfare NGOs, to develop and spread the best ideas for making Internet use safer. The programme also coordinates activities between different member states.

Safer Internet *plus* has four aspects:

i) Fighting illegal content

The definition of illegal content differs between countries: what is illegal in one country can be protected as free speech in another. Meanwhile, illegal Internet content may be produced in one state, stored in a second and accessed in a third one. This makes it difficult to use national laws when protecting minors and others when fighting Internet threats.

Safer Internet *plus* has set up and funds a unique **hotline network** of national contact points where all citizens can report the existence of "illegal" content. The network has also been welcomed by non-European countries such as Australia, Canada, Korea, Taiwan and the USA.

ii) Tackling harmful content

The vast majority of spam or junk messages can be qualified as harmful. Some of these contain advertisements for pornography, clearly illegal in any circumstance.

Safer Internet *plus* encourages the creation of tools, such as filters, to limit and manage spam messages.

A study benchmarking the effectiveness of available **filtering technology** was launched in November 2005. It indicates that many filtering solutions can effectively block pornographic content.

A major challenge is to find ways to deal with content generated by Internet users, as opposed to electronic content like spam. This requires the content and services to be rated and classified so that parents can better identify material that is potentially harmful to their children. To increase industry engagement, Safer Internet *plus* facilitates discussions, co-operation and exchange of best practices in this field.

iii) Promoting a safer environment

As part of Safer Internet *plus,* the Commission created the **Safer Internet Forum**, 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. The Code classifies content and provides parents with control over access to content, raising awareness of safer mobile phone use and reducing circulation of illegal material through mobile phones.

iv) Raising awareness

There is a need for better awareness of safe Internet use among many audiences, particularly teachers, parents and children. To ensure the best use of funding and reach the largest possible number of people, the European Commission supports multiplier organisations, like the **European network of 'awareness nodes'**.

This network coordinates awareness raising activities in 24 countries. The nodes ensure the exchange of best practices and train teachers, parents and children in the safer use of the Internet. They provide information and arrange awareness campaigns in close co-operation with other national, regional and local stakeholders.

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

NEXT STEPS

The European Commission recently proposed that a new Safer Internet programme be adopted to further enhance the safety of children in the online environment.

The proposal builds on the successful activities of the Safer Internet *plus* and continues to support actions to raise awareness on the safer use of online technologies. It will gather more information on the use of online technologies by children.

With a budget of €55 million from 2009 to 2013, it will focus on responses to online grooming and bullying, as well as on reducing unsuitable material online.

The proposal will go through a co-decision process in the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. Its final adoption is expected early in 2009.

For further information

Information Desk:

Information Society and Media DG
Office: BU31 01/18 B-1049 Brussels, Email: infso-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
Thematic pages: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/index_en.htm

Making the internet a safer place