Digital Single Market

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"Teach us about online safety in schools", say young people in the Safer Internet Forum

A broad consultation carried out as part of the European Commission's 2009 Safer Internet Forum brings a clear message: Online Safety needs to be taught in schools from as early an age as possible and as a horizontal subject.

In seeking to identify how national education systems approach online safety issues faced by children, the European Commission's Safer Internet Programme has carried out a consultation targeted at a broad range of stakeholders, the results of which have now been published in an "Assessment report on the status of online safety education in schools across Europe", written by an external expert.

All stakeholders agreed on one thing: The safety of children online cannot be left to chance – in the same way as they need to learn about behaving responsibly and safely in the traffic, they also need to be taught about Online Safety in schools from as early an age as possible.

The 2009 Safer Internet Forum gathered all relevant stakeholders, a Teachers' Panel including teachers from 27 countries and a pan-European Youth Panel gathering 56 teenagers from 26 countries, discussing how they would like to learn about online safety in schools. The pan-European Youth Panel was organised by INSAFE with the sponsorhip of and three organisations from the private sector: Liberty Global, Microsoft and Vivendi.

The Youth reported that they wanted to learn about online safety in their school time, but none of them had so far been given such education.

As part of the assessment, a Eurydice survey was carried out in cooperation with DG Education's Executive Agency. This showed that 21 European countries currently include "Internet safety" in the school curriculum. However, feedback from the Forum revealed that the implementation is inconsistent and that teachers lack the appropriate training, methods, time, incentives and resources to give their students the information they want and need. More teacher training, official validation of resources as well as incentives and time is therefore needed.

The Best Practices shared in the Safer Internet Forum showed that a lot of useful activities and materials for teaching about online safety exist, in many cases provided by the 27 Safer Internet Centres funded by the Safer Internet Programme. The INSAFE network coordinating these centres is building up a collection of resources made available by their members as well as from organisations in other parts of the world. The resources will help to support teachers as they deliver online safety messages to children and young people across Europe and beyond.

The Commission will consider the results of this broad consultation in the implementation of the Safer Internet Programme.

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