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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children

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European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children

As underlined in the EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child¹, the long-term effects of not investing enough in policies affecting children² may have a profound impact on our societies. Whereas the Digital Agenda for Europe³ aims to have every European digital, children have particular needs and vulnerabilities on the Internet, which must be addressed specifically so that the Internet becomes a place of opportunities for children to access knowledge, to communicate, to develop their skills and to improve their job perspectives and employability⁴. Children are increasingly exposed to the Internet, through a growing range of devices and at a younger age. It is therefore necessary to develop now a proper strategy to encapsulate their needs. New and higher quality content and services, dedicated to children, have to be developed. Online safety for children has to be guaranteed. In turn, analyses show that a better and wider use of the Internet by children is opening the door for intensive business development in innovative online content and services. Capitalising on the size of the internal market, European companies can be well placed to seize these opportunities for growth and jobs.

As highlighted in the Council Conclusions on the Protection of Children in the Digital World of 28 November 2011, a combination of policies is required to deliver a Better Internet for Children. Actions are being developed at the national, European or sectoral level. They need to be included in an EU-wide strategy, which develops baseline requirements and avoids fragmentation. Regulation remains an option, but, where appropriate, it should preferably be avoided, in favour of more adaptable self-regulatory tools, and of education and empowerment.

The strategy is articulated around four main ‘pillars’ that mutually reinforce each other (1) Stimulating quality content online for young people; (2) Stepping up awareness and empowerment; (3) Creating a safe environment for children online; and (4) Fighting against child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation. It proposes a series of actions to be undertaken by the Commission, Member States and the whole industry value chain.

1. WHY IS A EUROPEAN STRATEGY NEEDED NOW?

1.1. New opportunities for children and for business development

Although the internet was not created with children in mind, 75% of 6 to 17 year-olds in Europe were reported by their parents to be using the internet⁵. 15 and 16 year-olds report that they first went online when they were 11. By comparison, 9 and 10 year-olds report that, on

¹ COM(2011) 60 final.

² In this context the term children refers to every human being below the age of 18 years as defined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child..

³ COM(2010) 245 final/2.

⁴ Key priorities of the EU e-Skills strategy "e-Skills for the 21st century" COM(2007)496.

⁵ Flash Eurobarometer 2008.

average, they began to use it when they were 7. 33% of 9 to 16 year-olds who go online say they do so using a mobile phone or other handheld device⁶.

Children have specific needs and vulnerabilities and their difference has to be recognised. The internet and ICT provide children with a wide range of opportunities to play, learn, innovate and be creative, to communicate and express themselves, to collaborate and engage in society, to be more aware of the world around them, and to develop essential skills, and exercise their rights⁷. But children also need to be protected.

Paying attention to the demands of children opens up a wide range of business opportunities. The global digital content market is predicted to cross 113 billion Euros in 2012⁸. The market worth of mobile apps was 5 billion euros, and is expected to grow up to 27 billion euros by 2015, mainly driven by games and with more than 5 billion mobile subscriptions worldwide. The global video game market is predicted reach sales of over 62 billion euros⁹. With the wide proliferation of tablets, smart phones and laptops that children use heavily, the potential market for interactive creative and educational online content for both young children and teenagers is substantial. Online and mobile apps and games provide unprecedented opportunities for business development, in particular for SMEs and creators, as they allow for direct contact with potential users/clients. Children themselves could become online creators and start up businesses.

1.2. Current gaps and problems

1.2.1. Market fragmentation

The Commission report¹⁰ on how existing child safety recommendations are being implemented in the Member States shows that, broadly, they are making increasing efforts to respond to digital challenges, but the measures taken are insufficient. Different policies, either regulatory or self-regulatory, are implemented across Member States – for example for parental controls, for content rating and for reporting harmful and illegal content.

In the UK internet service providers (ISPs) have adopted a code of practice¹¹ that promotes "active choice"¹² whose implementation is left for each ISP to decide; in France, ISPs have to provide parental control software free of charge; in Germany a certified "youth protection software" can be used to prevent children from accessing websites providing harmful content. In other countries no such provisions exist.

⁶ Source: Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., & Ólafsson, K: Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full findings. (2011), produced under the EUKidsOnline II project.

⁷ As set out in the EU Agenda for the rights of the child - (COM (2011) 60 final - that includes general principles to ensure that EU actions are exemplary in ensuring the respect of the Charter for fundamental rights and of the UN Convention on the rights of the child. As part of the EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child, the Commission set up the Kids' Corner online (<http://europa.eu/kids-corner/>) and launched the European website on the rights of the child (<http://ec.europa.eu/0-18/>)

⁸ http://www.tavess.com/DigitalContentDelivery_June11.php retrieved on 20.03.2012. All figures expressed in dollars were converted into euros on 20.03.2012

⁹ The Economist, online edition, retrieved on 20.03.2012. All figures expressed in dollars were converted into euros on 20.03.2012 <http://www.economist.com/node/21541164?frsc=dg%7Cb>

¹⁰ Protecting Children in the Digital World COM (2011) 556 final.

¹¹ Code of Practice on Parental controls signed by BT, Talk Talk, Virgin Media and Sky http://www.productsandservices.bt.com/consumer/assets/downloads/BT_TalkTalk_Sky_Virgin_Code_of_Practice_28_Oct.pdf

¹² This means that customers are asked at the point of purchase whether they want to have parental controls and offer them free of charge

Germany also implements a self-regulatory framework that allows providers to rate different types of online content such as videos, websites or online games. In the UK, one of the recommendations of the Bailey report¹³ was to age-rate music videos. In other countries there are no provisions for classification of online content.

In Finland and Belgium industry codes of conduct have also been brokered, for social media in the first case and addressing a wider range of providers in the second.

In countries such as the UK, Spain, Italy or the Czech Republic different reporting mechanisms for harmful and illegal content and behaviour are implemented with the support of different stakeholders such as the police, NGOs or industry.

Although these measures can have a positive impact on the national markets and users, they could also lead to deeper market fragmentation and raise barriers especially for European providers, including SMEs that do not have the resources to cope with different policy systems across borders and cannot benefit from the digital single market. At the same time, it is clear that not all children across Europe get the same empowerment and protection opportunities when online.

1.2.2. Failure of the market to deliver protection measures and quality content across Europe

Children have yet to be identified as a target audience worth investing in. Integrating tools for their protection and which give them the possibility to manage their online presence in a safe and responsible way (such as parental controls) into devices or services is frequently seen as an add-on cost and companies are all the more reluctant to develop and implement such tools if they are not confident that there will be a market of sufficient size to justify the investment.

Benchmarking of parental controls¹⁴ shows that most tools are only effective in English. New devices raise further problems: there are not many tools suitable for game consoles, tablets and mobile phones – the devices increasingly used by children to go online - and there are no solutions for users who access content on mobile phones or tablets using an application and not a browser.

At the same time, there is not enough quality content available. According to a pan-European survey¹⁵, only 32% of 9-12 year olds feel that there are enough "good things for kids" of their age to do online¹⁶.

In sectors such as apps, content classification systems which were not developed for the European market and users are applied.

¹³ <http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/a0077662/bailey-review-of-the-commercialisation-and-sexualisation-of-childhood-final-report-published>

¹⁴ The Commission funds the SIP Bench study that does an expert assessment of products, tools and services that allow users to control children's access to inappropriate content online.

¹⁵ See footnote 6

¹⁶ A pan-European competition for quality content online for children was run by the Commission together with Safer Internet Centres in Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain in 2011. The competition had two strands: adult-made content and content made by teenagers for younger children. The content submitted in the "adult-made content" was very uneven across the participating countries, ranging from 3 providers in Portugal, 6 in Italy and 7 in Slovenia to 84 in Poland, 92 in Germany, and 200 in the Netherlands.

1.2.3. *Managing risks in order to build trust in services and content*

Research shows that across Europe, notwithstanding considerable cross-country variation, the ranking of risks experienced is fairly similar in each country¹⁷. In 2010, 4 in 10 children in Europe reported they had encountered one of the following risks: communicating online with someone they had never met face-to-face; being exposed to user-generated content promoting anorexia, self-harm, drug-taking or suicide; being exposed to sexual images online and misuse of personal data; going to meetings offline with people they first met online; being cyber-bullied¹⁸. New patterns of behaviour are also emerging, such as distributing footage, taken on a mobile phone's camera, of physical assaults on other children¹⁹ or sending/receiving sexual images/messages to/from peers²⁰.

New services with a potential impact on privacy, such as geo-localisation, are increasingly popular. Advertising is also thriving online, and children do not have a developed ability to engage critically with it²¹.

In addition, the use of internet is expanding for the recruitment of victims of trafficking in human beings and advertising their services, including children²². It also provides an environment where it is easy to distribute child abuse material. While this is not linked to the use of the Internet by children, it is a problem that affects children as victims. According to the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), over 40% of confirmed child sexual abuse URLs (by location of hosting provider) are hosted in Europe and Russia. Child sexual abuse images are now also being distributed online via other channels than websites (e.g. peer-to-peer networks). Given the borderless nature of the internet and the fact that child abuse images are illegal across Europe, action in this field is necessary at European level.

1.2.4. *Lack of skills*

While by 2015 it is expected that 90% of jobs across all sectors will require tech skills, only 25% of young people across the EU self-report having "high" levels of basic internet skills (such as use the Internet to make phone calls, create a web page, use peer-to-peer file sharing)²³. Research shows that there is a serious digital skills deficit amongst Europe's children, despite the popular view that they are "digital natives". For example, 38% of 9-12 year-olds in Europe who use the internet report that they have a personal profile on a social networking site. However, only 56% of 11-12 year-olds say they know how to change their privacy settings²⁴. Research also found that the range of digital skills and online activities are

¹⁷ Source: Livingstone, S., & Haddon, L.: EU Kids Online Final Report (2009), produced under the EUKidsOnline I project.

¹⁸ Source: O'Neill, B., Livingstone, S., & McLaughlin, S: 'Final recommendations for policy, methodology and research' (2011), produced under the EUKidsOnline II project.

¹⁹ Commonly known as 'happy slapping'.

²⁰ Commonly known as 'sexting'.

²¹ OECD (2011) 'The protection of children online: Risks faced by children online and policies to protect them', OECD Digital Economy Papers, No 179, OECD Publishing.

²² See Europol Organised Crime Threat Assessment report 2011 and the Council of Europe study on the Misuse of the Internet for the recruitment of victims of trafficking in human beings, 2007.

²³ E-skills fact sheet: http://eskills-week.ec.europa.eu/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=6f0a6d8e-49e7-42ac-8f2b-f5adba460afc&groupId=10136

²⁴ Source: Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K. & Staksrud, E.: Social Networking, Age and Privacy (2011), produced under the EUKidsOnline II project.

linked²⁵. Therefore, developing safety skills may encourage other skills associated with other online activities.

2. A NEW ECO-SYSTEM: A EUROPEAN STRATEGY FOR A BETTER INTERNET FOR CHILDREN

A series of policies have been developed over the years at the European level to support children. However, they were often specific, e.g. focusing on media channels²⁶ or technological platforms²⁷ and have not been combined in a coherent framework. EU policies so far have not sufficiently recognised that children constitute a specific target audience for the Internet, requiring a new eco-system to support its needs. Europe needs a strategy that will prevent market fragmentation and create a safer, enriching environment for all EU children online.

It is proposed to combine a series of instruments based around legislation, self-regulation and financial support. Legislation will not be discarded, but preference will be given to self-regulation, which remains the most flexible framework for achieving tangible results in this area. However, it needs to be a dynamic process that responds to new challenges such as technology convergence²⁸ and which provides appropriate mechanisms for benchmarking and independent monitoring. The Commission will also fund actions under the strategy through the Safer Internet Programme²⁹ (2009-2013), the "Connecting Europe Facility"³⁰ and "Horizon 2020" from 2014³¹.

²⁵ See footnote 6

²⁶ Directive 2010/13/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10.03.2010 on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in the Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media Services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive); Council Recommendation 98/560/EC of 24 September 1998 on the development of the competitiveness of the European audiovisual and information services industry by promoting national frameworks aimed at achieving a comparable and effective level of protection of minors and human dignity; Recommendation 2006/952/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 on the protection of minors and human dignity and on the right of reply in relation to the competitiveness of the European audiovisual and on-line information services industry.

²⁷ The "European Framework for the Safer Use of Mobile Phones by Younger Teenagers and Children", signed by mobile operators, illustrates their commitment to provide access control mechanisms, to raise awareness and promote education, to implement the classification of commercial content and to tackle illegal content on mobile community products or on the internet; the "Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU", signed by social networking service providers, commits them to raising awareness of safety education messages, ensuring age-appropriate services, empowering users through tools and technology, providing easy-to-use reporting mechanisms, responding to notifications of illegal content or conduct, enabling and encouraging a safe approach to personal information and privacy, and assessing means for reviewing illegal or prohibited content/conduct; "PEGI" is a pan-European agreement for age rating computer and video games, covering 30 European countries.

²⁸ Self-regulation will initially build on the 'Coalition to make the internet a better place for kids' brokered by the Commission and that has the support of major companies active in Europe across all industry sectors, who have committed to work towards implementing five concrete actions by December 2012.

²⁹ Decision No 1351/2008/EC of the European Parliament and Council of 16.12.2008 establishing a multiannual Community programme on protecting children using the Internet and other communication technologies

³⁰ Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) set up under the Multiannual Financial Framework — A Budget for Europe 2020, COM(2011) 500, parts I and II; Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Connecting Europe Facility, COM(2011) 665 — , without prejudice to

2.1. High-quality content online for children and young people

Stimulating the production of high-quality online content for children and young people benefits both them and the development of the digital single market. This strategy supports two strands of action which are clearly intertwined and can only lead to results if carried out in parallel.

2.1.1. Stimulating the production of creative and educational online content for children

Young children need ‘online playgrounds’ where they can both play and learn; teenagers could benefit from creative and educational games to stimulate their imagination and support their positive use of the internet. At the same time, technology will be used more and more in classrooms for all age groups. Interactive learning through technology can stimulate creativity and critical thinking. To facilitate this, it is necessary to stimulate the creation of content that will support both children's development and a European digital single market. Some Member States, such as Germany, have launched initiatives to stimulate the production and visibility of quality content for children with specific criteria and/or standards.

2.1.2. Promoting positive online experiences for young children

A majority of young people still ‘consume’ online rather than create. The aim is to encourage creativity and positive use of the internet that will not only help them develop their digital skills but will also empower them to grow and shape their world in a safe, creative way, to build communities, and to be active in a participatory society. It could also give birth to technological innovation and start-ups that contribute to the digital single market.

The **Commission** will:

- support interoperable platforms for tools ensuring access to age-appropriate content (such as white lists³² or child-friendly browsers), while considering the issue of continuous quality control.
- stimulate innovation in creative content by and for children by supporting projects and initiatives such as the ‘Best Children’s Online Content’ competition.

Industry should

- develop and offer targeted, interactive quality content for children, as well as user-friendly tools that encourage their creativity and help them learn.
- support financially and/or technically initiatives in this field coming from children themselves, schools or NGOs.

Member States should

- match the Commission’s support for and actively promote initiatives aimed at creating high-quality content online for children
- coordinate between themselves in this field, with the support of the Commission, and implement standards for quality content online for children³³.

the final decision and the final amounts on the proposals for CEF and the EU multi-annual financial framework, taking into consideration the wider political context of the Europe 2020 strategy

³¹ The EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, without prejudice to the final decision and the final amounts on the proposal for Horizon 2020 and the EU multi-annual financial framework, taking into consideration the wider political context of the Europe 2020 strategy

³² In this context, the term refers to a verified list of websites that provide high-quality content online for young people. The lists would be established and maintained by specialists in the field (public and/or private) in response to site suggestions from users or direct applications from companies to be listed, e.g. the German initiative fragfinn.

³³ An inventory of guidelines for producing and providing online content for children and young people was produced in 2010 under the Safer Internet Programme

2.2. Stepping up awareness and empowerment

Children, their parents, carers and teachers need to be aware of the risks children can encounter online as well as of the tools and strategies to protect themselves or cope with such risks. Children need to develop their critical thinking and digital and media literacy skills to be able to actively contribute in a participatory society. They need access to and advice on how to use tools suited to their age that would help them act safely and responsibly online. The focus of awareness and empowerment actions should be to develop self-protection and self-responsibility in the online environment among children.

2.2.1. Digital and media literacy³⁴ and teaching online safety in schools

Digital and media literacy and skills are crucial to children's use of the internet. As children start using the internet at very young ages, it is necessary for online safety education to start in early childhood, adapting implementation strategies to the different needs and degrees of autonomy of young children and teenagers. Schools are best placed for reaching the majority of children, regardless of age, income or background, as well as other key recipients of internet safety messages, such as teachers and (indirectly) parents. Online safety as a specific topic is currently included in the school curriculum in 23 education systems across Europe³⁵, but is insufficiently implemented with a lack of relevant online teaching resources. Teaching online safety in schools is an action also called for in the Digital Agenda for Europe.

Member States should

- step up the implementation of strategies to include teaching online safety in school curricula by 2013.
- reinforce informal education about online safety and provide for 'online safety' policies in schools and adequate teacher training.
- support public-private partnerships to reach the above goals.

The **Commission** will

- support the identification and exchange of best practices among Member States in the areas of formal and informal education on online safety, the creation of relevant educational content, and public-private partnerships aimed at reaching out to children, parents, teachers and carers.
- develop a specific module within Europass for digital competence and improve the indicators for use and impact of ICT in education.

Industry should

- engage in private-public partnerships to support the development of interactive tools and platforms providing educational and awareness materials for teachers and children, building on existing initiatives³⁶

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/docs/competition/final_draft.pdf

³⁴ The Commission has set out a European approach to media literacy in the digital environment in its Communication from the EC to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment, COM(2007) 833 and Commission recommendation of 20.08.2009 on media literacy in the digital environment for a more competitive audiovisual and content industry and an inclusive knowledge society C(2009) 6464.

³⁵ http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/121EN.pdf.

³⁶ Such as www.teachtoday.eu.

2.2.2. *Scaling up awareness activities and youth participation*

Good practices have to be scaled up so that awareness campaigns consistently reach all children, parents, teachers and carers across the EU³⁷. Awareness raising strategies need to consider the different levels of development of younger children and teenagers, with particular attention to the youngest and most vulnerable children, including those with learning and intellectual disabilities. At the same time, peer education is a valuable strategy for children of all ages to get to know their rights and responsibilities online.

The **Commission** will

- fund, from 2014, the creation of an EU-wide interoperable service infrastructure to support the Safer Internet Centres, which provide online safety information and public awareness tools, as well as platforms for youth participation. The platform will also include benchmarks for the exchange of best practice³⁸.
- revamp the European Youth Portal, in line with the EU Youth Strategy³⁹, to offer a secure and dynamic virtual environment for youth information sharing. It aims to become the reference for quality youth information on studying, working, volunteering, youth exchanges, culture, creativity, health and other youth related areas across Europe and for online youth participation, reaching out to all young Europeans, including those with fewer opportunities.

Member States should

- match the Commission's support for public awareness raising campaigns at national level.
- involve children when developing national campaigns and/or legislation with an impact on their online activities.
- match the Commission's support for the national Youth Panels.

Industry should support the scaling up of awareness activities by

- providing funding and technical support to NGOs and education providers for the development of resources
- disseminating awareness material to their customers either at the point of sale or through their online channels.

2.2.3. *Simple and robust reporting tools for users*

To empower children to deal with risks such as cyber-bullying or grooming⁴⁰, robust mechanisms for reporting content and contacts that seem harmful to children should be available EU-wide across online services and devices.

These mechanisms will also complement the objective of making it easier for citizens to report cybercrimes, particularly in the context of the development of the network of national cybercrime alert platforms and the future European Cybercrime Centre⁴¹.

At the same time, they will complement the 116 hotlines that offer help and support for missing children and their parents⁴² since online violence against children may constitute some of the causes for children disappearing from home.

³⁷ Building also on existing efforts such as the European e-Skills week

³⁸ Subject to the adoption of necessary legislation

³⁹ COM(2009) 200 final and Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the Youth field (2010 -2018)

⁴⁰ Grooming refers to actions deliberately undertaken with the aim of befriending and establishing an emotional connection with a child, in preparation for sexual activity with the child or exploitation

⁴¹ COM(2012) 140 final

Industry should

- establish and deploy EU-wide, in cooperation with relevant national actors, a mechanism allowing children using their services to report harmful content and conduct. This should be visible, easy to find, recognisable, accessible to all and available at any stage of the online experience where a child may need it. It should have clear and commonly understood reporting categories and a clear back-office infrastructure ensuring a fast and appropriate follow-up. Reports handling should be done in line with the legislation in force on data protection.

The **Commission** will

- facilitate cooperation between industry involved in pan-European self-regulatory agreements and the Safer Internet helplines.
- consider regulatory measures if an industry initiative fails to deliver.
- continue to ensure the correct implementation of the Universal Service Directive as regards the obligation of the Member States to make 116000 hotlines operational and will also provide funding for the establishment and running of missing children hotlines.

Member States should

- provide the necessary support for setting up and deploying the reporting mechanisms, especially where cooperation with partners such as helplines and law enforcement bodies is necessary.
- monitor their effective functioning at national level.
- render the 116000 hotlines operational.

2.3. Creating a safe environment for children online

While empowerment and education need to be stepped up, they also need to be complemented by protection. That is because children do not always see the potential risks they face online and/or are not always aware of the potential consequences of their actions. However, their exposure to harmful behaviour or content can result in distressing experiences online or risks in the offline world. Therefore, it is necessary to implement measures that would prevent children from coming in contact with such content or behaviour. The actions proposed address both younger children and teenagers, because children of different ages use new technologies in different ways and it is not possible to find a one-size-fits-all solution for all children or for their safety online. The differences in approach between the age groups are outlined where necessary.

2.3.1. Age-appropriate privacy settings

Although risks to privacy exist for all users, children are a particularly vulnerable group. Very young children in particular do not know how to change their privacy settings and do not understand the potential consequences of their actions, such as becoming an easy target for grooming or exposing themselves to risks to their online reputation. Therefore, default privacy settings for children should be managed in ways that ensure they are as safe as possible.

Industry is expected to

⁴² Commission Decision 2007/116/EC of 15.02.2007 on reserving the national numbering range beginning with 116 for harmonised numbers for harmonised services of social value; Directive 2002/22/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 07.03.2002 on universal service and users' rights relating to electronic communications networks and services (Universal Service Directive).

- implement⁴³ transparent default age-appropriate privacy settings, with clear information and warnings to minors of the potential consequences of any changes they make in their default privacy settings and contextual information on the privacy level of every piece of information required or suggested to set up an online profile.
- implement technical means for electronic identification and authentication.

The Commission

- proposed a new data protection regulation that takes specific account of children's privacy and introduces the "right to be forgotten".
- intends to propose in 2012 a pan-European framework for electronic authentication that will enable the use of personal attributes (age in particular) to ensure compliance with the age provisions of the proposed data protection regulation.
- will support R&D to develop technical means for electronic identification and authentication on relevant services across the EU and their deployment.

Member States should

- ensure the implementation of EU legislation in this field at national level.
- encourage the adoption of self-regulatory measures by industry and follow their implementation at national level.
- support awareness raising activities at national level.

2.3.2. Wider availability and use of parental controls

80% of parents believe that the improved availability and performance of parental control tools would contribute to safer and more effective use of the internet by their children⁴⁴. However, on average only 28% of parents in Europe block or filter websites visited by their children⁴⁵. With due respect for freedom of expression, parental controls are a complementary measure that contributes to protecting younger children from seeing inappropriate content online as they provide settings for filtering content and monitoring online activity. It is necessary to ensure the wider availability and use of parental control tools in several languages to allow parents to make an informed choice on whether to use these tools.

Industry should

- ensure the availability of parental controls that are simple to configure, are user-friendly and accessible for all on all internet-enabled devices available in Europe. The tools should be efficient on any type of device and for any type of content, including user-generated content. They should comply with best practices to ensure accountability and transparency. The tools should be promoted so as to ensure the widest possible awareness of their existence and take-up.

The Commission will

- support benchmarking and testing of parental control tools and relevant support services to empower parents and children.

⁴³ Implementation of measures concerning privacy and data protection will need to be in line with the relevant European legislation, including the outcomes of the revision of the ongoing revision of the current Data Protection Directive. Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data. The Commission put forward a proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of individuals with regard to processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data COM (2012) 11 final.

⁴⁴ See footnote 5.

⁴⁵ See footnote 6.

- support R&D to look into how age-rating and content classification systems could be made interpretable by effective parental controls that can deal with a wider range of languages.
 - consider legislative measures if industry self-regulation fails to deliver.
- Member States** are invited to
- support industry's efforts in this field and to follow up their implementation on devices sold on their territory.
 - perform tests and certification cycles for parental control tools.
 - promote their availability.

2.3.3. *Wider use of age rating and content classification*

One of the risks children face online is seeing inappropriate content (such as pornography or violent content). The ambition is to have a generally applicable, transparent, and consistent approach to age rating and content classification EU-wide, for a variety of content/services (including online games, apps and educational and other cultural content) and to explore innovative solutions (e.g. rating by users or automated rating). The system should provide parents with understandable age categories, while recognising that the same content may be rated as appropriate for different age categories in different countries. This approach should be used consistently across sectors, thus addressing the discrepancies in the implementation of current systems for the different media in order to benefit market competition.

Industry should

- establish an EU approach to age rating and content classification applicable across services as described above, building on the success of existing initiatives such as PEGI.
- look into how these systems could be made interpretable by parental controls.

The **Commission** will support

- self-regulation in this field but will also look into possible legislative measures if industry self-regulation fails to deliver.
- from 2014 the deployment of interoperable platforms to provide age-appropriate services.

Member States are invited to

- cooperate in line with their own regulations in the field and encourage relevant stakeholders at national level to contribute to the definition and implementation of EU age-rating and content classification systems.
- support the complaints process necessary for the proper functioning of such systems.

2.3.4. *Online advertising and overspending*

Children, especially younger ones, do not have a developed ability to engage critically with advertising messages. In virtual worlds, children can often pay for virtual goods via their mobile phones, by calling or texting, and therefore with no prior parental permission necessary⁴⁶. Children may also seek to access online gambling or gaming sites. They can download ringtones for their mobile phones or accidentally access the internet on their mobiles. All this may incur high charges.

⁴⁶ The Dutch 'My Child online' foundation released the 'Pas op je Portemonnee' report in 2011, which claims that there are an increasing number of complaints about money children spend in virtual worlds. The UK 'Briefing on the internet, e-commerce, children and young people' gives an overview of issues related to children and e-commerce.

The aims are to make sure that standards for advertising on websites for children allow a level of protection comparable to that of advertising in the audiovisual services⁴⁷ and that, with regard to behavioural advertising, no such segments are created to target children, and to ensure that spending online or on mobile phones by children does not generate unforeseen high costs.

Industry shall observe the legislation in force⁴⁸, particularly as regards online profiling and behavioural advertising. It should

- provide transparent, clear and age-appropriate information about the costs of services that can be acquired online and avoid default settings that would easily allow children to access premium services for which additional payment is necessary.
- avoid addressing children directly and encouraging them to buy virtual goods or credits with their mobile phone or other means that do not require prior parental control. Contextual early warnings about additional costs should be envisaged to empower children and parents.
- build on self-regulatory standards such as those defined by the European Advertising Standards Alliance for behavioural advertising⁴⁹ and proactively implement measures to avoid the exposure of children to inappropriate advertising in any form of online media.
- adopt measures to prevent children from accessing on-line gambling sites.

The **Commission** will

- step up the enforcement of existing EU rules and stimulate further self-regulatory measures in order to better protect children from inappropriate advertising and overspending.
- look into further legislation if self-regulatory measures fail to deliver.
- expand on the wider issue of children as consumers in the forthcoming Consumer Agenda.
- look into how best to improve the protection of minors in a Communication on on-line gambling in the Internal Market to be presented in 2012.

Member States are invited to

- ensure that legislation in this field is observed by companies active at national level.
- support industry in developing codes of conduct regarding inappropriate advertising online and to monitor their implementation at national level.

2.4. Fighting against child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation

The internet is increasingly used for distributing child sex abuse images. There are a number of problems to be tackled: it is necessary to identify, rescue and support the victims, take action against the perpetrators and curb down the continued circulation of images by detecting and removing child sexual abuse images from the internet and prevent their re-uploading.

⁴⁷ As indicated in the AVMS

⁴⁸ Including the Data Protection and ePrivacy Directives currently in force. Advertising and commercial practices targeting children should comply with the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive 2005/29/EC of the European Parliament and Council.

⁴⁹ <http://www.easa-alliance.org/page.aspx/386>.

2.4.1. *Faster and systematic identification of child sexual abuse material disseminated through various online channels, notification and takedown of this material*

The visibility of current reporting points (hotlines) where citizens can report illegal content needs to be increased, including linking to any EU-wide reporting mechanisms and measures for reporting cyber-crime that may be developed in the future. The systematic detection, takedown and prevention of the re-uploading of child sexual abuse images need to be improved.

Actions in this area must comply with the new Directive on combating child sexual abuse and pornography⁵⁰, the E-commerce directive⁵¹ as well as with the data protection legislation in force and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.

The *Commission* will

- support cooperation between industry, law enforcement and hotlines to improve the process and shorten the time span for taking down child sex abuse images, coordinate the sharing of tools and resources and continue to support the INHOPE network of hotlines to facilitate that the public can report illegal content, to follow up with appropriate action continuing to reduce delays for take down, and to explore ways of increasing their public visibility.
- support R&D into and the deployment of innovative technical solutions for police investigations, namely for more efficient identification and matching of child sexual abuse material disseminated through different channels on the internet, and for removing and preventing the re-uploading of child sexual abuse images
- support training for law enforcement.
- adopt a horizontal initiative on notice and action procedures. It will address in particular barriers to effective notice and takedown mechanism for all categories of illegal content, including child sexual abuse images.⁵²

***Member States* should**

- increase the resources of law enforcement bodies that fight against child abuse material online.
- ensure, in line with the Directive on combating child sexual abuse that effective investigative tools are available to enhance the investigator's capacities to identify child victims, guaranteeing that effective safeguards are in place to ensure democratic accountability in the use of such tools.
- match the support for the functioning and visibility of hotlines at national level where the public can report illegal content found online.
- support the improvement of cooperation between hotlines and industry for taking down child abuse material.

Industry

- will be encouraged to take steps, including proactive measures, to remove child sex abuse material from the internet.

⁵⁰ Directive 2011/93/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13.12.2011 on combating sexual abuse, sexual exploitation of children and child pornography criminalises child pornography offences, child grooming, webcam sexual abuse, or web viewing child pornography without downloading files.

⁵¹ Directive 2000/31/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8.06.2000 on certain legal aspects of information society services, in particular electronic commerce, in the Internal Market ('Directive on electronic commerce') which provides the basis for notice and takedown procedures.

⁵² Announced in the Communication on a coherent framework for building trust in the Digital Single Market for e-commerce and online services COM (2011) 942.

- should reinforce cooperation with law enforcement bodies and hotlines to refine notice and takedown procedures and to establish benchmarks.
- will be encouraged to develop and use tools to increase the effectiveness of the identification of child sex abuse images, notice and takedown procedures, and the prevention of re-uploading.

2.4.2. *Cooperating with international partners to fight against child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation*

As the internet knows no borders, international cooperation is essential. There is a need for a global approach to address the issues on a more coordinated and sustainable basis. Child sexual abuse material may be viewed and reported in one country while hosted in a third country but having been uploaded from yet another country: more than half the child abuse material reported to the Internet Watch Foundation in 2011 was identified as held outside Europe.⁵³ The same report notes that the methods of distribution and ways in which the materials are accessed are continuing to shift as technologies change: this requires the hotlines to continue to develop their strategies and tools so that they can collectively identify and combat the presence of child abuse material in its changing online contexts.

The **Commission** will

- encourage the INHOPE network of hotlines to increase its global membership which currently includes countries such as Russia, Japan, US, South Africa, Australia or South Korea.
- support the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime and the promotion of its principles through ensuring technical and legal protection measures.
- work with international partners through structures such as the EU-US Working Group on Cyber-Security and Cyber-Crime, which sets out common priorities in the area, including cooperation for removing child pornography from the internet and for enhancing child online empowerment.
- co-organize an EU-US conference in autumn 2012.
- try to reach out to other regions of the world and support cooperation on a global level.

Member States are invited to

- support the Commission in its efforts to boost cooperation with international partners

Industry is invited to

- exchange best practice in this field and cooperate with partners all over the world

3. CONCLUSIONS

While the Internet, the devices used to access it and the services available today were not created specifically for use by children, research shows that they are increasingly prominent users. Children therefore form a specific group requiring attention: the way children behave today online will help define tomorrow's digital world. A joined-up European effort in this field will support the development of interoperable and sustainable infrastructures to deliver a better internet for children, and will boost growth and innovation. Scaling up awareness raising, digital skills and media literacy for children will improve their jobs perspectives and employability and help them become confident digital citizens. Stimulating the potential of

⁵³ Internet Watch Foundation (the UK hotline): Annual and Charity Report 2011.

interactive content for children will contribute to a vibrant European digital single market. Ongoing effective industry self-regulation for the protection and empowerment of young people, with the appropriate benchmarks and independent monitoring systems in place, is needed to build trust in a sustainable and accountable governance model that could bring more flexible, timely and market-appropriate solutions than any regulatory initiatives. At the same time, the Commission will continue to provide support for placing topics about child online safety on the agenda of events such as the Internet Governance Forum and to share best practices with other international organisations active in this area. It will continue to encourage EU-funded projects to work with international partners, and will continue to organise the Safer Internet Forum international conference, which has been bringing together stakeholders from all over the world to discuss child online safety since 2004.

Member State authorities, industry and other relevant stakeholders are invited to endorse the proposed strategy and to take steps to ensure its successful implementation, through cooperation with all other interested groups.

The Commission will put in place a benchmarking of child online safety policies and actions across Europe, including an analysis of the resources used and their breakdown between the Commission, the Member States, the private and the voluntary sectors. It will also monitor closely the implementation of the current self-regulatory agreements signed by industry.

Overview of actions

Action	Main actors	Timescale
Pillar 1 — High-quality content online for children and young people		
Stimulating the production of creative and educational online content for children	Commission, with support from Member States and industry	Continuously from 2012
Promoting positive online experiences for young children	Commission, with support from Member States and industry	Continuously from 2012
Pillar 2 — Stepping up awareness and empowerment		
Digital and media literacy and teaching online safety in schools	Member States, with support from Commission and industry	By 2013
Scaling up awareness activities and youth participation	Commission, with support from Member States and industry	Continuously from 2012
Simple and robust reporting tools for users	Industry, with support from Commission and Member States	First results by end 2012. Full implementation within 18 months

Pillar 3 — Creating a safe environment for children online

Age-appropriate privacy settings	Industry, with support from Commission and Member States	First results by end 2012. Full implementation within 18 months
Wider availability and use of parental controls	Industry, with support from Commission and Member States	First results by end 2012. Full implementation within 18 months
Wider use of age rating and content classification	Industry, with support from Commission and Member States	First results by end 2012. Fully fledged proposals within 18 months
Online advertising and overspending	Industry, with support from Commission and Member States	Continuously from 2012

Pillar 4 — Fighting against child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation

Faster and systematic identification of child sexual abuse material disseminated through various online channels, notification and takedown of this material	Commission, with support from Member States and industry	Continuously from 2012, with first results by end 2012
Cooperating with international partners to fight against child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation	Commission, with support from Member States and industry	Continuously from 2012