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

**Final evaluation
of the implementation of the multiannual Community action plan on promoting
safer use of the Internet by combating illegal and harmful content on global networks**

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(Text with EEA relevance)

1. INTRODUCTION

This Communication concerns the final evaluation of the multiannual Safer Internet Action Plan for the period 2003-2004. The evaluation was carried out by a 3 member panel of independent experts, supported by a team of professional evaluators from a company¹ in charge of structuring and supporting the evaluation, collecting evidence and drafting the report. The evaluation was carried out during the period February to May 2006, in close collaboration with the Commission services concerned². The executive summary of the evaluation report³ is annexed to this Communication.

2. BACKGROUND

The aim of the Safer Internet Action Plan (SIAP) (henceforth “the programme”), as specified in the European Parliament and Council Decision⁴, was promoting safer use of the Internet and encouraging, at European level, an environment favourable to the development of the Internet industry.

The programme as originally adopted ran for four years from 1 January 1999 to 31 December 2002 with a budget of 25 million euro. The European Parliament and Council decided to extend it for a further two years from 1 January 2003 to 31 December 2004. The total budget for the period 1999-2004 was set at EUR 38.3 million.

¹ IDATE, contracted on the basis of a restricted call for tenders issued by DG Information Society in the autumn of 2005.

² DG INFSO Units C3 and E6

³ *Final Evaluation of Safer Internet Action Plan (2003-2004): Final Report, May 2006*, IDATE, http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/programme/evaluations/index_en.htm

⁴ Decision no 276/1999/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 January 1999 adopting a Multiannual Community Action Plan on promoting safer use of the Internet by combating illegal and harmful content on global networks (OJ L 33 of 6/2/1999 p.1) amended by Decision no 1151/2003/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 June 2003 n (OJ L 162 of 1/7/2003).

The programme was implemented through three Action Lines:

- (1) creating a safer environment (creating a European network of hot-lines, where end users can report illegal content on the Internet and encouraging self-regulation and codes of conduct);
- (2) developing filtering and rating systems;
- (3) encouraging awareness actions.

During the period 2003-2004, the programme's coverage was extended to new online technologies, including mobile and broadband content, online games, peer-to-peer file transfer and all forms of real-time communications such as chat rooms and instant messages primarily with the aim of improving the protection of children and minors. Enhanced networking was also encouraged through a Safer Internet Forum among all those active in the field in Member States and between project participants in the various actions lines, particularly in the field of hotlines and awareness raising. The programme also aimed at fostering the cooperation and exchange of experiences and best practices at European and international levels, especially with the new Member States, the candidate and accession countries.

The main mechanism for implementing SIAP was the co-financing of projects selected on the basis of public calls for proposals. During the period 2003-2004, fifty-two projects were co-funded involving 105 organisations and covering 22 Member States plus Iceland, Norway and Bulgaria. Twenty-two projects are hotlines (co-ordination node and 21 hotlines spanning 20 countries), twenty-five are awareness projects (2 co-ordination nodes and 23 awareness nodes spanning 21 countries), one is for applied research for media education, one is for quality labelling scheme, one is a self-regulatory plan for tackling spam and one is for rating online games. A Eurobarometer survey was carried out under a framework contract. In addition, a service contract was concluded for a benchmarking study of filtering software and services, following an open call for tenders. The total expenditure under the 2003 and 2004 budgets, including the funding of all cost-shared projects, the service contracts for the benchmarking study and the Eurobarometer and the costs of evaluations, reviews and meetings was around 13.7 million euro.

3. EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

The evaluation assessed the following specific issues: relevance of the programme's objectives, priorities and means of implementation, the effectiveness and impact of the programme, its efficiency and cost effectiveness, its utility and sustainability, causal links from resources used through to activities and presumed impacts (the intervention logic) and lessons to be learnt for possible future interventions of a similar type.

4. EVALUATION FINDINGS

The evaluators found that the Safer Internet Action Plan has been successfully implemented and the attribution of the grants and the management of the programme were in general transparent, efficient and satisfactory.

SIAP was seen by all stakeholders as a relevant and effective programme which should continue. The European Union was seen as a pioneer which identified at an early stage the issue of illegal and harmful content on the Internet as a serious and important political question of a global dimension.

The launching of national hotlines was seen as one of the main achievements of the programme. The evaluation of the existing network of hotlines, co-ordinated by INHOPE, produced evidence that the majority of them are offering a useful, relevant, and effective service and will not be sustainable without public funding. One key problem is that the majority of Internet end-users have little or no knowledge about the existence of hotlines. The level of cooperation between hotlines and other stakeholders, in particular with national governments, awareness nodes, but also police and law enforcement, offers room for improvement.

The development of awareness nodes in nearly all EU member states was seen as another achievement of SIAP. Awareness raising was considered by all those consulted as a crucial need. However the Internet safety awareness network, which is coordinated by INSAFE, is still at an early stage of development. In many cases, awareness raising activities reach only a limited number of target groups, in particular with regard to other stakeholders such as local and national media, parents' organisations, schools and other groups. They very often are not given a high enough priority on the public policy agenda of national governments.

Filtering technologies are seen by all stakeholders as an essential element of growing importance. However there is still too little knowledge among parents on how to handle filtering software at the end-user level. All stakeholders agree that content labelling and rating systems continue to be an important element in making the Internet a safer place, in particular for minors. However the progress reached in this field is unsatisfactory. A number of encouraging developments in industry self-regulation, codes of conduct and best practices, inter alia in the field of video games and mobile content, was noted.

Harmonisation of national legislation, in particular with regard to illegal and harmful content and youth protection, was identified as an important issue.

New problems arise with the further diffusion of new Internet enabled end-user devices like next generation mobile phones and new practices such as social networking (including chat linked to the use of webcams), Internet Blogging and File Sharing.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation report contains seven recommendations, including a set of sub-recommendations⁵:

Hotlines

- (1) Increase the visibility of hotlines:
 - (a) Promote greater awareness of hotlines among end users and the media
- (2) Improve the cooperation between hotlines and other stakeholders in particular the police and ISPs:
 - (a) Encourage the harmonisation of procedures between hotlines and the police across Europe.
 - (b) Produce a manual explaining procedures for information exchange and guidelines on best practices, which clearly define policies, ethics and procedures for people involved in this work.
 - (c) Coordinate the development of a European black list of illegal content and promote its wide implementation by ISPs.

Awareness raising

- (3) Awareness-raising should focus on specific target groups and improve outreach:
 - (a) Require awareness nodes to pursue tailored strategies to address children, parents or teachers.
 - (b) Facilitate discussion among national administrations (e.g. education ministries) to examine how safer use of the Internet can be brought into the schools (training teachers, curricula, setting up youth councils as self-regulatory bodies at schools).
 - (c) Promote more active involvement by the media in awareness campaigns.
 - (d) Devote a higher proportion of the programme budget to awareness-raising.
- (4) Involve children and young people in identifying problems and designing solutions:
 - (a) Obtain children's feedback and engage them in designing appropriate awareness raising messages and solutions.

⁵ See the attached executive summary and pp.42 et seq. of the evaluation report.

- (5) Increase end user awareness of the options available for filtering harmful content:
 - (a) Encourage awareness nodes to promote awareness of filtering tools in particular among parents and schools.
 - (b) Assess the effectiveness of different filtering solutions.
- (6) Encourage industry self-regulatory solutions at European level:
 - (a) Promote the adoption of age verification systems.
 - (b) Foster the exchange of best practices, inter alia, of codes of conduct, content labelling and rating systems.
- (7) Map possibilities for future technological developments and user options:
 - (a) Analyse the implication of convergent services and new modes of communication on the safety of children and on user behaviour and disseminate results.

6. CONCLUSION

The Commission takes full note of the findings of the final evaluation of the Safer Internet Action Plan and will take account of the recommendations in implementing Safer Internet plus and in planning a future follow-up programme. Progress already made in area mentioned by the recommendations will be reinforced.

Support will be given by the Safer Internet plus programme for activities by hotlines which lead to joint lists of illegal content within the scope of the programme (particularly child sexual abuse images). Communication of such lists to Internet Service Providers will respect the relevant legal provisions concerning their role, in particular those contained in the Directive on electronic commerce⁶.

In the light of the Commission's responses to the evaluators' report, it invites the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions to:

- (1) take note that the Safer Internet Action Plan has been successfully implemented;
- (2) assist the Commission in its work of increasing the visibility of the Safer Internet programme and stimulate public debate on safer Internet issues;
- (3) support the Commission in its activities to consult all interested parties and to examine possible follow-on activities, in particular to deal with new technologies and new categories of digital content affecting safer use of the Internet.

⁶ Directive 2000/31/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8 June 2000 on certain legal aspects of information society services, in particular electronic commerce, in the Internal Market OJ L178 17/07/2000 p. 1

Annex

Executive Summary

The conclusions presented herein, as part of the Final Evaluation of the Safer Internet Action Plan (2003-2004), have been formulated by an independent, three-member Expert Panel. The Expert Panel overseeing and conducting the evaluation process and methodology received support from the IDATE evaluation specialist responsible for establishing and analysing the evidence base used for the evaluation. The text reflects the results of an online questionnaire, phone interviews, desk research and a Focus Group meeting, as well as the views of the Expert Panel.

Conclusions

1. Launched in 1999, The Safer Internet Action Plan (SIAP), is seen by all stakeholders as a **relevant and effective programme which should continue**. The European Union is seen as a pioneer which identified at an early stage the issue of illegal and harmful content on the Internet as a serious and important political question of a global dimension. Today, the design and concept of the SIAP is used by many other countries – both in the Asia-Pacific region and in Northern and Latin America – as a model of how to deal with the challenge of harmful and illegal content on the Internet, while respecting the human right to freedom of expression.

2. The original programme included **four main directions for action**:

- A. hotlines (EU funding 4.6 Million €),
- B. awareness-raising (EU funding 7.4 Million €),
- C. filtering, labelling and rating (EU funding 0.875 Million €),
- D. industry self-regulation and codes of conduct (EU funding 0.493 Million €).

In the period 2003/2004 EU funding concentrated on hotlines and awareness building. Filtering, labelling, rating, self-regulation and codes of conduct were seen mainly as a responsibility of the industry. Under the SIAP (2003-2004) the EU spent overall 13.7 Million € Around 13.4 Million € were distributed to more than 50 projects, mainly concerned with hotlines and awareness-raising. Funding went to 22 EU Member States plus to Norway, Iceland and Bulgaria. Around 0.3 Million € was spent to cover the costs of evaluations, reviews, meetings and the Eurobarometer survey. The attribution of the grants and the management of the Action Plan were in general transparent, efficient and satisfactory.

3. The launching of national **hotlines** is seen as one of the main achievements of the programme. Under the SIAP a wide spread system of hotlines all over Europe in nearly all Member States and Candidate Countries has been developed, coordinated by INHOPE, the International Association of Internet Hotlines. Hotlines are contact points where end users can report illegal content on the Internet. Hotlines are working together, inter alia, with police, law enforcement and awareness nodes as well as with ISPs, industry organisations and other institutions. The evaluation of the existing hotlines produced evidence that the majority of them are offering a useful, relevant, and effective service. However, the majority of them will not be sustainable without public funding. One key problem is that while the hotlines deliver a valuable service, the majority of Internet end-users have little or no knowledge about the

existence of hotlines. In most of the countries, the awareness of the existence of hotlines is below 10 % of the totality of Internet end users. The level of cooperation between hotlines and other stakeholders, in particular with national governments, awareness nodes, but also police and law enforcement, offers room for improvement.

4. The development of **awareness nodes** in nearly all EU member states is seen as another achievement of SIAP. Awareness-raising was considered by all those consulted as a crucial need. Numerous techniques, tools and materials, according to local needs, have been developed. The “Safer Internet Day”, which is run by the network, is increasingly recognized as a valuable opportunity to improve communication among involved stakeholders and to reach out to the broader public. The Internet safety awareness network is coordinated by INSAFE. It is still at an early stage of development. In many cases, activities reach only a limited number of target groups, in particular with regard to other stakeholders such as local and national media, parents’ organisations, schools and other groups. They very often do not get the appropriate support from national authorities and the media and are not given a high enough priority on the public policy agenda of national governments. Awareness-raising actions are very often not specific enough to individual target groups like teachers, parents and children. The level and quality of the relevant training of teachers is different from country to country and in general is not seen as a high priority task. Children and young people need to be reached at a very early stage, but “Internet Education” is insufficiently integrated into the regular curricula of schools. Children’s own experiences are often not sufficiently taken in account.

5. **Filtering technologies** are seen by all stakeholders as an essential element of growing importance. Significant technological progress with regard to filtering technologies has been achieved by the industry and different options for end-users are available. Filtering technology is available which enables end users, in particular parents, to prevent their children to access websites with harmful content. In addition, some ISPs offer services to end-users which block access to certain categories of harmful content. However, there is still too little knowledge among parents on how to handle filtering software at the end-user level. All stakeholders agree that content **labelling and rating systems** continue to be an important element in making the Internet a safer place, in particular for minors. However the progress reached in this field is unsatisfactory. Systems which rely heavily on self-rating are unlikely to make a significant contribution to achieving the relevant goals. A number of encouraging developments in industry self-regulation, codes of conduct and best practices, inter alia in the field of video games and mobile content, was noted.

6. Harmonisation of **national legislation**, in particular with regard to illegal and harmful content and youth protection, was identified as an important issue. While rules are needed, individual and isolated legal actions by member states risk low efficiency and counter productive consequences. This goes far beyond the European Union and is a global challenge.

7. New problems arise with the further diffusion of **new Internet enabled end-user devices** like next generation mobile phones and new practices such as social networking (including chat linked to the use of webcams), Internet Blogging and File Sharing.