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

**Final evaluation
of the implementation of the multiannual Community Programme on promoting safer use of the Internet and new online technologies**

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1.      **INTRODUCTION**

This Communication concerns the final evaluation of the multiannual Safer Internet plus programme (2005-2008) referred to in this communication as "the programme".

The objective of the programme, as specified in the European Parliament and Council Decision[1], was promoting safer use of the Internet and new online technologies, particularly for children, and to fight against illegal content and content unwanted by the end-user.

The programme ran over a four-year period from 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2008 with a reference budget of 45 million euro.

The programme was implemented through four main action lines:

–       fighting against illegal content;

–       tackling unwanted and harmful content;

–       promoting a safer environment;

–       awareness-raising.

By comparison with the preceding Safer Internet Action Plan, the coverage was extended to include 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. A broader range of areas of illegal and harmful content and conduct of concern were covered, including racism and violence.

The main mechanism for implementing the programme has been the co-financing of projects selected on the basis of public calls for proposals. This has resulted in a wide range of projects being funded under the various action lines, complemented by non-funded activities as appropriate.

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[1]     Decision No. 854/2005/EC of 11 May 2005 of the European Parliament and of the Council published in OJ L149 of 11.6.2005, p. 1

The programme co-funds the INSAFE network of awareness nodes for carrying out awareness actions designed to reach children, families and schools, and helplines where children can raise concerns related to their use of online technologies, and the INHOPE network of hotlines allowing internet users to report illegal content[2].

The programme further supports thematic networks bringing together different stakeholders such as researchers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and law enforcement agencies in order to facilitate dialogue and exchange of best practice, targeted projects aiming at enhancing the analysis of illegal material by law enforcement agencies and projects for knowledge enhancement on various aspects of children's, parents and offenders' use of the Internet. The EU Kids Online project provides new knowledge about children's and parent's experiences of risk and safety, and a successor project will address the lack of comparative data which this has identified. A second project will enhance the knowledge of online-related sexual abuse of children by conducting qualitative research into adult offending.[3]

Two Eurobarometer surveys, with the purpose of exploring the attitude of EU citizens towards illegal and harmful content and their knowledge of how to protect themselves, were conducted under the auspices of the programme and a further survey will be carried out during autumn 2008.

In addition, the Commission has carried out a study into the effectiveness of filtering software. Among other results of the Programme, Safer Internet Day is celebrated world-wide in February and 56 countries took part in 2008. The Commission has instituted a dialogue with industry and civil society to foster self-regulation. The mobile phone industry adopted a European Framework for Safer Mobile use by younger teenagers and children in 2007. The annual Safer Internet Forum is a recognised meeting-point for all stakeholders, with discussion of topical issues.

According to Article 5 of the Programme Decision, the Commission shall submit to the European Parliament and the Council, at the end of the programme, a final evaluation report on the results obtained in implementing the programme.

The evaluation was conducted by a panel of three independent experts[4] during the period May to July 2008, in close collaboration with the Commission services concerned[5].

## 2. EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

The evaluation assessed the following specific issues: relevance of the programme's objectives, priorities and means of implementation, the effectiveness of the programme, its achievements, its impact, its sustainability and its complementarity with other initiatives within and external to the European Union, as well as with national initiatives.

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[2]    By the end of 2008, taking account of projects under negotiation, there will be 27 awareness nodes in 25 Member States and Iceland and Norway, 21 helplines and 24 hotlines.
[3]    A full list of projects co-funded by the programme can be found at http://ec.euroapa.eu/saferinternet
[4]    The experts were appointed on the basis of a restricted call for tenders launched in spring 2008.
[5]    DG INFSO Units C3 and E6

## 3. EVALUATION FINDINGS

The evaluators found that the programme has been successful in achieving the stated objectives as set out in the original Programme Decision and in subsequent annual work programmes. It has contributed to achieving a safer Internet through a range of interventions and produced a significant impact and influence. Feedback from stakeholders shows clear appreciation of the programme, particularly the knowledge sharing opportunities which it provides, and in emphasizing the importance of the work continuing.

More specifically it was concluded that:

The Commission has been **able to adapt the priorities of the programme to respond to changing challenges and needs** and that the programme has managed successfully to ensure that the themes and actions are relevant to the dynamic social and technological environment within which it operates.

The geographical scope of the programme is another area where the programme has responded in a timely and effective way. The rapid geographic growth of the EU has been mirrored quickly to include new member states in its activities.

The programme has further a high degree of relevance in its recent focus on consulting children and young people and ensuring that both their rights and their opinions are a priority within all aspects of the programme.

**The management of the programme has been efficient and effective.** There are hotlines and awareness nodes in almost all members states, a number of thematic networks have been established, and work is continuing on developing technical solutions in areas such as image recognition. However, the detailed level of effectiveness within the broad programme objectives has been more difficult to quantify, and it is important to collect and analyse more measurable data in follow-up initiatives in order to ensure the effectiveness and impact of funded activities.

**The programme demonstrates considerable achievements**. Not only has it continued to keep the issue of safer Internet high on the agenda of policy makers across Europe and beyond, but it has also become a driver for action outside the European context. The programme's experiences and best practices are seen as very helpful and stimulating by other countries which are confronted by similar challenges. The very broad international membership of INHOPE is also a testament to the standing of the programme in the wider internet community.

The networking opportunity provided by the programme is highly valued by many stakeholders, who emphasize the fact that the programme enables sectors to work together who would otherwise not have joined forces, for example major telecoms providers and NGOs.

The expansion of the two networks to cover virtually the whole European area as well as countries further afield is an undoubted achievement. The INSAFE network has grown from a coverage of 21 countries in 2006 to 34 countries in 2008. The INHOPE network has had a similar growth, with 13 members joining during the period of the programme, bringing the total membership to 33.

Another achievement is the extent to which the programme has encouraged collection and analysis of a huge body of research of safer Internet issues by the EU Kids Online network.

Successful work has been undertaken in the area of fostering dialogue within and between different sectors, and in encouraging the mobile phone industry in its efforts to adopt effective self-regulatory mechanisms on protecting minors.

As regards the awareness activities, the Safer Internet Day has been an undoubted success – the event has grown in terms of numbers and geographical scope year on year, with an increasingly international focus and impressive level press and media coverage.

**In terms of the impact of the programme the consistent approach and messages across Europe are an important factor for the high level of success of the programme.**

However, the visibility of the programme would be enhanced by greater online and offline presence and promotion. A greater consistency in branding would assist in establishing the identity and credibility of the programme within different sectors, countries and regions.

**The sustainability of the programme itself is robust**. It is, however, important to monitor the function of the networks to ensure that the model is still the most appropriate one. In particular, the requirement for hotlines, awareness nodes and helplines to form combined nodes at the national level in order to increase effectiveness and efficiency also raises the question of whether the two networks should be required to combine in a single organisation to coordinate all activities across Europe.

**The programme offers complementarity with a range of initiatives within and external to the EU as well as with national initiatives within most member states**, particularly with regard to fighting illegal content, promoting media literacy and affirming children's rights.

There is a clear emphasis among stakeholders on the importance of the programme as a catalyst for international and national involvement. Where there was no previous national engagement, it helped to put the issues on the agenda and bring stakeholders to the table. In countries where organisations had already started working on these issues, the programme helped to co-ordinate the approach and gave credibility to organisations that might otherwise have found it difficult to get the attention of national authorities and industry.

## 4. EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation report makes a number of recommendations to be taken into account for future work:

(1) The rights and privacy of children, young people and other legitimate Internet users should be protected and promoted within all activities of the

Programme. The involvement of young people themselves in discussion, design and delivery of solutions could be further intensified.

(2)     Continued efforts could be made to achieve active support and involvement for the Programme and individual projects on a national level from all relevant sectors. This should be reflected in the creation of multi-stakeholder networks at the European level in order to bring together different constituencies.

(3)     Co-operation and collaboration with third countries, both within and outside Europe, on a policy and operational level should be given a high priority, particularly with regard to identifying, tracing and eradicating illegal child abuse images.

(4)     Enhanced dialogue and cooperation should be established among the various EU initiatives with an intersection of interests or the potential for collaboration with the Safer Internet plus programme in order to identify new areas of synergy and innovation and to improve the effectiveness of the individual programmes.

(5)     Future solutions should continue to take into account national, cultural, linguistic and socio-demographic factors, particularly for new, candidate and accession countries, to ensure that interventions are relevant and valid.

(6)     The technical knowledge base of the Programme should be further strengthened in order to retain a high level of current knowledge and credibility.

(7)     The Programme would probably benefit from a more consistent 'brand' with quality control measures in place for internal and partner websites and other resources. More proactive use should be made of the press and media across Europe.

(8)     Further knowledge enhancement activity could be conducted in two key areas: problematic, risky and criminal online behaviours on the part of children and young people themselves; the underlying reasons for the trends identified by INHOPE in respect of illegal content.

(9)     The roles of the two networks (INHOPE and INSAFE) should be re-visited to ensure they offer the most appropriate mechanism for co-ordinating the work of national nodes. Consideration should be given to the question of whether the two networks should be merged to reflect the emphasis on combined hotline, awareness and helpline activity and to deal adequately with the planned extension of the scope of the programme to include cyber-bullying and grooming.

(10)    A high priority should be given to raising the visibility of hotlines, which still suffer from low levels of public awareness. The visibility of helplines also needs attention in order to provide European citizens with appropriate contact points, and to complement the work of the hotlines by dealing with issues of a broader nature.

(11)　　The Programme could engage more actively with industry. Priority should be given to establishing a common code of practice among Internet Service Providers throughout Europe, along the lines of the Framework Agreement signed by mobile network operators.

**5.　　COMMISSION COMMENTS AND CONCLUSION**

The Commission takes full note of the findings of the final evaluation of the programme and will take the recommendations into account when implementing the follow-up programme. Progress already made in areas mentioned by the recommendations will be reinforced.

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

(1)　　Take note that the programme has been successfully implemented;

(2)　　Assist the Commission in its work of increasing the visibility of the Safer Internet programme and stimulate a continued dialogue on safer Internet issues.