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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

Communication on the implementation of the multiannual Community Programme on promoting safer use of the Internet and new online technologies (Safer Internet plus)

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(Text with EEA relevance)

1. INTRODUCTION

This Communication was drafted in response to a requirement laid down in Article 5(3) of Decision No 854/2005/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2005 establishing a multiannual Community programme on promoting safer use of the Internet and new online technologies ("Safer Internet plus"), which states that "the Commission shall report on the implementation of the actions referred to in Article 1(2) to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions by mid-2006 at the latest. In this context, the Commission shall report on the consistency of the amount for 2007 to 2008 with the financial perspective."

The Decision defines the financial framework for the programme as follows (Article 6):

- The financial framework for the period from 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2008 is set at EUR 45 million.

- EUR 20.05 million is provided for the period until 31 December 2006 (Article 6(1)).

- For the period following 31 December 2006, the amount shall be deemed to be confirmed if it is consistent for this phase with the financial perspective in force for the period commencing in 2007 (Article 6(2)).

2. OBJECTIVES OF SAFER INTERNET PLUS

The aim of Safer Internet plus is to promote 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 focuses on the end-user – particularly children, whether at home or at school.

The Programme is divided into four main actions:

(a) fighting against illegal content;

(b) tackling unwanted and harmful content;

(c) promoting a safer environment;

(d) awareness raising.

Safer Internet plus is a successor to the Safer Internet Action Plan which ran from 1999-2004 with a total budget of EUR 38.3 million.

The coverage of the new programme extends 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. A broader range of areas of illegal and harmful content and conduct of concern are covered, including racism and violence.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME

Safer Internet plus is implemented by the European Commission. The Member States are represented through the Safer Internet plus Management Committee. Financial support is provided through grants and procurements.

3.1. Call for proposals 2005

In accordance with Article 3 of the programme Decision, the Commission drafted a Work Programme[1] for 2005 to serve as the basis for implementing the programme. The 2005 Safer Internet plus call for proposals was published on 10 September 2005[2].

Following the evaluation, 37 of the 59 proposals received were selected for negotiation, involving indicative EC funding of around EUR 11.79 million in total (of which EUR 9.21 million on the 2005 budget and EUR 2.58 million on the 2006 budget), as follows:

- Hotlines[3]: 1 network coordinator and 16 hotlines covering 15 countries;
- Awareness nodes[4] and helplines[5]: 1 network coordinator and 16 awareness nodes;
- User empowerment: 1 thematic network;
- Self-regulation: 1 thematic network;
- Media: 1 thematic network.

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1 Commission Decision C(2005) 3231 of 9.9.2005, www.europa.eu.int/saferinternet.

2 OJ C 223, 10.9.2005, p. 8 and Safer internet plus web site: www.europa.eu.int/saferinternet.

3 Hotlines allow users to report illegal content on the Internet. They pass the reports to the appropriate body (police, ISPs or a correspondant hotline) for action.

4 Awareness nodes carry out awareness-raising activities aimed at the target groups of parents, teachers and children covering a range of categories of illegal, unwanted and harmful content.

5 Helplines offer one-to-one conversations with a trained helper (by telephone or online) to allow children to raise concerns about illegal and harmful content on the Internet

The response to the call was particularly good for the hotlines and the awareness nodes. In fact, the existing hotline network will be extended to the Czech Republic and Slovenia, which did not have hotlines, and the awareness nodes network will be extended to Cyprus, Luxembourg and Latvia, which did not have awareness nodes. Of the 16 awareness nodes recommended for EC funding, 10 will include a helpline as a new service. .

3.2. Safer Internet Forum

The Safer Internet Forum was set up under the Safer Internet Action Plan to provide a focal point for discussion and encourage action on illegal, unwanted and harmful content. It provides a platform for consensus, inputting conclusions, recommendations, guidelines, etc., to relevant national and European channels. It also provides an opportunity to discuss ways in which industry can contribute to combating illegal content.

In 2005 the main topic discussed in the Safer Internet Forum was "Child safety and mobile phones" focusing on risk assessment, emerging solutions and national codes of conduct[6]. In 2006, discussion with mobile network operators, child safety organisations, researchers and public bodies continued, with the objective of reaching an agreement on best practices on child protection and their implementation across Europe.

In June 2006, two new topics were discussed in the Forum: children's use of new media and blocking access to child sexual abuse images[7].

On the first topic, results of recent research on internet safety were presented. In particular, the Commission presented the results of the last Eurobarometer survey[8], which was launched under a framework contract in December 2005, covering all EU Member States plus Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Turkey, to provide comparable data on internet safety issues across Europe.

Earlier surveys were carried out in autumn 2003 in the 15 “old” Member States and at the beginning of 2004 in the 10 new Member States, just before these countries joined the European Union on 1 May 2004. The new questionnaire was largely based on the 2003/2004 survey to allow comparison. Additional questions were included to better understand the context (parents’ use of media) and cover new services (mobile phones, online games, and filtering tools).

According to Eurobarometer, 18% of European parents of children aged 17 and younger say their child has encountered harmful or illegal content on the Internet. Although in the 15 “old” Member States, awareness levels have increased significantly since the previous survey, 44% of parents would like more information about how to protect their child from illegal and harmful content and contact. According to the respondents, this information should be provided by schools (36%),

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6 http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/sip/si_forum/mobile_2005/index_en.htm.

7 http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/sip/si_forum/forum_june_2006/index_en.htm.

8 http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/sip/docs/eurobarometer/eurobarometer_2005_25_ms.pdf.

the Internet provider (31%) and the media (21%). Among the recommendations received from stakeholders based on the Eurobarometer results are the following:

- focusing more on children under 10 who are already heavy users of internet and mobile phones;
- improving the visibility of hotlines through enhanced cooperation with the police;
- providing information through channels to suit the needs of the parents and the age of the children (schools, ISPs, media).

The survey also confirmed that internet use, parents' expectations and awareness levels still vary greatly across Europe. Having a European awareness network with national nodes appears to fit in well with running tailored local campaigns.

3.3. Safer Internet Days

Safer Internet Day is part of a global drive by awareness-raising partners to promote a safer Internet for all users, especially young people. In February 2005 and 2006, Safer Internet Days were organised under the patronage of Commissioner Viviane Reding by the European internet safety network INSAFE, which is co-funded by the Safer Internet Programme, with the participation of a broad number of organisations and countries across Europe and worldwide.

In 2005, Safer Internet Day was celebrated on 8 February and 65 organisations from 30 countries took part. The event included the launch of a storytelling competition for 9-16 year-olds. Following national ceremonies in 16 countries, a book of their stories has been published.

In 2006, Safer Internet Day was celebrated on 7 February and a broad variety of organisations (around 100 organisations from 37 countries) took part: national authorities, ISPs and telecom operators, industry, schools, libraries and museums, internet safety organisations and international organisations.

Internet safety events such as a worldwide blogathon, quizzes, online games, story-telling competitions, and round table discussions were organised across Europe and also beyond EU borders, for instance in the United States, Russia, Brazil, Argentina, Australia and New Zealand.

More detailed information on the events organised for Safer Internet Day 2006 is available on the programme web site[9].

[9] http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/sip/docs/events/si_day_2006_events.pdf.

4. NEW TRENDS FROM 2006

In 2006 the Commission intends to continue the above activities and to enhance their impact by:

- Consolidating and extending the geographical coverage of the hotlines and awareness-raising networks. During the period 2003-2004, under the Safer Internet Action Plan[10], 21 hotlines spanning 20 countries and 23 awareness nodes spanning 21 countries were funded. Most of them will continue operating as a result of the call for proposals for 2005. The new call for proposals for 2006[11] will aim to give the two networks the fullest possible geographical coverage.

- Fostering close cooperation between all stakeholders in Safer Internet activities. This was one of the objectives of the joint annual meeting of hotlines and awareness networks in Luxembourg on 20 June 2006 and the Safer Internet Forum of 21 June 2006, in which researchers, industry, law enforcement authorities and members of the European networks took part.

- Helping European citizens to find practical information about how they can use the Internet more safely. This will be done through the activities of the national awareness nodes and the promotion of a Europe-wide helpline (Europe Direct service)[12].

- Increasing the visibility of the Safer Internet plus programme among European citizens, both adults and children. In particular, on top of the awareness campaign run by the national awareness nodes, the Commission will organise an event in Brussels for Safer Internet Day 2007.

In implementing Safer Internet plus and in planning a future follow-up programme the Commission will also take account of the findings and recommendations of the final evaluation of the Safer Internet Action Plan[13]. Progress already made in area mentioned by this evaluation will be reinforced.

5. FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVE

Following the interinstitutional agreement on the new financial framework signed on 17 May 2006, the Commission presented its "revised package for EU programmes 2007-2013"[14], amending existing and proposed legislation where necessary to give effect to the agreement. The amount set in this package for Safer Internet plus for the

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10 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 (OJ L 162 of 1.7.2003).

11 OJ C167 of 19.7.2006 and Safer Internet plus web site: http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/sip/call/proposals/index_en.htm.

12 http://europa.eu/europedirect and free-number 00800 6 7 8 9 10 11.

13 COM/2006/XXXX of ….

14 IP/06/673 of 24/05/2006 and MEMO/06/213.

period 2005-2008 is EUR 45 million, exactly the amount provided for in the decision.

The amount set in the programme decision for the period from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2008 – EUR 24.95 million – is therefore consistent for this phase with the financial perspective in force for the period commencing in 2007.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The great number of reports received by the hotlines (over 534,000 in 2005 alone) shows the increasing need for such a service to fight against illegal content.

Safer Internet Day, with its broad national participation and media coverage, is increasingly recognized as a valuable opportunity to improve communication among stakeholders and to reach out to the broader public.

Awareness nodes are providing more and more targeted campaigns to reach children, parents and teachers and the network is increasingly exchanging best practice in this area.

In order to further build up the actions carried out so far, to achieve the full impact of the programme (e.g. expanding geographical coverage and fostering cooperation among stakeholders), and to enhance its visibility, continued funding is required.