



Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on guidelines for trans-European telecommunications networks and repealing Decision No 1336/97/EC

Statement from eNACSO, EU KIDS Online, INHOPE, INSAFE

eNACSO - The European NGO Alliance for Child Safety Online, is a network of leading children's rights and child protection NGOs, dedicated to making the Internet and associated technologies safer for children and young people.¹

EU Kids Online is a thematic network that aims to stimulate and coordinate investigation into children's online uses, activities, risks and safety. It employs multiple methods to map European children's and parents' changing experience of the internet. It also sustains an active dialogue with national and European policy stakeholders.²

INHOPE is the International Association of Internet Hotlines. INHOPE coordinates a network of Internet Hotlines all over the world, supporting them in responding to reports of illegal content to make the Internet safer.³

INSAFE is a European network of Safer Internet Centres in 30 countries (28 EU member states) plus Iceland, Norway and Russia, each comprising an awareness/education and a youth participation team and helpline that work together to effectively promote safe, responsible use of the Internet and mobile devices to young people and ensure that all their actions are evidence-based. Insafe strives to empower young people as well as their parents, teachers and carers, and encourages the creation of positive online content.

The Safer Internet Programme brings together organisations from public, private and civil society sectors to respond to the broadly diverse online challenges that young people encounter in today's information society. The support and funding of the European Union ensures the independence of the actions of the Programme and its constituent organisations, allowing them to counter any emerging challenge that could put young citizens at risk in their online life. Over the 14 years of its existence during which a fundamental and continued evolution in technologies has taken place, the Programme has demonstrated its European added value evidenced in its successes and achievement, one great example being the worldwide success of Safer Internet Day.

However, as seen in the current discussions, this policy area of the 2014-2020 EU budget is to be reduced. The European Union needs to find ways to do more, not less.

As key voices of European civil society, we urge the Members of the Council and the European Parliament to ensure that online safety for children remains a high priority in the 2014 – 2020 policy agenda and, therefore, be reflected in the level of funding.

¹ 27 NGOs in 24 countries.

² 33 Countries (NGOs and Academy).

³ 44 Hotlines in 38 countries.

We express our concerns regarding the direction that the debate is taking on the proposal entitled “*Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on guidelines for trans-European telecommunications networks and repealing*” specifically the fact that expenditure on online safety for children could be very substantially reduced. There is certainly no evidence that there is less need for work in this area. On the contrary, it is quite apparent that we need to multiply our efforts to make the internet safer and better for children and young people.

We believe that promoting and respecting children’s rights is a key and necessary element of EU action - this can neither be a discretionary task nor should it be tokenistic in nature.⁴ When an EU policy specifically addresses or has an impact on children, then the EU must ensure that its actions safeguard children’s rights to protection by placing them at the very centre of its legislation. Article 3.3 of the Treaty on European Union declares that the Union shall promote protection of the rights of the child. Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the “best interest of the child” is to be the central principle in all legal instruments protecting children’s rights.

As noted earlier, the European Union has been at the forefront of protection of online children’s rights since 1999 through the *Safer Internet Programme* that supported civil society and governments in:

- identifying and removing child sexual abuse material across Europe and beyond. This was carried out through the setting up of Hotlines and more than 150 Analysts currently handle over 1 million reports of alleged illegal content, serving 1.3 billion internet users worldwide. Over the 14 years the number of Hotlines has grown to 44 in 38 countries, including 27 in 28 EU Member States.
The work of the Hotlines is also invaluable in supplying the data used by INHOPE to extrapolate and publish unique set of statistics. There are no other organisations in the world that can provide evidence-based trends on child sexual abuse material as extensive as those produced by INHOPE. This could not have been achieved without significant funding from the EU under the Safer Internet Programme;
- setting up 30 Helplines across Europe that make more than 2500 contacts per month, mainly from children and young people – but also, parents and teachers - covering a wide range of issues such as cyberbullying, grooming, as well as privacy and harmful content;
- establishing national Awareness Centres in order to reach hundreds of thousands of children and young people, parents and teachers through a wide range of awareness-raising initiatives and resources with the aim of promoting a safer and positive use of new media;
- according to the conclusions of the EU Kids Online report, awareness-raising is a central element of European internet safety policy and INSAFE’s extensive network of Awareness Centres is the principal platform by which internet safety is promulgated. This is not the task of a single ministry or country or company; promoting a safe, responsible, positive online world calls for the objectivity and public confidence that only the support of the European Union can bring;
- developing robust research and focused evidence-based activities in support of children’s online empowerment and safety across Europe. This research has informed policy-makers and practical initiatives in their efforts to improve children’s online experiences and behaviour

⁴ All EU Member States have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The European Court of Justice has expressly recognized the need to respect children’s rights and requires EU law to take due account of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (See e.g., Case C-540/03 *European Parliament v. Council of the European Union* [2006] ECR 5769). The Lisbon Treaty provides that protecting the rights of children is an objective of the EU, both internally and in its relations with the wider world. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights clearly reaffirms the EU’s commitment to human rights and, within that content, expressly to the rights of the child (Article 24). See also e.g., Case C-540/03 *European Parliament v. Council of the European Union* [2006] ECR 5769

at national, European and international levels, thereby facilitating the enforcement of child safety regulations and self-regulations at European level.

On the 2nd of May 2012, the Commission adopted the Communication for a *Strategy for a Better Internet for Children* which re-defines the priorities and the objectives of the Union for child online safety as they were stated in the Safer Internet Programme.

In the new European Union's Multi Financial Framework 2014 – 2020, the new Connecting Europe Facility - CEF should provide the funds needed to implement the above mentioned Strategy, which needs to continue its work in strengthening all the facets of this vital Europe wide effort.

At the moment it looks as if the new CEF programme will be allotted a 1 billion euro budget. However, based on the way the current debate on the *Regulation* is defining criteria and priorities for funding (which are mainly market/business oriented), online safety for children will not be considered a priority, and, therefore, a great many existing and future initiatives to guarantee a safer and better internet for children will be closed down.

This latest development is extremely short-sighted and fails to recognise the true significance and repercussions on society of a reduced focus on the rapidly growing challenge of protecting children online **Therefore, we strongly call on the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament to reconsider decisions taken so far in light of the EU's obligations towards protecting children's rights by ensuring proper funding that will allow the continuation of initiatives carried out by the Safer Internet Programme and, therefore, the implementation of the Strategy for a Better Internet itself.**

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