

## European Commission / Information Society and Media DG / Unit E-6: eContent and Safer Internet -- Dr. Michael Busch

*Every Internet intermediary has a distinct role and responsibility as regards the protection of children and young people when using the Internet and communication technologies. Without the Internet intermediaries taking their roles child protection in this area will not work.*

The average Internet use by children aged 6-17 years across the EU is 75% and increasing extremely fast. <sup>1</sup>On average, two thirds of children aged 6-17 have a mobile phone in the EU, with the proportion increasing to 94% of 15-17 year olds. Mobile phones are increasingly used to access the Internet, text message, instant message, exchange images, download music and videos, email: all the functions that were previously the prerogative of a computer. This has a negative impact on the parents' capacity to monitor or supervise their online activities.

Children use online technologies e.g. for: information for school work, read news, information about hobbies/interests, playing games, participating in competitions and quizzes, downloading, listening and watching music and films, communicating with friends and getting new friends through own home pages, social networking sites, chats, instant messaging services, e-mail. In many cases they also create their own web sites.

Most of the risks that children and young people encounter are not specific to them – the risks are the same for adults – and neither are they confined to their use of online technologies; they encounter the same risks in other (real life) arenas as well. However, children are more vulnerable than adults. They have mostly not developed the critical sense that comes with experience and parental guidance.

They are therefore in need of protection.

Typology of risks<sup>2</sup>:

Content: Child as recipient of information, for example:

- Advertising, spam
- Violent/ gruesome/hateful content
- Pornographic/harmful sexual content

Conduct: Child as actor initiating abusive or risky behaviour, for example:

- Creating/ uploading sexual/pornographic material
- Bullying another person
- Sharing personal information online
- Placing images of themselves or other young people online
- Children downloading sexually abusive images of children
- Children meeting 'friends' met online

Contact: Child targeted as participant in one-on-one activity, for example:

- Being bullied, harassed or stalked
- Tracking/ harvesting personal information
- Self-harm, unwelcome persuasion, instigation to suicide
- Children groomed online for sexual abuse of-fline
- Children sold online for sexual abuse both online and offline, self-prostitution
- Children made the subjects of child abuse images
- Children abused through prostitution using the Internet and mobile phones to contact their abusers
- Adults or young people engaging in 'cyber-sex' with children

The most urging issue is the (continuous production and) spreading of images showing children which are sexually abused. The most recent report of the UK-based Internet Watch Foundation says that “72% of the child victims appear to be between the ages of 0 and 10; 23% six years old or under; and 3% two years or under. 44% of images depict the rape or torture of the child.”<sup>3</sup> The International Association of Internet Hotlines (INHOPE) processes monthly about 9,600 reports on child sexual abuse images identified in the Internet.<sup>4</sup>

1 Flash Eurobarometer 2008: “Towards a safer use of the Internet for children in the EU – a parents’ perspective”, European Commission

[http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/sip/docs/eurobarometer/analyticalreport\\_2008.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/docs/eurobarometer/analyticalreport_2008.pdf)

2 See Livingstone, S, and Haddon, L (2009): EU Kids Online: Final report. LSE, London: EU Kids Online. (EC Safer Internet Plus Programme Deliverable D6.5)

3 INTERNETWATCH FOUNDATION 2009 ANNUAL AND CHARITY REPORT

[http://www.iwf.org.uk/documents/20100511\\_iwf\\_2009\\_annual\\_and\\_charity\\_report.pdf](http://www.iwf.org.uk/documents/20100511_iwf_2009_annual_and_charity_report.pdf)

4 <https://www.inhope.org/en/node/296>