

REPORT ON THE APEC-OECD JOINT SYMPOSIUM ON INITIATIVES AMONG MEMBER ECONOMIES PROMOTING SAFER INTERNET ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN

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1. Background and Purpose of the Project

1. While the Internet is developing into an economic and social infrastructure essential to the lives of people in countries around the world, the dramatic spread of this medium has also brought with it negative aspects; for example, easy access to obscene or violent images as well as an increase in bullying over the Internet are undesirable from the standpoint of the sound upbringing of children. In this regard, it is necessary to make: understand the extent of the problems related to harmful content targeting at children, introduce legal regulations, require private suppliers to vet their own content, improve government, develop filtering and sensing technologies, and promote international cooperation.

2. In Japan, the “Law to Create an Environment Conducive for Children to Safely Use the Internet” was established in June of this year to address this situation. This law not only promotes the furtherance of efforts to protect children from illegal and harmful information on the Internet, for instance, by making it obligatory for mobile phone operators to provide filtering services, but also makes provision for initiatives such as promotion of improved ICT literacy for citizens.

3. Similarly, in the United States, in addition to the voluntary implementation by individual mobile phone operators of parental controls, laws and regulations such as the Children’s Internet Protection Act have been established. Moreover, in Australia, as well as voluntary self-regulation by organizations in the industry, a system has been set up that allows the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), an independent government agency, to issue mandatory instructions for the deletion of certain harmful information. In many other Member economies, while the approach differs from country to country depending on social and cultural factors, legal regulations and voluntary private-sector initiatives are being developed in parallel regarding, for example, the limitations of providers’ liability and the provision of filtering with regard to illegal and harmful information.

4. In Europe too, the European Commission is implementing the Safer Internet Plus Program while, at the same time, positive undertakings in this field are underway not only within the APEC region, but also in OECD member countries, for instance, to establish regulations to control illegal information, with a focus on measures against child pornography, and to conduct activities designed to promote users’ awareness of harmful information.

5. As expressed in the Bangkok Declaration of April this year, “An environment that offers protection for users, especially for minors and other vulnerable groups and supports the security of personal and business information is essential,” the protection of children in particular with regard to Internet content spreading across the globe irrespective of international borders and ensuring a safe and secure ICT environment are issues common to all Member economies. It is the purpose of this project to implement the activities described below to promote mutual exchange of best practices for initiatives such

as the introduction of mobile content filtering services and the establishment and observance of voluntary rules for the protection of children by content providers and other providers with the aim of helping to plan effective policies for the protection of users.

2. Plan of the Project

6. The project began with two phases. As a first phase, interested economies, such as Japan, Australia, Canada, Thailand, and the U.S., launched a virtual working group and discussed various factors, such as the content of the questionnaire to send to each economy and the symposium agenda. As a second phase, while holding the joint symposium with OECD, these interested economies sought to promote mutual exchange of best practices and awareness of the problem.

3. The Summary Results of the Joint Symposium

3.1 Introduction: Children on the Online Environment (Japan)

7. Japan explained its policies regarding the protection of children in the Internet environment, such as the establishment of an Act on Secure and Safe Internet Use and the promotion of filtering against illegal and harmful content. Also, Yahoo Japan talked about its activities, such as conducting surveys for improvement of filtering services and the impact of the Internet on children, while establishing third-party organizations, which certify the soundness of Internet content, led by the private sector, and setting up promotion councils for the establishment of a secure network, which are organizations between industry and academia to develop an environment conducive Internet usage by children.

8. In contrast, approaches towards children should be considered mainly from two aspects; 1. Younger children who lack knowledge about the Internet and unintentionally are exposed to inappropriate content. 2. Children in their late-teens who know about the filtering function but intentionally bypass it. Also, there was a comment that Japan has a great system in the private sector which judges whether or not content is harmful.

3.2 Session 1: Policy framework to promote a safer Internet for children

United States

9. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) presented a summary of the FTC Act's prohibitions on unfair or deceptive practices, the CAN-SPAM Law, and the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), as well as the requirements under the Broadband Data Improvement Act of 2008 as a system of the protection of children on the Internet in the United States. Also, in addition to these legislative responses, the FTC employs consumer and business education, encourages voluntary industry self-regulation, and keeps current on newly emerging technologies.

Hong Kong

10. With respect to Hong Kong's experience, it was pointed out that regulation on harmful content was the cooperative effort of government and the Internet industry and that it is moving in the right direction, and in this regard, the regulation should be technological neutrality. The country also said that it is desirable to filter in terminal position because filtering at ISP may interfere with innovation leading to ineffective protection for children from harmful content.

Australia

11. The Australia's Ministry of Broadband, Communications and Digital Economy explained that the country plans to set aside 125.80 million Australian dollars over the coming 4 years for its cyber safety program and establish youth advisory boards as quarterly holding councils for cyber safety that are made up of the government, industries, and local communities. Australia also said that the country implements educational activities for cyber safety targeted at research projects, homes, teachers, and librarians at school.

INHOPE

12. INHOPE, the International Association of Internet Hotlines responds to reports of illegal content on the Internet, outlining the recent trend of illegal harmful content, in which 50 percent of such content is child pornography related and the percentage is increasing at an annual rate of 15 percent. In this regard, the Association explained what countermeasures could be taken, like creating an URL database. Also, the Association commented that it is difficult to respond when information is sent by children. Based on this factor, the Association said that it should be discussed by making a sharp a distinction between two elements: the protection of children as victims and the establishment of a system in which children can access the Internet in a safe and correct way.

Egypt

13. Regarding the protection of children in the knowledge society, the Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology presented its legal and administrative approaches, such as establishing departments and agencies specialized in cybercrimes, technological approaches, such as filtering ISP, rating, and regulating the certification system, and cooperation with civil society along with international cooperation. Also, the Ministry explained three factors as its future approaches: 1. survey of the current status of children's online usage and the risks, 2. creation of an e-safety indicator at government level, and 3. its plan to improve consumer education by establishing the Arab Internet Safety Portal.

New Zealand (NetSafe)

14. NetSafe said that New Zealand has conducted four approaches in order to develop a safe Internet environment: 1. Consolidation of the legal system by the government, 2. Timely support by civil society, 3. Consumer education, and 4. Technology development with the ICT industry.

EC

15. EC has made efforts to protect children by legally criminalizing distribution of child pornography on the Internet. However, a legal system putting an obligation on service providers differs from country to country within the EC. In this regard, EC explained that it is necessary to promote effectiveness of the above approaches by the ensuring consistency of legal systems in each country, while strengthening international cooperation.

Microsoft

16. Microsoft explained that each player, such as the government, industry, and users, does not independently have any solution for the protection of children on the Internet. Therefore, it is extremely important to cooperate between the government and the private sector. In this regard, Microsoft explained that a key element in this matter is open feedback.

3.3 Countermeasures against illegal and harmful content, education, and best practice for the promotion of users' awareness

Canada

17. Industry Canada outlined the content of media educational activities, such as providing educational materials designed for children and parents as well as events for the promotion of awareness. The activities, in which children and their parents are undertaking, range from media, awareness, to network.

Japan

18. Information-Technology Promotion Agency, Japan (IPA) outlined the awareness program, such as an information security poster program contest targeting students at all three levels.

Verison

19. Verison explained that it addresses various issues, such as site blocking, security advisor, anti-spyware software both for fixed and mobile phone, regarding activities for the protection of children on the Internet in the 21st century. Also, as a point to consider, Verison mentioned three important factors; 1. Consumers have recently become producers of online content. 2. Due to the continuous advancement of the online threat, it is necessary to address such issues in a flexible manner. 3. Communication between children and parents are extremely important.

Thailand

20. Ministry of Information and Communications Technology in Thailand mentioned two issues; 1. Whereas many children lack knowledge about risks on the Internet, parents and teachers do not have enough knowledge about computers. 2. There are no effective means of preventing harmful content reaching children at a reasonable price. In this regard, Thailand seeks to conduct training on promoting awareness and to develop free and easily-handled tools, such as access control, program management, and provision of time management functions as well as automatic update and support through the Web and telephone, aiming at children over elementary school age, parents, and teachers. With intensive PR activities through the participation of stakeholders and media, Thailand said that the approaches mentioned above have been successfully working.

3.4 Concluding Session

21. In conclusion, the chair of the session 1, Mr. Jinhyun Cho, APEC-TEL SPSG Convenor, and the chair of the session 2, Mr. Keith Besgrove, OECD/ICCP/WPISP Chair, stated that there is no magic formula to protect children over the Internet. In this context, the two chairs pointed out that a comprehensive approach, including legal, technological, and educational measures, is necessary. Among these measures, legal enforcement is particularly important. Although approaches may differ from country to country, it is significant to involve various stakeholders and to promote international cooperation between the government and the private sector. In terms of countermeasures, it should be recognized that children have much more knowledge than adults do. In addition, children tend to become not only victims, but also perpetrators.

22. Moreover, as a next step, the chair of session 2 suggested that in APEC it is appropriate to develop better practices according to each policy issue and that the OECD study should be conducted based on the Symposium.

4. About Questionnaire

23. In order to promote a more detailed approach towards the protection of children over the Internet in each country, a questionnaire was provided to APEC economies and OECD member countries. Its question items are:

- I. The current status of issues regarding harmful content for children
- II. The development status of technology, such as filtering technology, sensing technology, and limited function mobile phones
- III. Regarding laws and regulations (whether or not there are regulations for making it obligatory to delete harmful information, disclosure of senders' information, and monitoring of Web Sites)
- IV. Concerning voluntary efforts (whether or not there is an independent charter that ISP's sign up to.)
- V. Literacy improvement approaches from the government
- VI. National cooperation system
- VII. International cooperation

24. As the above questionnaire survey was circulated to APEC and OECD members and observers from December 2008 to March 2009, 21 countries including Japan, such as Thailand, Philippine, Australia, the U.S., Mexico, Republic of Korea, Germany, EC, Italy, Turkey, Spain, Netherland, Finland, Egypt, Switzerland, Denmark, Slovakia, Hungary, Sweden, provided responses. It shows that a large number of countries are interested in this issue. The questionnaire results will serve as material for the next discussion and activities in APEC, as it is planned to exchange information with OECD. Also, after the results are studied by OECD, they will be used to develop an analytical report.

5. Raising Key Problems Resulted from the Project

25. As shown above, a variety of information on measures to combat illegal and harmful content in each economy was exchanged at the joint symposium. As a result, it is recognized that following elements are particularly important.

- *Close Co-operation between the government and private sector*

26. Close cooperation among governments, ISP, telecommunications operators, industry organizations, NPOs, and other stakeholders in the public and private sectors is necessarily important in the current situation, in which a government cannot clearly develop a legal definition, such as what the harmful content is, from a viewpoint of freedom of expression. Also, it would be advantageous to develop guidelines by relevant industry organizations, to classify Internet content and establish rating standards by a third-party, and to raise the awareness of people concerned. In addition, it is important to create a system in which people can request the deletion of sites containing harmful content against the Web administrators and providers through hotline centers that notifying harmful content, online dating service, and defamation on the Internet.

- *Comprehensive Approach*

27. In order to work towards the protection of children on the Internet, it is significant to take not only legal, but also comprehensive approaches, such as educational and technical developments. Regarding filtering, for example, due to the recent increasing number of Internet usage with mobile phones, accessing to illegal and harmful content free from the eyes of parents has easily become possible. In this regard, there are economies introducing legal frameworks, such as making it obligatory for mobile phone operators and other relevant suppliers to provide filtering services to children. However, it is also important to take measures for diffusing the use of filtering through free distribution of a filtering software to users and for the promotion of awareness of its usage. Also, in light of the continued evolution of Internet relevant technology, such as the emergence of the Web 2.0, a continuous technology development, like filtering and sensing technologies, is significant.

- ***Promotion of Awareness of Children, Parents, and Teachers***

28. In order to maximize the effects of the comprehensive approach above referenced, it is necessary to promote awareness of children, parents, and teachers. For example, even if filtering services are in place, they will become meaningless, if children use technology to get around filtering or when parents deactivate it for one reason or another. As a result, with a wide range of cooperation between the government and private sectors, it is necessary to adopt moral education to improve information literacy for curriculum guidelines, to implement an awareness promotion program for parents and teachers, and to promote awareness by distributing pamphlets as well as holding seminars.

- ***Strengthening International Cooperation***

29. Even though various activities have been undertaken on the basis of cultural and economical considerations in each economy, illegal and harmful content on the Internet are delivered across borders. For instance, when there is a server sending illegal and harmful content to overseas, international cooperation is extremely important to tackle this issue. In this regard, while sharing awareness of issues, it is necessary to promote activities for further strengthening international cooperation and for ensuring the consistency of international policy through continuous information exchange and information sharing at various international organizations and fora, such as APEC, OECD, and ITU.

- ***Children as Users***

30. Approaches that aim to protect children from illegal and harmful content over the Internet do not encompass all issues related to the protection of children online. For example, cyber-bullying where children may harass other children on the Internet, may require broader approaches. However, initiatives to raise awareness of children and other stakeholders are likely to be an essential building block in any policies to enhance child safety online.

Next Steps based on the Project Results

31. Building on the result of this APEC-OECD Symposium as well as on the questionnaire results, OECD has agreed to develop an analytical report, the development and findings of which will benefit from APEC economies' input. As a whole, it is planned to promote discussion of international cooperation in the future. In APEC, based on the development of the discussion in OECD, it is planned to review concrete activities in the future. It is also important to spark international debate by cooperating with other global institutions and fora. In addition, it may be essential to effectively proceed to a discussion on issues of the promotion of awareness, while closely cooperating with relevant projects, such as the "Awareness Promotion Initiative," led by the U.S. and Australia.

Conclusion

32. The purpose of this joint symposium with OECD was to promote awareness and to exchange best practices for approaches towards the protection of children on the Internet. In this regard, it can be said that the event was successful and attended by many speakers from various organizations and countries. Also, there was a beneficial exchange of information. From the viewpoint of strengthening cooperation with OECD on various common issues, this symposium has contributed to a much better understanding of the problem. Also, as mentioned above, the result of this symposium will serve as a basis for future discussion and activities against the problems raised both for APEC and OECD.

33. In conclusion, as illegal and harmful content over the Internet easily spreads across borders, it is indispensable to further strengthen international cooperation in order to protect children from such vicious materials. This symposium will serve as a springboard for future discussion. In the light of this background, it is highly expected that the discussion will continue at various places not only in APEC and OECD, but also in other international organizations and fora.