# Protection of children using the Internet and other communication technologies. Safer Internet programme 2009-2013

2008/0047(COD) - 27/02/2008 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to establish a "Safer Internet" multiannual programme.

PROPOSED ACT: Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council.

BACKGROUND: the use of the Internet and communication, or on-line technologies such as mobile phones is still growing considerably. Whilst, on the one hand, this offers a number of opportunities, risks to children and the abuse of the technologies continue to exist. Further, new risks and abuses continue to emerge. In order to encourage the opportunities and positive benefits of the Internet, measures are needed to promote their safer use. In this context, children and adolescents have become familiar users and are often unaware of the risks which they are exposed to and the ways to tackle this issue. Among the risks which they face is the risk of being exposed to child abuse material or being contacted by people who will befriend them in order to commit sexual abuse (grooming), and becoming victims of bullying in the online environment (cyberbullying).

The European Union has been a forerunner in the protection of children online since 1996, and the successive Safer Internet programmes have been a major feature of the Commission's activity in this field (see COD/2004/0023).

Given that the challenges in this area have been further aggravated by the emergence of new technologies and services, the Commission decided to propose a new programme to better protect children from the new risks which they are exposed to. This is the subject of the current proposal.

CONTENT: the purpose of this proposal, therefore, is to establish a Community programme to promote the safe use of the Internet and other communication technologies with a particular emphasis on children as well as to fight illegal content and harmful content on-line. The programme is to be known as the "Safer Internet" programme. It will cover a five year period beginning 1 January 2009 with a proposed budget of **EUR 55 million**.

In order to realise the stated objectives of the programme, four core actions are proposed namely:

1) Reducing illegal content and tackling harmful conduct on line.

2) Promoting a safer on-line environment.

3) Ensuring public awareness.

4) Establishing a knowledge base.

**Reducing illegal content and tackling harmful conduct on line: t**he purpose of this action will be to reduce the amount of illegal content circulated online and dealing adequately with harmful conduct online. It will receive 30-35% of the total financing. Particular attention will be given to online distribution of child sexual abuse material, grooming and bullying. The main actions planned include, *inter alia*: providing the public with contact points for reporting online illegal content and harmful conduct; tackling

harmful conduct online, in particular grooming and bullying; stimulating application of technical solutions for dealing adequately with illegal content and harmful conduct online; promoting cooperation and exchange of information, experience and best practices between stakeholders at national and European level; and enhancing cooperation, exchange of information and experience in fighting online illegal content and harmful conduct at an international level.

**Promoting a safer online environment**: the purpose of this action will be to bring stakeholders together in a bid to find ways of promoting a safer online environment and protecting children from content that may be harmful. It will receive 5-10% of total financing. The main actions planned include, in summary: enhancing cooperation, exchange of information, experience and best practice between stakeholders; encouraging stakeholders to develop and implement adequate systems of self-regulation; stimulating the involvement of children and young people in creating a safer online environment; increasing information about adequate tools for dealing with harmful content online; and ensuring compatibility between the approach taken in Europe and internationally.

**Ensuring public awareness**: the purpose of this action will be to increase public awareness, particularly amongst children, parents, carers and educators, on opportunities and risks related to the use of online technologies and means of staying safe online. It will receive 45-50% of the total financing. The main actions planned include, in summary: raising public awareness and disseminating information on the safer use of online technologies; providing contact points where parents and children can receive answers to questions about how to stay safe online; encouraging efficient awareness-raising methods and tools; ensuring the exchange of best practices and cross-border cooperation at a European level; and ensuring the exchange of best practice and cooperation at an international level.

**Establishing a knowledge base:**the purpose of this action will be to establish a knowledge base for dealing adequately with existing and emerging uses of the online environment and relevant risks and consequences, with a view to designing adequate actions aimed at ensuring online safety for all users. It will receive 8-15% of total financing. The main actions planned include, in summary: encouraging a coordinated approach concerning investigation in relevant fields; providing updated information concerning children's use of online technologies; promoting investigation on online victimisation of children; promoting investigation on efficient ways to improve safe use of online technologies; and increasing knowledge of the effects of the use of current and emerging technologies on children and young people.

**Beneficiaries**: in presenting this proposal, the Commission is hoping to offer practical help to end-users, particularly children, parents, carers and educators. The programme will seek to involve, and bring together different stakeholders, whose cooperation is essential, but who do not necessarily always come together unless the appropriate structures are in place. Stakeholders include, for example, Internet service providers; mobile network operators; regulators; standards bodies; industry self-regulating bodies and educational, regional and local authorities.

**International cooperation**: the programme will be open to all legal entities established in the Member States; legal entities in the EFTA and EEA countries; entities established in accession and candidate countries; those established in the Western Balkans and the European neighbourhood countries; entities established in a third country being a party to an international agreement with the Community; and other international organisation.

**Implementation**: the programme will be implemented by the Commission. In order to ensure that Community aid is used efficiently, the Commission shall ensure that actions under this Decision are subject to prior appraisal, follow-up and subsequent evaluation.

**Reports**:the Commission shall report to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the programme by two and a half years from the date of publication in the Official Journal, and the Commission shall submit a final evaluation report at the end of the programme.