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

2008/0047(COD) - 03/02/2012 - Follow-up document

The Commission presents an the interim evaluation of the Safer Internet Programme 2009- 2013, in accordance with Decision No 1351/2008/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a multiannual Community programme on protecting children using the Internet and other communication technologies

The **main objective of the evaluation** is to assess the programme concerning relevance, effectiveness and efficiency in addition to broader impacts and sustainability based on evidence from questionnaires, consultations with stakeholders and annual reports.

The **main mechanism for implementing the programme** is the co-financing of projects selected on the basis of public calls for proposals. This has resulted in a wide range of projects being funded under the various action lines, complemented by non-funded activities as appropriate. The projects aim at creating a safer online environment for young people and the non-funded initiatives range from supporting Safer Internet Day, organizing Safer Internet Forum, promotion and support of industry self-regulation and co-operating at the international level with other relevant organizations.

Evaluation findings: the report states that **the evaluation results are positive**. They show that the programme has evolved to keep up with the technological and sociological considerations surrounding the safer use of the Internet by minors. It responds well to changing demands in the external environment as evidenced by the current emphasis on social media and cyber-bullying. However, **the programme needs to continue to explore new issues and have a long-term strategic vision.**

The evaluation results further show that the **programme is influential** in relation to other national and international activities; literature, research and results from the programme are widely used and quoted. In addition, recommendations from the last programme evaluations have been broadly incorporated into the programme.

The programme was run efficiently. There are good levels of communication between the related EU programmes at policy level. The programme is also effective according to the evaluation. The achievements of the programme concerning the existence of hotlines, helplines and awareness centres in the majority of Member States are highlighted in the evaluation. The evaluation also concludes that the current focus and structure of the programme is appropriate and does not call for significant change in the next period. The support and funding from the programme is crucial for the projects to exist, especially considering the current economic constraints.

Improvements: whilst the overall picture is positive, the evaluation describes the need for certain improvements:

- some stakeholders feel that further work must be done ensure that there is the direct involvement of children;

- the projects call for longer funding periods to ensure better continuity and periods of reflection;

- the programme should keep up to date with technological advances – through market intelligence, knowledge enhancement projects and general knowledge exchange. The programme must also be able to follow the developments in national contexts concerning issues related to legislation. The risk of national budget cuts and subsequent change of priorities implies that there is a need to ensure that national and regional priorities are coherent with European priorities to maximise the effect in the time to come.

Recommendations of evaluators: a number of recommendations have been identified through the interim evaluation in order to further the impact of future initiatives.

Relevance: the Safer Internet Programme should continue its efforts to ensure that it researches and funds the most pertinent activities for the protection of minors on the Internet. The programme should not broaden its objectives but maintain its current objectives. It is recommended to maintain a long-term strategic vision on the programme and its issues. The knowledge base should be improved through creating links with key industry actors, international organisations, content providers and technology producers. Many links from existing stakeholders can be better exploited. Enhancement of children's participation and involvement in the programme should be considered.

Efficiency: this could be improved through longer funding periods for the projects and fewer restrictions on the internal allocation of funds. The paper also suggests implementing the programme jointly with other projects carried out by the Commission. The networks of hotlines, helplines and awareness centres should be further coordinated through joint events and working groups, and the collaboration of INHOPE and INSAFE should be further encouraged. INTERPOL is willing to engage in further cooperation with Safer Internet projects.

Effectiveness: awareness of the work of the Safer Internet Programme should be raised so as to address a potential reduction in national/regional political support. The programme should also look at measures to increase more consistent commitment from the industry and increase debate about legal issues surrounding the protection of minors. In relation to international networking, it is recommended that enlargement countries and Russia/South East Europe are involved in contributing to the evidence base and as receivers of knowledge/best practices from experienced stakeholders. The programme should ensure that the knowledge base is improved through research contributions shaped and informed by the growing level of information already published. The annual reports of the projects should be improved concerning outcomes and impacts. The programme should also ensure that the knowledge reaches further into schools and curricula.

Impact and sustainability: the report considers the following:

- setting up two types of forum: (i) to discuss technology issues arising in relation to the programme and its objectives; and (ii) to discuss relevant legislative issues arising in the individual countries;

- further indicators for measuring the impact of awareness-raising activities must be developed. The programme should also enhance the opportunities for projects funded by different Commission programmes to exchange knowledge and discuss common issues.

The Commission takes full note of the findings and will take the recommendations into account in the activities and strategies of the programme. It invites the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions to take note that the programme has been successfully implemented at mid term and to **assist the Commission in its work to increase the visibility of the Programme** and stimulate continued dialogue between stakeholders in the field of Internet safety.