

# Multiannual action plan on promoting safer use of the Internet: extension to 2004

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This Communication concerns the final evaluation of the multiannual Safer Internet Action Plan for the period 2003-2004 on promoting safer use of the Internet by combating illegal and harmful content on global networks. The evaluation was carried out by a panel of independent experts during the period February to May 2006, in close collaboration with the Commission services concerned.

Launched in 1999, The Safer Internet Action Plan (SIAP) is seen by all stakeholders as a relevant and effective programme which should continue. The European Union is seen as a pioneer which identified at an early stage the issue of illegal and harmful content on the Internet as a serious and important political question of a global dimension. Today, the design and concept of the SIAP is used by many other countries – both in the Asia-Pacific region and in Northern and Latin America – as a model of how to deal with the challenge of harmful and illegal content on the Internet, while respecting the human right to freedom of expression.

The evaluators found that the Safer Internet Action Plan has been successfully implemented and the attribution of the grants and the management of the programme were in general transparent, efficient and satisfactory.

The main mechanism for implementing SIAP was the co-financing of projects selected on the basis of public calls for proposals. During the period 2003-2004, 52 projects were co-funded involving 105 organisations and covering 22 Member States plus Iceland, Norway and Bulgaria.

22 projects are hotlines (co-ordination node and 21 hotlines spanning 20 countries), 25 are awareness projects (2 co-ordination nodes and 23 awareness nodes spanning 21 countries), one is for applied research for media education, one is for quality labelling scheme, one is a self-regulatory plan for tackling spam and one is for rating online games. A Eurobarometer survey was carried out under a framework contract.

The total expenditure under the 2003 and 2004 was around EUR 13.7 million.

New problems arise with the further diffusion of new Internet enabled end-user devices like next generation mobile phones and new practices such as social networking (including chat linked to the use of webcams), Internet Blogging and File Sharing.

The evaluation report contains 7 recommendations, including a set of sub-recommendations:

- 1) increase the visibility of hotlines: promote greater awareness of hotlines among end users and the media;
- 2) improve the cooperation between hotlines and other stakeholders in particular the police and ISPs: encourage the harmonisation of procedures between hotlines and the police across Europe; produce a manual explaining procedures for information exchange and guidelines on best practices, which clearly define policies, ethics and procedures for people involved in this work; coordinate the development of a European black list of illegal content and promote its wide implementation by ISPs;

- 3) awareness-raising should focus on specific target groups and improve outreach: require awareness nodes to pursue tailored strategies to address children, parents or teachers; facilitate discussion among national administrations (e.g. education ministries) to examine how safer use of the Internet can be brought into the schools (training teachers, curricula, setting up youth councils as self-regulatory bodies at schools); promote more active involvement by the media in awareness campaigns; devote a higher proportion of the programme budget to awareness raising;
- 4) involve children and young people in identifying problems and designing solutions: obtain children's feedback and engage them in designing appropriate awareness raising messages and solutions;
- 5) increase end user awareness of the options available for filtering harmful content: encourage awareness nodes to promote awareness of filtering tools in particular among parents and schools; assess the effectiveness of different filtering solutions;
- 6) encourage industry self-regulatory solutions at European level: promote the adoption of age verification systems; foster the exchange of best practices, inter alia, of codes of conduct, content labelling and rating systems;
- 7) map possibilities for future technological developments and user options: analyse the implication of convergent services and new modes of communication on the safety of children and on user behaviour and disseminate results.

The Commission takes full note of the findings of the final evaluation of the Safer Internet Action Plan and will take account of the recommendations in implementing Safer Internet plus and in planning a future follow-up programme. Progress already made in area mentioned by the recommendations will be reinforced. Support will be given by the Safer Internet plus programme for activities by hotlines which lead to joint lists of illegal content within the scope of the programme (particularly child sexual abuse images). Communication of such lists to Internet Service Providers will respect the relevant legal provisions concerning their role, in particular those contained in the Directive on electronic commerce.