

DYNAMIC COALITION CHILD ONLINE SAFETY

Statement

– 21 June 2016 –

Organizations working with and for children and youths, government and industry representatives have joined together in the Dynamic Coalition on Child Online Safety to establish a dialogue and address fundamental and practical issues impacting on child safety in the online environment.

Our DC Action Plan indicates that during FY17, 18 and 19, among others, we will seek to:

- “Facilitate the exchange of information and of best practices between countries and regions and;
- Adopt position papers/policy statements on relevant issues related to child online rights and safety.”

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On any reckoning, the arrival of the Internet has been of huge benefit to children and young people the world over. However, it is also beyond doubt that the Internet has also thrown up a number of major challenges. Among many alarming threats there is, for example, a growing body of evidence that the easy accessibility of large volumes of hard-core pornography over the Internet is having harmful effects on children and young people. According to a major meta-analysis of the research literature [1] hard-core pornography has been linked to unrealistic ideas about sex, more casual attitudes about sex, beliefs that women are sex objects and confusion about sexual relationships. Children and young people also learn from and may change their behavior due to accessing hard-core pornography. Young people who view hard-core pornography are more likely to have had sex with multiple partners and to have used alcohol and drugs during sex. 70% of 18 year olds surveyed felt that pornography can have a damaging impact on young people’s view of sex and relationships.[2]

Data analyzed in the UK [3] indicated that access by children and adolescents to pornographic content online is high. In May 2015, 1.4 million unique visitors under 18 years old accessed online sites classified as containing pornographic content from computers (the data excluded access via mobile phones and tablets). Approximately half (732,000) were users aged 6-14, which represents 13% of all children online in this age group. Certainly a differentiation of age groups with regard to the effects hard-core pornography may have on the mental development and healthy growing-up of children and adolescents is important.

DELIBERATIONS FROM THE DYNAMIC COALITION

To combat this problem the Dynamic Coalition on Child Online Safety supports moves by the UK Government to investigate how a system could be established which would ensure that persons under the age of 18 cannot access pornography web sites. In February, 2016 a consultation document was issued by the government outlining possible solutions. At the time of writing the UK Government's detailed response to the consultation had not been published but in May, they announced that they intended to legislate to introduce statutory measures to address the problem.

In response to these developments in the UK, it is known that several technology players are working on age verification solutions which in many respects would be privacy enhancing in the sense that they would allow end users to produce a "digital token" (essentially an encrypted file) to prove only one thing – that they are already aged 18 or more. In Germany it is prohibited by law to provide access to content that is assumed to have a negative impact on children's development to children and youths under the age of eighteen. An age differentiation of 6, 12, 16 and 18 years is in place. Several age verification systems are certified by the respective regulating authority and they work properly to address the problem.

Members of this Dynamic Coalition praise the collaborative efforts across sectors where governments, child rights organizations and the technology sector come together to try and find solutions. Wherever those initiatives are considered to have had a positive impact and could be deemed a good practice, we encourage them to be duplicated in other countries and regions.

END

[1]http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Basically_porn_is_everywhere_cyp_version.pdf

[2] <http://www.ippr.org/read/young-people-sex-and-relationships-the-new-norms#> and Harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the Internet - The Alannah and Madeline Foundation, March 2016, accessed 21 June 2016,

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/jbl33js3yw5kbg6/AMF%20pornography%20submission%5B1%5D.pdf?dl=0>

[3]https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/500729/AV_ConsultationDCMS_20160216.pdf