

EUROPEAN INTERNET COREGULATION NETWORK

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Press release

Child protection on the Internet Preventing the exposure of children to harmful content

First statement of the European Internet Coregulation Network

- **A policy statement delivered to the European institutions as a contribution to the revision of the 1998 Recommendation on the protection of minors**
- **5 key principles and proposals for action concerning the protection of minors on the internet, based on the expertise of several members of the Network**
- **Need to go beyond self-regulation to encourage the development of online age-control devices on a European scale**

PARIS, JUNE 4th, 2004 – The European Internet Coregulation Network (EICN) is today issuing a "[Policy statement](#)" to the European institutions, concerning the prevention of children's exposure to harmful content (including violent and pornographic content) on the internet. This document is the EICN's contribution to the European institutions' ongoing debate around the revision of the 1998 Recommendation on the protection of minors in audiovisual and information services.

As internet use develops, minors are increasingly being exposed to harmful content, often against their will. According to a study by the European SAFT programme (Norway, Denmark, Ireland, Sweden, Iceland), a quarter to a third of young people aged 9-16 surveyed said they had been accidentally exposed to violent, offensive, sexual or pornographic content within the previous year¹.

On 24 September 1998 the European Council adopted the [Recommendation 98/560/EC](#) on the protection of minors and human dignity in audiovisual and information services. This Recommendation is to be revised in the coming months by the European institutions. In the light of this revision, the main purpose of the EICN policy statement is to highlight the key principles upon which the members of the Network agree, and to stimulate the thinking of the European institutions on this important issue.

This statement is largely based on work conducted locally by several members of the network (including bodies such as the French Forum des droits sur l'internet, the Belgian Observatoire des droits de l'internet and the British Internet Watch Foundation), which have already released recommendations to their own authorities on this subject.

The EICN wishes to highlight the following five key principles :

1. Education is the key to greater online safety;
2. Strong support for the development of age-control devices could help European content providers leading the way towards more safety for kids online;
3. Parental control software and services are useful complementary tools for shielding children from harmful content;

¹ SAFT, Children's Study - Investigating online behaviour, National Center for Technology in Education, Dublin, mai 2003.

4. Spam should be fought against as a carrier of harmful content;
5. European policy makers, members of the industry and users should aim at making next-generation mobile Internet more secure than the Internet at large.

The EICN promotes the principle of coregulation, which implies cooperation by all members in the "chain of responsibility" (public authorities, content and service providers, users – parents and children).

A working group on Child protection and mobile phone

This working group was launched in April 2004. It is conducted by the Oxford Internet Institute (OII). It will gather information regarding the best practices of local mobile phone operators, content providers and distributors (for example, on harmful content or monitoring of chatrooms) on a European scale. The final report will be published within one year.

For more information on this group :

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Background on the European internet coregulation network

The European Internet Coregulation Network was initiated by the French organization, Le Forum des droits sur l'internet, in partnership with organizations from 6 European countries during the WSIS in Geneva in December 2003. This network is supported by Erkki Liikanen, European Commissioner responsible for Enterprise and Information society.

The members of the European Internet Coregulation Network:

Austria: *Osterreichisches Institut für Angewandte Telekommunikation*

Belgium: *Observatoire des Droits de l'Internet – Observatorium van de Rechten op het Internet*

France: *Le Forum des droits sur l'internet*

Italy: *Forum per la tecnologia della informazione*

Hungary: *Information society research institute*

Sweden: *Swedish law and informatics research Institute*

United Kingdom: *Internet Watch foundation and Oxford Internet Institute*

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