

27th April 2009

eNACSO/NSPCC Joint Conference

Protecting children from internet-related sexual abuse

REPORT

On March 25th 2009, the European Commission published a proposal for updated EU legislation ‘on combating the sexual abuse, sexual exploitation of children and child pornography’. One of the core aims is to address new risks to children created by the rapid expansion of internet technologies. As Member States commenced discussions on the planned legislation, this conference aimed to review suggested measures, in particular those relating to protecting children from internet-related sexual abuse. The event addressed both the abuse of children using the internet, via inappropriate online contact from adults, and the issue of child abuse images where the internet plays a major role in this horrific global trade.

Expert seminar “Shaping EU legislation against internet-related child sexual abuse”

- **Jakub Boratynski**, Head of Unit Fight Against Organised Crime, DG Justice, Liberty and Security, European Commission
- **Dr Zoe Hilton**, eNACSO/NSPCC
- **Elvira D’Amato**, Head of the Centre Against Child Pornography on the Internet (Postal and Communication Police Service), Italy
- **Denis Gibadulin**, Ministry of the Interior, Czech Republic

Kathleen Spencer Chapman from NSPCC chaired the expert seminar, where keynote speakers contributed to discussions on the European Commission’s proposals for a revised EU Framework Decision ‘on combating the sexual abuse, sexual exploitation of children and child pornography’ and considerations on how it can be effectively implemented by Member States.

Highlights from the European Commission’s proposal for a revised Framework Decision were presented with focus on the new forms of child abuse that are taken into account in the new proposal – namely online child sexual abuse. The proposal follows the technological development with an improved and combined approach for prosecution, protection and prevention. New criminal offences have been introduced on the prosecution side, notably grooming and viewing of child abuse images. Furthermore the proposal covers a new tool in the toolbox, which is the possibility for the police to do undercover operations to track down criminals and illegal networks. On the protection side it was highlighted that the new proposal introduces an increased focus on victim identification as there is a huge gap between the number of child abuse images in the INTERPOL database and the number of victims identified.

On the prevention side an article on blocking of child abuse images is proposed. A key message from the European Commission was that taking down the illegal images should still be the main approach; however blocking is an effective support as it is not always possible to take down the illegal content.

When the meeting took place the new proposal had already been subject for two working days within the Council and the atmosphere had so far has been positive towards the proposal.

An introduction to the work of the Italian police department for investigation of child sexual abuse and a short introduction to the Italian blocking system gave a picture of how some of the new elements in the proposal for a revised framework decision can be useful in Members States. Within the centralized police centre there exists a specific unit to analyze images and undertake undercover activities. In Italy victim identification is conducted in cooperation with Save the Children Italy and cooperation with civil society is of high importance.

The Czech Republic's initiatives for a safer Internet for children were presented, including the Prague Declaration on a new European approach for a safer Internet for children. Main issues of the Framework Decision were compared to the Council of Europe Convention in order to make sure that the new Framework Decision will be in line with the highest international standards. The Czech Presidency leads the discussions about the Framework Decision within the Council until June 2009, where the EU Presidency will be passed to Sweden.

Overall, NSPCC and eNACSO welcome the Framework Decision and are urging Member States to support it.

Round Table debate: "Necessary protection or unjustified restriction? Using blocking to combat online child abuse images"

Panellists:

- **Natasha Jackson**, Head of Content Policy, GSM Association (GSMA)
- **Dieter Carstensen**, eNACSO/Save the Children Denmark
- **Michael Rotert**, Vice-President of EuroISPA
- **Cesar Alonso Iriarte**, Unit Fight Against Organised Crime, DG Justice, Liberty and Security, European Commission
- **Lars Underbjerg**, CIRCAMP (Cospol Internet Related Child Abusive Material Project)

Simon Wilson from The Centre chaired the Round Table Debate. Different viewpoints were explored and challenged by the keynote speakers and the audience and this led to lively discussions on the different aspects of blocking of child abuse images and how the related article (Article 18) of the European Commission's proposal for a revised EU Framework Decision can be effectively implemented in Member States.

All participants agreed that getting the illegal content taken down was of critical importance; the question being debated was whether blocking could be a useful tool to support this. Blocking already

exists in a number of countries either as a result of the law (Italy) or due to voluntary agreements with the Internet providers.

The European Commission believes that there are good reasons to block child abuse images in accordance with international law. The stop page scares a lot of users and thereby decreases the dissemination of child abuse images, which leads to less production and less children abused.

The CIRCAMP project is suppose to identify and break up illegal networks. For them an important argument in favor of blocking is that notice and take down only works within the country's own borders. Arguments against blocking are that the technique is not completely effective and that there should be police investigations into images identified. However, the police are not always able to provide sufficient resources.

From a mobile operator perspective it was argued that getting illegal content off servers is the most important, but it is crucial to create as many obstacles for access to child abuse images as possible and all initiatives must go together, including blocking. It was argued that it should be up to the providers themselves to decide how they are going to block child abuse images.

From an NGO perspective it was claimed that it would be beneficial if all ISPs would scan their network for illegal content. This suggestion was opposed with the argument that it is not a realistic option to scan all networks and that the ISPs themselves know best how to find the illegal content on their networks.

Discussions followed on whether the number of incidents reported to the hotlines differs between those countries that use blocking and those that do not. It was mentioned that the hotlines in the countries that use blocking receive 50 percent less reports with illegal content after they began to use blocking. Furthermore it was discussed whether the blocking lists that have been leaked to the press include legal content as well. It was mentioned that CIRCAMP have evidence that the sites contained illegal content at the time they were blocked.

NSPCC and eNACSO found it helpful to hear the many different viewpoints at the seminar and round table debate. We were pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the issues and intend to continue to press for all parties to embrace blocking technology as a first step in the fight against child abuse images.

Thanks to everyone who participated!

Information about the organisers

eNACSO, the European NGO Alliance for Child Safety Online is a network consisting of children's rights NGOs from across the EU working for a safer online environment for children. The mission is to promote and support actions at national, European and international level to protect children and promote their rights in relation to the Internet and new technologies.

NSPCC, the UK's National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, was formed in 1885 and is the UK's leading NGO specialising in child protection. The NSPCC aims to end cruelty to children by

seeking to influence legislation, policy, practice, attitudes and behaviours for the benefit of children and young people. This is achieved through a combination of service provision, lobbying, campaigning and public education.